Francis L. Schmertz is a member of the English Department of John Burroughs School, St. Louis. A man sensitive to the natural environment, Mr. Schmertz has recently been developing a personal interest in landscaping.

MEN WORKING IN TREES

"The bastards," he said. . . . "They aim between the eyes, just because it's big, free and beautiful. . . ."

- Romain Gary. The Roots of Heaven

The sign astride the narrow green
Fixed between macadam and the mud
Performs the function of a staring sidewalk crowd
And the eye clambers--
Forcing apart the branches and at last
Discovers them. They laugh and laugh.
One saws at lengths; the other
Stuffs thick liquid in a hole.

Their partner on the ground recovers rope
And throws dark glances upward as he coils.
He does not laugh. His heavy, sap-drawn face
Betrays a quick aversion to the higher air
Or else his envy of the ones above--
What if the rope should fail, the thin line give?
Does such a treacherous thought take root
Among the simple soil which forms his brain?

Men working in trees. A lesson here perhaps:
When men fell down from primal jungle gyms
To earth and left their simian cousins to
The leaves, did hatred of the free untrammeled
Life, did murderous impulse toward the floating
Gift of grace become the only seed
Of baleful loving in the human heart,
Thus to creep upward to the heated human head?