

Address  
at the  
Founding Day Ceremony  
of the  
Athenian School

*21 November 1965  
Danville, California*

by Kurt Hahn

Dyke Brown, Ladies and Gentlemen. It was difficult for me to refuse the invitation, which has been extended to me. But before I give you the reasons I would like to correct one impression, which has been transmitted by the Headmaster, namely, that I am the originator of all these enterprises, which he mentioned. I followed the trail which wiser men had blazed.

To make my meaning clearer I will recall a conversation, which the late founder - the real founder of the Salem School - Prince Max of Baden had with a visitor. His enthusiastic guest asked him the following question, "what are you proudest of in your beautiful schools?" He said. "I am proudest of the fact that if you go the length and breadth of the schools, you will find nothing original in them. It is stolen from everywhere, from the British public school (you call them private schools), from the Boy Scouts, from Plato, from Goethe." Then the enthusiastic guest turned to him and said, "But oughtn't you to aim at being original?" Then Prince Max rather abruptly answered, "Well, you know, it is in education like in medicine, you must harvest the wisdom of the thousand years. If you ever came across a surgeon who wants to take out your appendix in the most original manner possible, I would strongly advise you to go to another surgeon."

I will now tell you why I could not refuse your invitation. Last holiday I was talking to some parents of a Gordonstoun boy and I made the not very profound remark in front of a boy of nine that my great grievance against life was that it passes so quickly. Whereupon the boy interrupted me and said, "Yes, by the time you know the trick, it's all is over."

I do not presume to know the trick but I have certain anxieties and hopes, which I feel should be deposited with my natural allies. I was thrilled when I heard of Dyke Brown's intention to found this school. He was in Salem at the time when I was preoccupied more or less with political matters, but he experienced a community of remarkable boys and girls. They proved their mettle when two years later, after he had left, they saved the school from extinction by Hitler and in the years to come their successors protected

Salem against the corruption by Hitler. The School actually survived until 1944 when it was finally Nazified, to be re-opened again after the war.

It is a wonderful thing to maintain an older tradition. We must not think lightly of this. It is difficult and remarkable if it succeeds. But I always thought it was as wonderful to create a new tradition.

I was fascinated by the name Dyke Brown has chosen for this school. I am sure that you will feel with me after the inspiring talk we just heard, that he chose this name not only to remind us of the glory of Athens, but also to remind us of the tragedy of Athens, over which every proud nation should never fail to ponder. I am always excited by the start of a new school. It is a wonderful thing to maintain an older tradition. We must not think lightly of this. It is difficult and remarkable if it succeeds. But I always thought it was as wonderful to create a new tradition. You are taking part in the building of the school, you are helping in the making of the laws, which will guide this community - I include the unwritten laws. It will depend upon you whether they are firmly established so that they cannot be uprooted by future generations.

Perhaps I may be forgiven if I go back to Salem's very early days of which your start reminds me so much. We only had three boys and one girl at the beginning - you have a very handsome number already. These four had a Director of Studies. He was not called that, but he really directed their studies. I was only in charge of their plan of daily life. This man, called Otto Baumann, was a remarkable person. His trust created trustworthiness, but not always: he trusted blindly and lacked just that measure of healthy distrust which is indispensable for a schoolmaster. He was in fact intoxicated by the milk of human kindness. He could never believe that boys and girls would ever cheat. And so when it happened and he discovered it, he gave a savage punishment, namely, no games for three months. The son of Prince Max of Baden, Prince Berthold, aged 13, already then the head of the school, came to me and said, "This is terrible, my father will not give me a gun for Christmas, if he hears of this punishment and why it was given - please intervene." I went to seek out Baumann who lived at the other end of the castle. You, Dyke, will remember these enormous passages, 300 yards long. Negotiations in Germany take a long time. As Bismarck used to say of the Germans, "if the Germans agree, they quarrel why they agree." It took me from eight o'clock 'till one in the morning to get his agreement to rescind this savage punishment. And then I went back.

There was no electric light in the passages, conditions were rather primitive, you might even say "Athenian." A white figure suddenly jumped out of a door carrying a candle. I thought: is this the ghost of a monk? It was Prince Berthold in a white nightgown and he said, "Is there hope?" And I said, there was hope. The next morning Professor Baumann came into the classroom where the four pupils were assembled. They were hidden in smoke and he thought, "Heavens, have they started smoking?" And then the smoke dispersed and the young Prince courteously bowed and presented him with an urn which contained the ashes of all the fraudulently conducted exercises of the last six months. And that was a pledge, a pledge which was not always kept by Salem but which can always be revived in strength. It is kept in Gordonstoun, I think, better than in Salem. The

pledge, if kept, means that a master can set an examination paper and without saying a word can leave the room confident that nobody will cheat.

Now, your task is more difficult when you try to establish the unwritten laws. Present day society does not operate in your favor. The young of today are surrounded by a dazzling variety of vigorous and victorious enterprises and you are exposed to insidious influences inherent in present day civilization. I am naturally reluctant to speak of the youthful society in this country. My impressions are second hand. But if I am allowed to give my personal opinion, I would say this: the spiritual disorders afflicting young people are possibly greater than in Europe. But I would also say, that the healing forces which have been released are more powerful.

In this context I think one should mention the remarkable appointment of John Gardner, the Secretary of Welfare, Health and Education. Socrates would have been pleased that at this stage, wisdom has been entrusted with such a far-reaching responsibility. His book on "excellence" I regard as a milestone. He demands something, which is of great relevance to all educators. He demands that a healthy community should try to discover the excellence, which is hidden in almost every human being. He does not only refer to academic excellence, he refers to the excellence of devoted craftsmanship and to the excellence of dedicated and humble service.

Now to my anxieties. There is no doubt today that you are surrounded by what I call tempting declines - declines in the basic human qualities. I will mention five of them: the decline of physical fitness due to modern methods of locomotion; the decline of skill and care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship; the decline of imagination and memory due to the confused restlessness of modern life; the decline of self-discipline owing to the ever-present availability of pills which tranquilize or stimulate; and the worst decline of all, the decline of compassion, which William Temple, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, called spiritual death.

I will mention some symptoms of these declines: the German Army has registered that healthy recruits often cannot walk eight miles when they join. I will relate an incident, which is rather disreputable from my point of view, indicating how a philosophy of slapdash is used to justify slovenly work. A boy at Gordonstoun once presented a very shoddy piece of work. I said to him, "Aren't you ashamed of this?" He looked at me radiantly and said, "It is the genius of the British race to muddle through," and in his innermost heart he believed he contributed to the genius of the race.

I will now illustrate the decline of self-discipline. A mother in Europe, not in this country, sent her boy to boarding school with pills against homesickness. I give you another example: a progressive educator who did not believe with Plato that there are not only good and sweet things, but also good and irksome things, cross-examined me severely and said to me, "Do your boys enjoy jumping running and throwing?" - which is part of the Gordonstoun routine designed to develop vital health, resilience, acceleration, coordination and stamina. I said to him, "Do you enjoy brushing your teeth, Sir," and he said, "I do not enjoy it and I do not do it."

And now I return to the worst decline - the decline of compassion. When I was in New York last spring I found my friends shocked and ashamed through what had happened outside an apartment house in a respectable part of the city. Most of you will have heard of it, a girl was murdered. It took the murderer thirty-five minutes to commit his horrible crime. He was twice chased away by the girl's cries for help. The cries were heard and not heeded by thirty-eight witnesses who looked down from their comfortable apartments -- not one of them called the police, not one of them intervened. The police were only called after the girl was dead; they arrived within two minutes. The girl could have been saved if the police had been called in time. All thirty-eight witnesses were asked by social workers, by lawyers, by the police, why they had not intervened? And they all gave the same answer: they did not want to be involved.

I went back to London and read an article in the *Times* entitled "38 Witnesses." I must confess I had said to myself, this could not possibly happen in Britain. The *Times* article culminated in the words, "Could it happen here?" The whole gist of the article was to answer this question in the affirmative. Then I went to Germany and visited an old friend. He told me that a hooligan had tried to assault his daughter. Luckily nothing happened. Passers-by came along at the right moment and the hooligan was chased away. But the girl lay on the ground, shocked, and asked a passerby, "would he telephone for a taxi?" The man said: "Do it yourself."

-2-  
We are all exposed to these declines, young and old. Among young men and women there have emerged four types, unmistakable products of present day civilization. There are the lawless, there are the listless, who do not want to be involved, and then there are the so-called angry young man and women who I prefer to call cantankerous young men and women. A humorist once said about such people, "They have an inner itch and nobody to scratch them." And then there are the honorable skeptics, an impressive type, often deserving our admiration but highly dangerous. I do not think you have so many of them in this country; we have any amount of them in Germany and also in Britain. At one time the shrugging of shoulders almost became a western salutation on the other side of the Atlantic.

I will illustrate this skepticism by telling you of what happened to one of Dyke Brown's contemporaries, Joerg Von Bonnet. You may remember him. When I had the honor of being imprisoned by Hitler, this boy felt bewildered and angry - he was fifteen years of age at the time. He wrote the following letter to Hitler: "Dear Mr. Chancellor. If you carry on like this National Socialism will not make much progress in this school." The father had the courage to forward me letter. And you can imagine things got rather hot for the boy. In 1935 he was sent to Gordonstoun, which in the meantime had been founded, to be out of the way. A strange change had come over him, which frightened me very much. He still thought the Nazis were the devil but he also thought that the devil was invincible. I tried to console him and I believed I was in a strong position to do so. A friend of mine had introduced me to General Smuts, the great South African. Smuts had a wonderful gift. He divined what a man wanted to say and did not dare to say. Smuts sensed that at that time I was almost despairing about the country of my birth and he

suddenly said to me, “Young man” - he was 70, I was 47 – “I can console you this pest will be wiped off the face of the earth,” and then he used words almost identical with those spoken by my late chief Prince Max of Baden in a famous speech made in 1917, “I know the spiritual history of Germany, there is throughout a sense of responsibility for the human destiny. What the Nazis are doing is the most un-German thing which could happen.” I repeated all that Smuts had said to my honorable skeptic, he only shrugged his shoulders and said, “Mr. Hahn, I do not want to destroy your illusions.” A terrible thing to hear from a boy of seventeen.

Lawlessness, listlessness, subversive anger, honorable asceticism - these dangerous attitudes to life are all encouraged by present day's society. It my belief that schools, day schools no less than boarding schools should widen and deepen their responsibilities and accept the remedial task of building up in the young entrusted into their care a healthy resistance against the tempting declines which surround them.

I advocate the introduction of what, for short, I call the preventive cure. It has four elements.

The first, a morning break, interrupting the sedentary habits of the morning. It should be devoted to athletic training designed to keep the joy of movement alive, which is often extinguished in adolescence. The medical profession has now recognized under-exercise to be as great a menace to health as undernourishment. It is in fact a contributory cause of coronary thrombosis, which kills so many indispensable men and women in late middle age.

Training for expeditions should give young people the experience of being alone. When in solitude one naturally looks back, one also thinks and dreams ahead and one finds it difficult to conveniently forget what one should remember.

The second element is the expedition. A canoeing, riding, sailing or climbing expedition, well planned and carefully prepared and demanding both resolution and initiative. Joseph Conrad has written illuminating words about the needs of youth. In his great novel *Lord Jim* he described the tragic failure of his hero, when as a serving officer he deserted a sinking ship leaving hundreds of sleeping passengers to their fate. He tries to probe the mystery behind this conduct of an honorable and brave man:

“He had never been tested by events that show *in* the light of day the inner worth of a man, the edge of his temper, and the fibre of his stuff; that reveal the qualities of his resistance and the secret truth of his pretences, not only to others but to himself.”

Training for expeditions should give young people the experience of being alone. When in solitude one naturally looks back, one also thinks and dreams ahead and one finds it difficult to conveniently forget what one should remember. Neither the love of man nor the love of God can take deep root except in aloneness. We need it to counteract the confused restlessness of modern life and the insatiable appetite for company it engenders.

I once showed a Salem film in New York, a long time ago, in 1930. At that time Salem boys and girls who were in a responsible position were under an obligation to go for a lonely walk on Sunday. When this lonely walk was shown on the film a young man in the audience cried out in protest, "How cruel to force anybody to be in his own company."

Projects chosen by the pupil, projects of art, music, craftsmanship and in the last year at school, mainly projects of research demanding victorious patience and tenacity of purpose, often bring to light a hidden creativity. Projects of research can lead to the discovery of intellectual reserves which examinations often fail to mobilize.

The third element is the project. I am all for examinations, they should be invented if they did not exist - they train will-power and in preparing for them the young develop and test the alertness of the mind - surface intelligence. Projects chosen by the pupil, projects of art, music, craftsmanship and in the last year at school, mainly projects of research demanding victorious patience and tenacity of purpose often bring to light a hidden creativity. Projects of research can lead to the discovery of intellectual reserves which examinations often fail to mobilize.

I now come to the fourth element, the most important one in the preventive cure - rescue service. I will relate how we came to introduce this element. I begin by telling you how any first attempt was a miserable failure due to our misreading of human nature:

I had heard that in the eighth century there came across from Ireland a Saint Gernadius by name, who lived in a cave on our rocky coast and on stormy nights he walked about throughout the dark hours waving a lantern. I thought I could enthuse the boys to do some coastwatching on their own and I summoned the whole school and told them the story of Gernadius and I thought I told it quite impressively, but suddenly I saw a light of distrust jumping from boy to boy as if they wanted to say, "The old man wants to improve our souls." And I suddenly realized that the modern young are allergic to the manifest improvers. I registered my defeat and dropped the subject.

But the Board of Trade unexpectedly stepped in. Two ex-naval captains in charge of the Coast Guard Service in Britain visited me to inquire whether the rumor was true that we thought of introducing a voluntary Coast Guard Service and then told me why they came. "We tried to persuade the Treasury to build a Coastguard station on your ground because neither Burghead nor Lossiemouth can observe what happens along this dangerous stretch of coast. The Treasury refused. Now we make you this offer: If you build us a hut, we shall give you a rocket apparatus in trust, and enroll your boys as Coastguards, and install a telephone at our expense." I saw the possibility of redeeming myself and asked the two captains - they were in uniform - to tell the boys the same story they had told me. I summoned the school: As soon as the boys heard that the Board of Trade was prepared to fork out cash, they sensed a reality. That is how Gordonstoun's Watchers Corps originated, perhaps the school's most characteristic institution.

There are three ways of trying to win the young. There is persuasion, there is compulsion and there is attraction. You can preach at them, that is a hook without a worm; you can say, "you must volunteer," that is of the devil. And you can tell them, "You are needed." That appeal hardly ever falls. I am quite certain that the young of today respond better to the service which is demanded from them in the interest of others than to the service, which is offered them for their own benefit and improvement.

There are all sorts of subsidiary motives which come into play and which at times seem to detract from the intrinsic worth of the service which is rendered: the love of adventure, the fascination of machinery, scientific curiosity. I do not believe they necessarily detract: the experience of helping a fellow man in danger or even of training in a realistic manner to be ready to give this help tends to change the balance of power in a youth's inner life with the result that compassion become the master motive.

I remember a characteristic incident which took place in Salem. There was a wild and ruthless boy. I received daily deputations urging me that I should get rid of him. But I hesitated, wondering whether his undefeatable spirit could not be directed towards worthwhile alms. I persuaded him to join the agriculture guild. One day he came to me in great excitement and said, "Mr. Hahn, something terrible has happened. They want to kill our cow because she has swallowed a piece of wire. Now I know from my father who is a doctor that in such cases you can operate on humans and a cow is a much tougher animal than man or woman. May I find a who will operate?"

At the end of the 19th century William James threw out the challenge to educators and statesmen: "Discover the moral equivalent to war." James hated war but he admits that war satisfies a primitive longing, which will never be extinguished, the longing to lose yourself in a common cause. This longing may be driven underground. There it remains in unconscious readiness to erupt in an international crisis, often weighting the scales of public opinion in favor of war. The moral equivalent has been discovered. The fight against unnecessary death and suffering releases the highest dynamics of the human soul even more so than war.

In my stupidity I said to him, "Well, if you find a vet who will operate on this cow she shall live." He disappeared for twenty-four hours, then came back with a vet who lived 30 miles away. His coming cost more than the cow. I shall never forget what happened then. I was to bed at that time with a broken leg and the stable was 200 yards away. I suddenly heard a cry - it was the cry of jubilant mercy. What had happened? The boy had been allowed to assist at the operation - he had poured much iodine into the wound made by the surgeon's knife. The arm of the vet buried in the recesses of the cow had extracted the piece of wire from near the heart. When he held it up the boy emitted that triumphant cry which I had heard. He has since become a distinguished surgeon.

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in unconscious readiness to erupt in an international crisis, often weighting the scales of public opinion in favor of war. The moral equivalent has been discovered. The fight against unnecessary death and suffering releases the highest dynamics of the human soul even more so than war.

“Samaritan service is a source of the revelation.” William Temple was right when he said this: “He, who drills and labors, accepts hardships, boredom and danger, all for the sake of being ready to help his neighbor in peril discovers God's purpose in his inner life.” I am not only thinking of help rendered on dramatic occasions and of the training, which it demands, but of the wonderful work done by your National Ski Patrol, by the Australian Surf Life Savers, by the Bavarian Mountain Watch. I equally have in mind epic labors of love undertaken to bring relief to the blind, the deaf, the old and lonely. I am thinking of voluntary workers in hospitals and in approved schools. Seven hundred boys at the Manchester Grammar School are engaged in some sort of social service. This example is followed by many other schools in Britain.

The Samaritan spirit is stirring everywhere, not only in the Western world, also behind the Iron Curtain. As I said to the beginning, powerful healing forces have been released, at the same time we must be under no illusion, the declines are advancing at a rapid rate. Who will win the race?

I would have given a pessimistic answer up to 1963, but an event took place that year which has given me great hope. The Royal College of Surgeons in London held a convention on life saving and accident prevention. The most distinguished physicians and surgeons were present, educators were allowed to attend. Every doctor who spoke bore witness to the revolutionary change, which has come over the attitude of the Medical profession to the role of the layman. Formerly the layman was discouraged from trying to save life - today the layman trained in first aid is urged to apply the skill he has mastered. This change has come about as a result of the rediscovery of the expired air method and the discovery of closed cardiac massage in resuscitation. At the convention a Norwegian doctor stunned his eminent colleagues by saying, “Life saving is the business of the layman, the less serious things we can leave to the doctors.”

A threefold call went out from this convention:

A call to schools to give first aid a place of honor on the timetable.

A call to the rescue and relief organizations to open their welcoming gates to well trained adolescents and to be prepared to use them in earnest.

A call to young people of the Western world to help in the fight against unnecessary death and suffering.



There were three highlights in the conference which I will always remember:

The first was a demonstration in first aid by the apprentices of the Army Medical School, all aged between 10 and 18. The watching doctors were full of admiration for the care and skill displayed by those boys in demonstrating the expired air method and closed cardiac massage on the model "Resuscity Anne." An eminent surgeon remarked, "I wish my young doctors would be as efficient in resuscitation." I was reminded of a remark made by the great physician, the late Lord Dawson of Penn, "The adolescent has a vigilance of the spirit and an alertness of the senses superior to those of the child or adult."

The second highlight was the speech by the Duke of Edinburgh. He made three proposals:

He called upon rescue and relief organizations to have confidence in the competence and dedication of teenagers: if they are well trained and to entrust to them serious and responsible jobs.

He expressed the hope that a permanent medical commission would be established as a recognized authority in accident prevention and accident control. "It can bring the callous fend the thoughtless into deserved contempt. It can rouse a conscience of safety, It can give advice which will help to save thousands of lives and which only fools will disregard."

His third proposal seems to me to be the most important. He suggested that all rescue organizations should meet and discuss the possibility of establishing a series of Instructors' or Guides' certificates for the various hazardous activities.

Since then the Medical Commission has been established and has done invaluable work. The Commission has taken up Prince Philip's proposal and at the proper moment intends to sponsor a big international convention of rescue and relief organizations to be attended also by educators. It is my hope that these organizations will decide on presenting attractive hurdles which volunteers would have to pass if they want to be enrolled as helpers. Qualification should be demanded in first aid to an advanced level and in life saving also to an advanced level. In physical adequacy, special concessions to be made to the physically handicapped who through the daily challenge of their disability have often developed an undefeatable power to overcome.

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I look forward to the day when the status of helper will be recognized internationally. This would open up a new avenue of distinction. I would suggest that in Europe these helpers would be called "Hansen Helpers" after Fridtjof Hansen, the explorer, the scholar,

the patriot who towards the end of his life sacrificed his beloved interests to save millions from death and misery, all citizens of nation; other than his own.

Aristocracy is the salt wherewith democracy shall be salted. Not the Aristocracy of birth or of position or of culture. I have a vision of an Aristocracy of Service, which could set a fashion of conduct throughout the Western world. In a democracy you can only accelerate developments by example. I look to independent schools, young ones and old ones, to make an important contribution to the example of demanding and dedicated service.

Boarding schools are able to do this on two conditions, that they are not a plutocratic community, which inevitably suffers from an enervating sense of privilege, and that they have given up their isolation, as for instance, Andover and Exeter have done. Both schools are rendering great service in the district and beyond it.

In a democracy you can only accelerate developments by example. I look to independent schools, young ones and old ones, to make an important contribution to the example of demanding and dedicated service.

I was delighted when I heard yesterday that your Trustees have decided to admit twenty-five percent of your boys and girls irrespective of the financial position of their parents. And I know that from the first Dyke Brown will try to develop the Athenian School into a healthgiving center of this region.

Dyke has mentioned the Atlantic College in St. Donat's In Hales on the Bristol Channel. I hope for intimate contact between the two pioneering ventures. They are both inspired by a sense of mission in the international and in the social field; training for Samaritan service will have a place of importance in your community life as it has in St. Donat's.

They have four rescue services there: Surf Life Savers, trained according to the Australian method, Canoe Life Guards who patrol outside the surf, a Cliffcladder Company and a Coach Rescue Squad, which operates with inflated rafts, capable of doing thirty knots. The Headmaster has submitted a plan for how to make the bathing beaches of Britain safe with the help of 25,000 teenagers. By way of making a start he has built up an extramural department which trains boys who do not attend the College in rescue skills, the Atlantic boys - all of them university entrance candidates - helping with the instruction. Residential courses are held during the holidays. Preliminary training for active service on the beaches can be given in the swimming pools in the big cities.

Boys from more than twenty nations are attending the Atlantic College. One hopes that one day students will come from behind the Iron Curtain. There is a great spiritual unrest among young people not only in the Satellite countries, but also in Russia. Ever since Krushchev in 1956 spoke out and admitted that murder, massacre and torture were part of the Stalin system which he had served, the young in Russia often look westward full of distrust, but not without hope and ask a question which makes us blush, "Are you In

earnest about the ideals you profess?" Who shall Give the answer? I say, young men and women ready to do as the Good Samaritan has done.

There is a spiritual link between your courageous and imaginative enterprise and the schools with which I have the honor to be connected. I cannot do better than express our common purpose by what to me has become a watchword. It was spoken by George Trevelyan in 1943 as he baptized the sailing ship *Garibaldi* which for years rendered great service to Outward Bound. This is what he said:

"Two passions are not likely to die out of the world, the love of country and the love of freedom. They can be kept pure by one thing, which can tame yet not weaken them, tender love of all mankind."