

## KEYS TO SOCIAL CHANGE

THE way men of ability and moral longing pick quarrels with their times has a great deal to do with the social health of subsequent generations. Staughton Lynd, for example, has pointed out that the typical resort of morally indignant Americans is to launch a military crusade. The Civil War, for all its underlying economic causes, was basically a moral crusade, and it set a pattern of righteous behavior for Americans. Yet the United States is now torn by domestic turmoil and her best men are filled with shame because of the failure of the Civil War to accomplish what was expected of it. The real task remains to be done. Meanwhile, we are finding it almost impossible to end another crusade which hardly anyone any longer defends as either righteous or effective.

Actually, the idea that men are able to use massive power to right social wrongs is of fairly recent origin. In a book of essays, *The Opposing Self*, Lionel Trilling proposes that this confidence grew out of the French Revolution. The spirit of the modern age, he suggests, "was signaled by the fall of a very famous prison, the Bastille." He develops the importance of the fall of the Bastille as a symbol for future social action:

The attack on the Bastille was an attack on the gross injustices and irrationalities of the social system. These gross injustices were not wiped out in 1789, nor were they forgotten in the years that followed. But as soon as the Bastille had fallen, the image of the prison came to represent something more than the gross injustices and irrationalities. Men began to recognize the existence of prisons that were not built of stone, nor even of social restrictions and economic disabilities. They learned to see that they might be immured not only by the overt force of society but by a coercion in some ways more frightful because it involved their own acquiescence. The newly conceived coercive force required of each prisoner that he sign his own *lettre de cachet*, for it had established its prisons in the family life, in the professions, in the image of respectability, in the ideas of faith and duty, in (so the poets said) the very

language itself. The modern self . . . was born in a prison. It assumed its nature and fate the moment it perceived, named, and denounced its oppressor.

The wrath inspired by this situation finds a ready if largely unproved remedy in the habit of militant crusade. There is an instant assumption on the part of nearly everyone that the thing to do, in a situation that is intolerable, is to *change* it. This is an assumption on which politicians thrive, and it makes fortunes for journalists with a taste for demagoguery.

No one, after all, can find reasonable grounds for objecting to this assumption. But there are many reasons for contending that the resort to power is an extremely limited means for accomplishing lasting change. These reasons account for the moderation as well as the pessimism of many historians, yet they hardly appeal to the man who, schooled in the traditions of his countrymen, is firmly convinced that unless he wins or seizes power, he can do absolutely nothing. This, it seems, is what we remember from the revolutions of the eighteenth century.

But what is the lesson of the revolutions of the twentieth century? There can be no doubt about the fact that these more recent revolutions have changed the world, and that we are by no means done with their effect. While some men have in some ways benefited from them, there are also ways in which conditions became worse. The relativities of "might have been" speculations prevent argument, but the fact remains that the concentration camp is an institution which at least rivals the Bastille in anti-human infamy. There is a sense in which the political crimes and human sufferings of the present lack the sharp objectivity which nearly two hundred years have given the abuses of the feudal regime. One might say that exploitation has assumed subtler forms, autocracy new guises, and that pain has found a higher

intensity in the constant frustration of far greater expectations.

It is even possible that the main progress brought by recent revolutions lies in their instruction that while armed revolt can bring down tyrants and punish obvious exploiters, they have not shown the way to create a heaven on earth. The more elaborate the plans for a politically created Utopia, it seems, the more comprehensive the failure that results.

It hardly needs pointing out that attempts at social change through the exercise of power will continue to be made, regardless of the lessons of history. But it should be worth while to consider what might be done by those who feel that the time has come to experiment with other means. How, for example, might a philosopher go about the "revolutionary" project? In this case "philosopher" means a man who gives evidence of psychological understanding as well as of a vision which compels him to act for the general good. There have probably been other such men in history, but we think in particular of two—Pythagoras and Gandhi. The rest of our discussion will amount to a comparison of the ideas of these two.

Pythagoras' school at Crotona (in Italy) was as much a place of training for social change as it was a center for the teaching of religious philosophy. Members of the Pythagorean brotherhood sought the improvement of society through the elevation of individual life. By the practice of integrity in human relations, they hoped to seed the society of their time with better tendencies. Iamblichus, in his *Life of Pythagoras*, gives the following testimony:

This Pythagorean school filled Italy with philosophers; and this place, which was before unknown, was later, on account of Pythagoras, called Greater Greece, which became famous for its philosophers, poets and legislators. Indeed the rhetorical arts, demonstrative reasonings and legislation were entirely transferred from Greece. As to physics, we might mention the principal physiologists, Empedocles and the Elean Parmenides.

As to ethical maxims, there is Epicharmus, whose conceptions are used by almost all philosophers.

Unlike the political thinkers of later centuries, Pythagoras laid great stress on the personal discipline of individuals. He endeavored to root justice in personal practice. Iamblichus has this to say on the Pythagorean instruction in justice and politics:

The principle of justice is mutuality and equality, through which, in a way most nearly approximating union of body and soul, all men become cooperative, and distinguish the mine from the thine, as is also testified by Plato, who learned this from Pythagoras. Pythagoras effected this in the best possible manner, by erasing from common life everything private, while increasing everything common, so far as ultimate possessions, which after all are the causes of tumult and sedition. Among his disciples, everything was common, and the same to all, no one possessing anything private. He himself, indeed, who most approved of this communion, made use of common possessions in the most just manner; but disciples who changed their minds were given back their original contributions, with an addition, and then they left. Thus Pythagoras established justice in the best possible manner, beginning at its very first principle.

In the next place, justice is introduced by association with other people, while injustice is produced by unsociability and neglect of other people. Wishing therefore to spread this sociability as far as possible among men, he ordered his disciples to extend it to the most kindred animal races, considering these as their intimates and friends, which would forbid injuring, slaying or eating any of them. He who recognizes the community of elements and life between men and animals will in much greater degree establish fellowship with those who share a kindred and rational soul. This also shows that Pythagoras promoted justice beginning from its very root principle. Since lack of money often compels men sometimes to act contrary to justice, he tried to avoid this by practicing such economy that his necessary expenses might be liberal, and yet retain a sufficiency. For as cities are only magnified households, so the arrangement of domestic concerns is the principle of all good order in cities. . . .

Because injustice also frequently results from insolence, luxury, and lawlessness, he daily exhorted his disciples to support the laws, and shun

lawlessness. He considered luxury the first evil that usually glides into houses and cities; the second insolence, the third destruction. . . .

Besides this household justice, he added another and most beautiful kind, the legislative, which both orders what to do and what not to do. Legislative justice is more beautiful than the judicial kind, resembling medicine which heals the diseased, but differs in this that it is preventative, planning the health of the soul from afar.

That is why the best of all legislators graduated from the school of Pythagoras: first, Charondas the Catanean, and next Zaleucus and Timaratus, who legislated for the Locrians. Besides these were Theaetetus and Helicaon, Aristocrates and Phytius, who legislated for the Rhegini. All these aroused from the citizen honors comparable to those offered to divinities. For Pythagoras did not act like Heraclitus, who agreed to write laws for the Ephesians, but also petulantly added that in those laws he would order the citizens to hang themselves. What laws Pythagoras endeavored to establish were benevolent and scientific.

Yet Pythagoras was no great elaborator of legal structures. His confidence was in the disciplines that produce virtuous men. The mood of Pythagorean wisdom is suggestively contained in the many Pythagorean "fragments" which were recorded by his followers. In the "Select Sentences" of Sextus, for example, one finds:

Esteem as precious nothing that a bad man can take from you.

Do not investigate the name of God, because you will not find it. For everything called by a name receives its appellation from that which is more worthy than itself, so that it is one person that calls, and another that hears. Who is it therefore, who has given a name to God?

The world would have been spared much useless theological controversy had this Pythagorean injunction been observed. Indeed, there is a good case for the view that the present-day reluctance to integrate social theory with philosophical ideas of human development, after the manner of Pythagoras, is due to the externalizing tendencies of organized religion in the West. It can hardly be denied that religious

argument about the nature of Deity, the threat of eternal damnation by an extra-cosmic judge, and the enormous emphasis placed upon correct belief, had the practical effect, over centuries, of making human good depend upon an outside power. Not the perfection of human excellences, but the techniques of relation and submission to that Power became the crucial consideration. The persecutions of religion, the operations of the Inquisition, and, finally, the civil wars of the Reformation are sufficient evidence that *belief* was considered to be far more important than personal morality. Actually, the doctrine of man's helplessness as a sinner, unable to rise to virtue by his own efforts, accomplished a general debasement of the idea of the self in Christian lands.

It is hardly remarkable, considering these psychological habits apart from beliefs, that when the great social upheaval that began in the nineteenth century formulated revolutionary doctrines of social organization, the sources of power were again placed *outside* of individual man—in "historical processes" and the phenomena of economic production. God was replaced by dialectical materialism, with access to salvation possible only through the prescribed methods of Scientific Socialism. So, as Lynn White, Jr. has observed, Marxism may be identified as a Judeo-Christian heresy, so far as its basic psychology is concerned. Its crucial requirement is conformity to a system of belief about "salvation."

Non-Communist Socialism now has the role of a weakened ("democratic") protestant opposition to Communist power. Socialism disavows only the ruthlessness, not the major doctrine of Marxist revolution, which identifies economic processes as the controlling factors in the determination of human destiny. The "system," and not the quality of individuals, is still the thing.

One looks in vain for the restoration of the philosophic ideal of human excellence to social thought until the time of Gandhi. With him, the

priorities became, once again, very similar to those taught by Pythagoras. There are parallels, too, in his essential doctrines. In a volume of his *Speeches and Writings* (Natesan), we find Gandhi saying:

I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use, and keep it, I thief from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception, that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving. I am no socialist and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possessions: but I do say that personally, those who want to see the light out of darkness have to follow this rule. I do not want to dispossess anybody. I should then be departing from the rule of *ahimsa* [harmlessness]. If somebody else possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not want. In India we have got three millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a *chapati* containing no fat in it, and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything that we really have until these three millions are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation in order that they may be nursed, fed and clothed.

Elsewhere Gandhi wrote:

In a well-ordered society the securing of one's livelihood should be and is the easiest thing in the world. Indeed, the test of orderliness in a country is not the number of millionaires it owns, but the absence of starvation among its masses. The only statement that has to be examined is, whether it can be laid down as a law of universal application that material advancement means moral progress.

On the achievement of the social ideal, he said in *Harijan* in 1940:

Now let us consider how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. The first step towards it is for him who has made this ideal a part of his life to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India. His

earnings would be free of dishonesty. The desire for speculation would be renounced. His habitation would be in keeping with his new mode of life. There would be self-restraint exercised in every sphere of life. When he had done all that is possible in his own life, then only will he be in a position to preach this ideal among his associates and neighbors.

Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbors. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore the non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as trustee for the remainder to be used for society. In this argument, honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed.

If, however, in spite of utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find out the solution to this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society. If this knowledge were to penetrate and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.

What stands in the way of wider consideration of these new-old ideas of social change and reform? Habit, no doubt, but also, surely, their utter simplicity. But most of all, we think, the expectation that only massive external authority is strong enough to alter the ways of men and their attitudes of mind.

Yet today a new conception of the role and importance of the individual is emerging. In the idea of *community* we find a practical synthesis of philosophic ideas of human good and far-reaching processes of social change. There is no longer the

habitual resistance to conceptions of high human potentiality, and less and less confidence is placed in merely political solutions, since the failures of these solutions are all about. These changes in attitude toward power may represent the beginning of a new use of the imagination on the part of modern man.

## *REVIEW*

### EDUCATION, AND OTHER MATTERS

ONCE again, *Life* Magazine (Nov. 1) has published a forthright criticism of the higher education in America—this time by Judson Jerome, professor of literature and director of the experimental "inner" college at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. The earlier *Life* article on this subject (in the May 24 issue) was by James H. Billington, titled "The Humanistic Heartbeat Has Failed." Dr. Jerome's article is called "The System Really Isn't Working." His central charge is the irrelevance of higher education to life. Speaking of the teachers of his own generation, he asks:

How many of us truly feel that our college education was relevant to real human concerns? How many of us, especially in graduate study, have let a model of scholarship be foisted upon us which took us farther from, rather than nearer to, our interests in our subject? How many of us have let education exorcize our enthusiasm and quell our will to action?

I hear students telling me what I never had the guts or imagination to say though I recognize its truth: the system isn't working. The whole network of departments, field, areas, credits, requirements, courses, grades, which we have accepted as educational design, does not relate coherently to human learning, and the network is collapsing of its own Byzantine weight.

How has this irrelevance developed, and how has it been justified?

Classes, courses, degrees, credits, grades might be dismissed as trivial problems—easier to accept as conventions than to revise. But more serious incoherencies begin to appear when we examine the assumptions about learning implied by our current structures. The model of knowledge inherited from the Enlightenment, with clear-cut "disciplines" and methods for discovering and verifying facts, accumulating a delta of truth which extends into the unknown, all this seems increasingly inadequate to describe the world we live in. Science has raised disturbing doubts about its own methods—but these methods tend to be imitated uncritically in other disciplines. Even if verification could be relied upon, the sheer burgeoning of knowledge accumulated on this model had led to fragmentation and fossilization

within specialties which are less and less able to provide a person with a coherent grasp of his own human experience.

This basic irrelevance is raised to a higher power by the "scientific" professionalism of professors: "From high school on, our education has been designed as a series of sequential steps preparing students to do original research, as though the democratic dream of an educated citizenry might eventuate in a society of Ph.Ds."

Where did this conception of education come from? Dr. Jerome says the Enlightenment, and it is fair to add that Francis Bacon was a forerunner and prophet of the Enlightenment. From Bacon, at any rate, we have the idea of knowledge as power, and of learning as the means to power. That our civilization finally embraced the Baconian doctrine and applied it in all directions is evident from the now generally accepted definition of the university as a service station for the needs of technology. Bacon was a very bright man and his theory of knowledge was easily converted into the credo of research specialists. It has little to say about the judgment of ends. Bacon's utilitarian theme appeals rather to the technical, manipulative intelligence. Power is the object and the proof of knowledge. So scientific method became the academic religion and in time devitalized the humanities by subjecting them to a dissecting scholarship.

This philosophic criticism of education as the means to power was first made by Plato, and was made again, quite effectively, by Ortega in his *Mission of the University*:

Science is not something by which we live. If the physicist had to live by the ideas of his science, you may rest assured that he would not be so finicky as to wait for some other investigator to complete his research a century or so later. . . . The internal conduct of science is not a vital concern; that of culture is. Science is indifferent to the exigencies of our life, and follows its own necessities.

So, through the worship of science as the means to power, education has been led away from life by the endlessly diversifying and

specializing necessities of science, until it has become in Dr. Jerome's single word—irrelevant.

We have for review two books that support this general analysis—the claim that what is wrong with modern life is its exploiting and imperialist view of the world of nature and of knowledge. It is a view that leads men to spend their energies trying to find, make, or get excellent "things," with only afterthought devoted to what is essential to an excellent life. The publicists of the triumphant technological society have even advertised to the world that there is no significant difference between the two. If we have the power to accomplish so many wonderful things, we must be good men!

One of these books, *The Pollution Reader* (paper, \$3.50; cloth, \$5.95), comes from Harvest House, a Canadian publisher (1364 Greene Ave., Montreal, Quebec). Compiled by Anthony de Vos, Norman Pearson, P. L. Silverston, and W. R. Drynan, it presents the findings of a Canadian conference on "Pollution and our Environment," sponsored in 1966 by the Canadian Council of Resource Ministers. The intention of the conference was to develop "dialogue between the three leading actors in the pollution drama: the public, industry, and government"; however, the immediate effect of the book is to make the reader feel sick. It is the story of how the world we live in is rapidly being made into a filthy mess.

Yet the volume, made up of reports by technicians with public concern, has a constructive quality and intent. Two of these writers, in an introductory chapter, explain that pollution doesn't have to result from man's relations with nature:

It would seem that the man-made environment induces pollution not only of nature but of itself. Slums, for instance, are the product of pollution of the man-made environment—comparable to dead water in the natural environment.

The results of pollution on man himself are not dissimilar to the consequences in natural elements. This is not surprising since man is a natural being in the first instance. But man is affected physiologically both by physical and sensory phenomena. Sight and

sound can make him sick, just as effectively as the ingestion of poisonous matter. In the contemporary city the human pollutants are in smog, in dead water, garbage slums, noise and chaos.

However, there is no reason to assume that the man-made environment must of necessity be pollution-inducing or even pollution-producing. There are isolated examples of cities or parts of cities in which a process of constant renewal has occurred without the production of slums. There are examples of the conversion of urban waste to matter which can enter into a natural ecological cycle. It is technically possible to install a completely reusable and independent water system within a single dwelling unit. It is technically possible today to create a man-made environment which does not pollute either man himself, his habitat, or the non-urban environment. It is consequently possible to create an urban ecology which meshes with the natural ecology. This is by no means an isolation of "nature" and the man-made environment, nor can it be even in part a return to the primeval natural ecology. But it can, nevertheless, lead to the establishing of a new ecology which is viable both in terms of nature and contemporary technology.

So there *is* a way, but the will to use it is lacking. Hardly any other conclusion can be drawn from the diverse studies of the *Pollution Reader*, which cover the subject with technical thoroughness but without excessively technical language. There are contributions on the pollution of food, soil, water, air, and discussions of what municipalities can do to control pollution. The peculiar virtue of this book is that the writers all have first-hand knowledge of their subjects. It was prepared by experts for the assistance of people who have opportunity to exercise direct influence in the reduction of pollution. The general problem, however, remains. There must be intensive wondering about the ends and means of a life which would not have these destructive effects. Technical control at the periphery—where we discover the massive ecological disaster—is not really going to work.

The other book we have for review is *The Indian in America's Past*, edited by Jack D. Forbes (Prentice-Hall, 1964, paper, \$1.95). Those who have read Helen Hunt Jackson's A

*Century of Dishonor* and John Collier's *Indians of the Americas* will want to add Mr. Forbes' compilation to their library. It is a collection of historical documents showing how the Europeans who came to the New World thought of the "natives," and how this determined their behavior. There is also a lengthy section of speeches and statements addressed by Indian leaders to the white marauders, ranging from 1609 to 1963, and chapters containing documents concerned with the policy of the United States in relation to the Indians, from the time the Constitution became the law of the land until the present.

There is not much to hearten the reader in this book, and much to make him ashamed. The Indians were overwhelmed by the same power-seeking habits that have made education irrelevant to life, increasingly fouled the common physical environment, and caused skill in destruction to be our most dramatic technological achievement.

We should not end without calling attention to Dr. Jerome's discussion of the new tendencies in education which give him hope. "There is a basic lesson we can draw," he says, "from the many instances when college students have been treated like adults and have used their responsibilities well." He calls for more education which recognizes the maturity of the questions that the young insist upon asking:

It never occurred to me or to my generation to question the authority of teachers, parents, the draft, the police—but today 14-year-old people (I hesitate to call them kids; one lives in my home) raise valid questions about such authority and insist on answers. If it weren't for the draft and disdain for the choices available in the job market, the exodus from conventional settings of higher education would be rapid.

There is no doubt about the reality of these qualities in the young. Another description of them, by Dorothy Samuel (printed in the Spring 1965 *Contemporary Issues*), gives an idea of the needs that future education will have to meet, or, as Dr. Jerome suggests, go begging:

On every college campus will be found unfashionably clad students lolling in cheap rooms, reading inexpensive paperbacks or second-hand editions of great books. . . . They browse among the courses and the disciplines. If a book speaks to their condition, they may skip a few weeks' required work to peruse everything the author wrote. When the grade card reflects what they did not learn rather than what they did learn, they couldn't care less. Top grades are meaningful only to employers; these students have not seen any jobs worth doing. . . . And so the exodus has begun. In ones and twos, undramatically, thoughtful lads and lasses are dropping out of college, at least off and on, so they will have time to think. . . .

They are, in short, philosophic in an age which seems to offer no forum for discussion of principles and values and verities. . . . They would be Emersons and Thoreaus in a day when journals and podiums seem open only to statisticians and reporters.

## COMMENTARY THE LIVING WHOLE

WHY can't the conservationists keep up with the polluters? If, as the authorities quoted in this week's Review say, it is "technically possible today to create a man-made environment which does not pollute either man himself, his habitat, or the non-urban environment," why don't we do it? The explanation can only be that we feel no kinship or respect for the world around us. We have little in common with the Buddhist belief so marveled at and delighted in by Lafcadio Hearn: *Grass, trees, countries, the earth itself . . . appear to be gross matter . . . but to the eye of the Buddha they are composed of minute spiritual entities!*

Would such an idea, if widely adopted, give sufficient strength to Schweitzer's plea in behalf of reverence for life? Something like this conviction is surely necessary, if we are to reverse the almost universal tendency to turn matter into waste, as though it had no meaning or purpose of its own, and then to let the waste accumulate until it fouls the natural world.

Wondering about such possibilities recalls Joseph Wood Krutch's distinguished pamphlet, *Conservation Is Not Enough*, which is written out of awareness of what must be done:

What is commonly called "conservation" will not work in the long run, because it is not really conservation at all but rather, disguised by its elaborate scheming, a more knowledgeable variation of the old idea of a world for man's use only. That idea is unrealizable. But how can man be persuaded to cherish any other ideal unless he can learn to take some interest and some delight in the beauty and variety of the world for its own sake, unless he can see a "value" in a flower blooming or an animal at play, unless he can see some "use" in things not useful? . . .

Might it not be that man's success as an organism is genuinely a success so long, but only so long, as it does not threaten the extinction of everything not useful to and absolutely controlled by

him . . . so long as, to some extent, man is prepared to share the earth with others? . . .

But how can he learn to accept such a situation, to believe that it is right and proper, when the whole tendency of his thought and his interest carries him in a contrary direction? How can he learn to value and delight in a natural order larger than his own order? How can he come to accept, not sullenly but gladly, the necessity of sharing the earth?

Mr. Krutch asks the right questions. It is this "whole tendency" of thought and interest that needs correction. Or, as Lynn White, Jr., has put it: "We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny."

# CHILDREN

## ... and Ourselves

### UNFAMILIAR ART IN A FAMILIAR WORLD

[This is Part One of another of Robert Jay Wolff's lectures on art and designer education. It first appeared in the *Magazine of Art* for December, 1946.]

#### I

IN the unpredictable days to come we can be sure of one thing. Neither a resurgence of materialistic aspirations, nor a revival of old art forms will, in the end, meet the unparalleled depth and complexity of contemporary human existence.

New directions are necessary and beginnings have been made. The best contemporary art has directly challenged the unprecedented conditions of modern life. It is time now to question whether these tendencies will be allowed to grow to vigorous maturity, or to disappear under mass acceptance of familiar but outworn and irrelevant cultural patterns.

Somehow the men and women of our time must be given the means to re-evaluate their environment and rediscover their roots. Only in this way will they learn to perceive the mirror of their own world and the expression of their deepest experience in new and vital, but as yet unfamiliar, works of art. Only in this way will they come to identify the act of living with the imprint of a living culture.

It is not a simple matter of educating the public to art. The first problem is an artless one of seeing the world we live in. Until this can be brought about, the new work of the artist, the architect and the planner will be a disturbing mystery to all except the few who see as clearly as they, whose sense of reality is as deep and whose need for order is as great.

The break between the artist and the layman must be bridged, and it is up to the artist to take the first step. He will have to rouse himself and try to understand, for the first time, the people

who do not understand him. He must try to grasp the limitations of the layman's way of seeing and, without adjusting his vision to these limitations, help him to discover the life sources that are at the roots of the works which he is inclined to reject.

Art history is overburdened with tragedies of intolerance resulting from the ancient tyranny of established art and old visual habits over the realities of the present. As long as Rembrandt in his early life kept within the bounds set by late Renaissance naturalism, Holland accepted him. "The Night Watch," a later work, was commissioned by the men portrayed. They wanted a record of themselves in their familiar world. Rembrandt infuriated them by giving them just that, but in a way that had no counterpart in familiar art. From that moment on, Rembrandt's work turned more and more toward his immediate vision and away from prescribed art forms. And from that moment on his work was rejected as grotesque.

When Rembrandt observed the intensity of light in the presence of darkness, he was not indulging in an exclusive experience. Every Dutchman had observed the glow of a face in candlelight, or the light of the setting sun through the window of a darkened room. This was a segment of the familiar world. No one before Rembrandt had expressed it with such intensity. It was not that Rembrandt was misunderstood. It goes deeper than that. His contemporaries had first to fail to understand themselves and their own world before they could condemn, in the name of old art, the appearance of a new vision.

Chardin turned to the immediate sources of his humble surroundings in a century when the world of art was viewing itself in terms of the court of Louis XV. The painting of Boucher, the familiar art of the time, rendered the work of Chardin unfamiliar. It is not even now necessarily a question of choice between the desirability or beauty of these two worlds. If an art fixation on one destroys, not so much the art form, but accessibility to the life-sources of the other, then

that fixation must be destroyed. The destruction of art for the sake of life did not occur for the first time with the appearance of dada at the time of World War I.

The new naturalism of Gustav Courbet, less than a hundred years ago, could not compete with the familiar banalities of his contemporary, Bougereau. Courbet's return to immediate life sources and his rejection of everything in painting beyond observed fact was, above all, a protest against established art. Courbet is the father of our own healthy discontent with art as a special category of human experience. And this discontent is perhaps the reason why no stream of painting since Courbet has persisted long enough in its own self-complacency to give us an exalted academy.

It is quite possible that the best photography today is performing a task similar to the one Courbet accomplished a century ago. Good photography reveals and intensifies the sources of modern visual interest. On the other hand, photography can also become a means of rendering life artificial by the constant repetition of standardized naturalistic patterns. The usual Hollywood motion picture stereotypes our world for us even more effectively than entrenched art tradition. But this is only one side of the story, and those of us who have not looked further have condemned photography as the enemy of art.

The best contemporary photography strengthens our visual powers, not by changing and altering familiar things, but by giving us a chance to see the thing observed in terms of itself. However, there are factors which prevent the easy identification that is made in everyday life. Things do not seem as familiar as they should. And at this point we can ask ourselves whether the camera has distorted life or whether it is seeing it with a frankness our eyes have never known. Photographs may record the everyday world exactly as it exists. Yet the camera, with artless detachment and uncompromising truthfulness, has rendered this world unfamiliar. Obviously,

something is wrong somewhere. In our search for the error, we can eliminate the camera. It is within ourselves we must look for the answer.

How are we to determine the factor which makes the photographic record so different from the familiar impressions of our smugly trusted eyes? Perhaps the answer is this: the camera sees as well as looks; we look but do not always see. Familiarity does not necessarily imply seeing. More often, it is the point in the course of contact where the human eye is relieved of further search. We look at an object not to see it but to identify it. The incentive which impels us to look does not often demand more than perception of abbreviations.

The conclusion is that the familiar world is not the real world. This will be a difficult admission for most people to make. It takes the starch out of the demand for "natural" appearances in art, because we can no longer be sure what natural appearances are without a complete renovation of our visual and, it follows, our inner life. This places in a new light the artist whose visual and spiritual clarity has resulted in works which seem unfamiliar. Perhaps, as in photographs, the key to the strangeness of modern painting is its nearness to reality.

It is a mistake, however, to look to the artist as one who has been living in complete visual freedom. If every painting produced in the last few years showed marks of this emancipation, we would be well on the way out of our dilemma. The painter is an integral part of art history. Because he is close to the rich fascination of historical forms, the temptation to compress a new world-view into the familiar and ready-made language of the past is often more than he can resist.

There are certain questions which will be raised at this point. One of them will certainly be this: If our contemporary view of life can be cleared of prescribed values, how are we to escape the alterations in our vision effected by our own subjectivity, the very element that infuses an

observation with the personal interpretation we value so highly? The answer is that in this day of uncertainty and change, even if we wanted to erect an art in which nature would appear, even indirectly, in impersonal and objective terms, we would be unable to do so.

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## *FRONTIERS* Buddhist Inscriptions

AFTER he had read Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*, which tells the life-story of the Buddha, Lafcadio Hearn wondered if "Buddhism in some esoteric form may prove the religion of the future." Having already, with the help of Herbert Spencer, shaken off the last vestiges of religious orthodoxy, he dreamed of a vast change in "the whole occidental religious world" as a result of Buddhist teachings.

Hearn, it seems, was something of a prophet. The penetration of the West by Buddhist and other Oriental conceptions has greatly accelerated since his time. And even if many Westerners approach the treasures of Eastern philosophy in a shopper's mood—somewhat as an earlier generation visited Woolworth's, looking for something "new"—the grip of inherited beliefs has obviously loosened and underneath the acquisitive habits of the Western mind are genuine hungers of the spirit.

Hearn was hungry, too, but as artist and thinker he knew how to open himself up to philosophical influence. After he reached Japan—where he eventually married, raised a family, and became a lecturer in English literature at the University of Tokyo—the current of Buddhist thought grows ever stronger in his writing. It flowers most notably in one of his books, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*, which contains wonderful reveries devoted to recondite Buddhist doctrines, and his rendition of the facts of the curious case of Katsugoro, the Japanese boy who remembered the circumstances of a previous life so vividly that the officials of his village went to some pains to verify his recollections.

From Hearn one learns how a self-reliant mind finds tools of thought in a great philosophical tradition. Here is no "conversion," certainly no ostentatious embracing of doctrines or teachings. What Hearn gains from the East comes by reflective examination and use. In one

of the papers in *Exotics and Perspectives*, first published (by Little, Brown) in 1899, he devotes himself to the inscriptions which are found on the small monuments in a Japanese cemetery. He begins with the setting:

Behind my dwelling, but hidden from view by a very lofty curtain of trees, there is a Buddhist temple, with a cemetery attached to it. The cemetery itself is in a grove of pines, many centuries old; and the temple stands in a great quaint lonesome garden. Its religious name is *Ji-sho-in*; but the people call it Kobudeta, which means the Gnarled, or Knobby Temple, because it is built of undressed lumber,—great logs of *binoki*, selected for their great beauty or strangeness of shape, and simply prepared for the builder by the removal of limbs and bark. . . .

I like to wander in that cemetery,—partly because in the twilight of its great trees, and in the silence of the centuries which has gathered about them, one can forget the city and its turmoil, and dream out of space and time,—but much more because it is full of beauty, and of the poetry of great faith. Indeed of such poetry it possesses riches quite exceptional. Each Buddhist sect has its own tenets, rites and forms; and the special character of these is reflected in the iconography and epigraphy of its burial-grounds. . . . at Kobudera the inscriptions and the sculptures peculiar to several Buddhist sects can be studied side by side. . . . It was here that I first learned, under the patient teaching of an Oriental friend, something about the Buddhist literature of the dead.

Hearn says of the inscriptions:

As for subtlety and complexity, much of this mortuary literature is comparable to the Veil of Isis. Behind the mystery of the text—in which almost every character has two readings—there is the mystery of the phrase; and again behind this are successions of riddles belonging to a gnosticism older than all the wisdom of the Occident, and deep as the abysses of Space. . . . The uselessness of any exact translation of these texts may be exemplified by word-for-word rendering of two sentences written upon the *sotoba* used by the older sects. What meaning can you find in such a term as "Law-sphere-substance-nature-wisdom," or such an invocation as "Ether, Wind, Fire, Water, Earth!"—for an invocation it really is? To understand these words one must first know that in the doctrine of the mystical sects, the universe is composed of Five Great Elements which

are identical with the Five Buddhas; that each of the Five Buddhas contains the rest; and that the Five are One by essence, though varying in their phenomenal manifestations.

After extending this explanation with the teachings of the Shingon school, he turns to texts containing high Buddhist philosophy. Behind the phenomena of endless becoming in the world, there is radical unity:

*This doctrine is equal and alike for all, there is neither superior nor inferior, neither above nor below.*

Nay, according to a still more celebrated text, there is not even any difference of personality:

*The "I" and the "Not-I" are not different in the world of law: both are favored alike.* [Hearn adds in a note: "More literally, 'Self and Other': i.e., the Ego and the Non-Ego in the meaning of 'I' and 'Thou.' There is no 'I' and 'Thou' in Buddhahood."]

And a still more wonderful text—(to my thinking, the most remarkable of all Buddhist texts)—declares that the world itself, phantom though it be, is yet not different from Mind:

*Grass, trees, countries, the earth itself,—all these shall enter wholly into Buddhahood.*

Hearn comments:

Literally, "shall become Buddha", that is, they shall enter into Buddhahood or Nirvana. All that we term matter will be transmuted therefore into Mind. . . . As phenomenon, matter is unreal; but transcendently it belongs by its ultimate nature to the Sole Reality.

For elaboration, he quotes Kobo-daishi, founder of the Shingon sect:

As to the doctrine of grass, trees, and things non-sentient becoming Buddhas, I say that the refined forms (ultimate nature) of spiritual bodies consist of Five Great Elements, that Ether (ultimate substance) consists of the Five Great Elements; and that the refined forms of bodies spiritual, of ether, of plants, of trees, consequently pervade all space. This ether these plants and trees, are themselves spiritual bodies. To the eye of flesh, plants and trees appear to be gross matter. But to the eye of the Buddha *they are composed of minute spiritual entities*. Therefore, even without any change in their substance, there can

be no error or impropriety in our calling them Buddhas.

Hearn continues:

The reader will now, perhaps, be better able to follow out the really startling Buddhist hypothesis of the nature of matter to its more than startling conclusion. (It must not be contemned because of the fantasy of five elements; for these are declared to be only modes of one ultimate.) All forms of what we call matter are really but aggregates of spiritual units; and all apparent differences of substances represent only differences of combination among these units. The differences of combination are caused by special tendencies and affinities of the units. . . . All integrations of apparent substance,—the million suns and planets of the universe,—represent only the affinities of such ghostly ultimates; and every human act or thought registers itself through enormous time by some knitting or loosening of forces working for good or evil.

So, for Hearn, the universe becomes a vast web of life, a brotherhood of being:

Grass, trees, earth, and all things seem to us what they are not, simply because the eye of flesh is blind. Life itself is a curtain hiding reality,—somewhat as the vast veil of day conceals from our sight the countless orbs of space.