

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

TÉL. 021/9634821
TÉLÉFAX 021/9635260
TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Sunday, 23rd July, 1995

Dear friends,

After a long fine spell of increasingly hot weather - very hot down from the heights of our hill - the storm clouds have been hurrying in across the lake, and there have been some cooling rains. The housekeepers have been hurrying through the house, closing windows against the violent squalls. Some things do not change. In my research for the book I am writing on the history of Caux, I discovered a letter in the Swiss government archives in Bern from the caretaker of the hotel that became Mountain House. The interned prisoners of war had left 18 of their windows open, despite being warned, several windows were broken, and the floors were damaged by the rain that came in!

I confess that I am cheating this letter, producing it a day early. Today starts with a free morning, and then a picnic, and I am planning on 48 hours back home in Geneva, resting my vanishing voice. This week has been even more intense than usual, and my view of it even more incomplete, with apologies. A professional video crew arrived last Monday, and they leave again today, after busy days of interviews, and filming in every corner of the house, and at several vantage points in the countryside around. They are pleased with what they have been able to shoot - and I have been working with them much of the time.

In the autumn, you will be able to see the fruit of their efforts, and something more of this time in Caux: a short new promotional video, for the 50th anniversary, a 'visiting card', that we hope you will want to show to your friends. It should be short enough to show to the busiest men and women we know! Ken Dodds, who travelled with the MRA musical 'Anything to Declare?', nearly thirty years ago now, is the director, and it will be edited in London by Ian Corcoran, another of the same vintage who has also gone on to make a career in television.

Last Monday also saw the second 'Caux Anniversary Lecture', by Mrs Jara David-Moserova, from the Czech Republic, on the theme of 'Those who left and those who stayed behind - a central European experience'. Vice-president of her country's first post-communist parliament, and then ambassador to Australia and New Zealand, she is now President of the Czech UNESCO Committee. One of her plays, 'Letter to Wollongong' is being played again in Caux this summer. Tomorrow's lecture will be by a Muslim lawyer from Pakistan. It is early days yet to tell whether we are succeeding in our dream of drawing in a certain number of people from the region.

We are lucky in the talented people who are here when needed. As I started last week's letter, I completely blocked my computer, and was in quite a panic, until Luis Puig, our resident computer doctor came to the patient's bedside, listened carefully with his stethoscope, and prescribed the right medication. I clearly need to more careful about the wrong keys that I thump!

The next, current session, 'The Society of Tomorrow' started on the Tuesday, with all the chairs in the hall facing a new platform placed in the bay window. The boring old voice of experience told me that it wouldn't work, we'd all be looking against the light, and I was wrong again. It's good to be proved wrong, and good to change in our set ways of doing things. There was an air of excitement and expectancy: the group organising this session have put in a massive work of preparation over months, and it shows, along with considerable depth and spontaneity. There was a welcoming team in the front hall with refreshments for hot and weary travellers from the plains, and a 'welcome kit' of documentation. The numbers rose rapidly to just below the 500 mark - the Caux Round Table for senior business figures was running at the same time, so there has been a fascinating mix.

The opening meeting was led by a young lady in colourful Jamaican costume. Then a British Indian came up with a chair, introduced himself, and the thought that had come to him in Caux last year for a meeting on the theme of the society of tomorrow. He was joined by three more friends who he had talked to back in London, and in ones and groups, all of the initiating group came up giving a simple but vivid picture of the development of an idea and the growth of a team. A law student, an artist, a research scientist and film-maker from Britain, a freelance journalist, a tour-guide and architecture student from Paris, an American artist living in Sweden, a cartoonist, a student of Russian and political science from Norway...

An 80-year-old (my mother) read some thoughts that she received from another of her generation: 'Give the love that you never gave because you knew not how. Be the comfort that you were not, because you didn't see the need. Give the joy that you didn't allow time for, because you let duty take its place. Give the peace you didn't give while self-will drove you on.' Then she added, 'There is no limit to the number of grandchildren that we can care for with God's help.'

There are meant to be two quiet periods per day, after the morning and afternoon sessions, just before community meetings in the morning, and supper in the evening. It makes striking viewing to see the many individuals scattered across the park, reflecting on what they have just heard, or gathered in small groups, discussing animatedly. By the way, for the first time to my knowledge, the English-speakers have given up trying to find a better translation for the French word 'animateur', and use the word 'animator' for a community group leader.

A powerful one-man play, 'The Invisible Man' by Ralph Ellison, forced us to look at racism, and the people and feelings we refuse to see. We have also been reflecting on 'identity' - a Buddhist monk of Canadian origin told us that he had to remind himself of this identity on coming through Swiss customs, and to remember to show his passport. 'But when I walk in nature,' he went on, 'I don't say to myself, "I am a Canadian", I think that I am part of nature - but I can't say that to the customs man!' He went on to propose an exercise: to think of someone we feel an aversion towards; isolate what it is in them that we react to; then seek out that thing in ourselves. So often, we are reacting to our own failings reflected in the other, he suggested, before mentioning 'the fly-paper syndrome' - getting stuck with the things in ourselves that we try to throw away, instead of just opening our hands and letting go, so that they can be taken away.

Grateful greetings from a full and lively house,

Andrew Stallybrass

Andrew