

# Some Philosophical Fragments

## Supplement to Students Monthly Letter

### THE MASTERY OF FEAR

(Continued from Dec. 1934)

Theologians went into real estate rather heavily. Vast edifices stood proxy for piety and various organizations became more interested in the number of their members than they were in the quality thereof. Religion compromised itself, descended from the non-commercial aloofness which was its original estate. The theological mind wandered from the contemplation of the Kingdom of God to the contemplation of the kingdoms of the earth. The humble simplicity of faith which was its strength gave place to a gaudy unsatisfying complexity, and mankind lost its spiritual preceptor.

The cry is: Back to simple things, to simple lives, to an almost mendicant existence. Men, tired of the sham and responsibility of unnecessary possessions, are beginning to question the desirability of accumulation. Religion should lead in this pilgrimage towards simplicity. Ostentation in faith is unbecoming and the pompous pedagogue is relegated to the limbo. Our world is coming to a philosophy of work, and theology should be a religion of works. As soon as man is satisfied with little, as soon as ambition no longer tempts him to excess, as soon as he regains his power of individual sufficiency, so soon he will master fear.

Mahatma Gandhi is a dramatic example of the new world trend toward simplicity. In his own life this extraordinary man achieves religion in action. This little brown ascetic challenges the involved theologies and policies of the world. He has accomplished within himself the virtues which

men have preached for ages and have failed to live even for a day. Gandhi would bring all men together in a true fellowship of intelligent action and spiritually enlightened endeavor. In his realization of the essential values of life Mahatma Gandhi has mastered fear, and would lead his brother creatures from a collapsing structure of doubt to a newer and broader dwelling of certainties. Impersonal love, sincerely applied to the common problems of mankind, cannot fail to bring about a beautiful and permanent solution.

When religion approaches the social problem not with threats of hell or hope of heaven, but with a simple handclasp of friendship, when the priest is again the shepherd of his flock, then we may hope for the dawn of a more enlightened age. The greatest preaching of Christendom was done to barefoot men along the road to Nazareth; the supreme inspiration of the Buddhist faith came from a shaven-headed mendicant seated on a hillock with no roof but the sky and no altar but the dry earth. Was Islam ever richer than when the Prophet preached the Suras in secret to a faithful few? Religions are not great because of the numbers of their followers, the vastness of their temples, nor the wealth of their orders; they are great only when their doctrine is vitally necessary to men. All this must be re-clarified if faith is once more to lead the march of progress.

The richest civilization that ever existed is bankrupt for ideals. If this Fellowship of Faiths can bring the great religions of the world to the realization of the necessity of forgetting their schisms and their discords, and uniting to the common task of preserving the idealism of the race, it can make the greatest contribution of all modern times to the preservation of society. In the face of this great



opportunity, this great responsibility, nothing else can be considered of importance.

While man is so desperately oppressed with an unfair and unreasonable economic theory of living, it is impossible for him to clarify his mind for the understanding of spiritual matters. While it is true that affliction is a great stimulant to thought, the constant pressure of a hopeless financial tyranny destroys the morale of the mass, and if protracted long enough, results in degradation and chaos. It is highly important that man should put his physical world in order before he turns his attention too completely towards spiritual concerns. Some will say that if man will first become spiritual these other things will adjust themselves, but experience has shown that a certain tranquility of environment is essential to the propagation of idealism. While a few may climb by the rocky path of adversity, the many must be led through green pastures. A man who is in constant fear for the necessities of life is not in a position to be philosophically detached. His perspective is certain to be warped by the pressure of circumstances, he is narrowed to a doctrine of utility. A mind filled with worries has little space in it for ideas. The wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world today is worried nigh unto death. In this crisis we have tested our intelligence and found it wanting. We have tried our psychologists who are supposed to be experts on all complexes, but their solutions are worse than our dilemma. Our college professors are no better. They have lived so long in the narrow environment of memorization that they have been rendered incapable of thinking by the very weight of education. As for our politicians—well, the less said the better. Our scientists, though rather successful in biological research, are poor economists. As most of their funds come from endowment and donation, they are childishly ignorant of practical matters. Our philosophers—but why bring that up? we have none.

So, all in all, when something happens which really requires thinking, there is no one left in our very cultivated world who is capable of doing it. These groups of impotent intellectuals, et cetera, are not only without solutions, they are without ideals. They pride themselves for the most part

upon their lack of vision. There is only one body in society today which even pretends to idealism and that is the religious world.

If this civilization is going to be saved it will not be saved by budgets or ballots, it will not be saved by psychoanalysis or serums. It must be saved by honest, practical idealism, and without this priceless ingredient all remedies advanced to solve the present world emergency must fail. A practical example of the spiritual factor in material action is the NRA program. The success of the National Reconstruction Act depends entirely upon one metaphysical element—namely, integrity. Our President has put his faith in the honesty of the American people, but where in the whole theory of modern education, sociology or science, is man being educated in honesty? The government issues each year hundreds of bulletins dealing with the planting of corn, the trapping of wild animals, the weaning of infants, et cetera, and yet nowhere does man receive education in integrity, honesty, truth and practical idealism. If our President, like Diogenes, is having difficulty finding his honest man, it is because economics has made such serious inroads into the spiritual life of man that the honest man is failing from the earth.

If this Fellowship of Faiths can dedicate itself to the production of honest men, if it can preserve and perpetuate those great spiritual ideals which promote honesty and truth, it shall earn for itself the undying gratitude of mankind.

Except for men, humanity has very little to fear. We have fairly well tamed the primordial forces, but we have never been able to check human greed. When people complain about this world they are really not complaining about the world at all—only the people who are in it. The earth is very abundant, a gentle and kindly mother of living things. She has her moods, but science has learned to anticipate many of them and in time may curb them all. But man on this little earth has made himself very uncomfortable. With his national spirit, he has hacked continents into small bits and fenced off acreage under various flags. Since his first appearance, man has been precocious and destructive. With uncurbable ambition and insatiable greed he has prevented the fulfillment of nearly every good



which might otherwise have come to him. A certain religious instinct was his one redeeming emotion. A certain veneration by which, through development, he became a patron of art and beauty; and, enfolding philosophy unto itself, he gradually built a somewhat impressive structure, of at least relative truth, in the midst of the desert of its deceptions. In more recent times the sciences, philosophies and arts all separated from the religious principle, each going its separate way on a program of isolated individualism. Learning thus became sacred and profane. Profane learning became very profane and finally reached the nadir of its profanity in our recent economic orgy.

The day must sometime come when all the arts, sciences, crafts and philosophies must again be united with the sacred sciences to become one undivided body of divine learning. Until all the transactions between men come to be regarded as spiritual, none of the transactions between men can be truly spiritual. Only when men are honest and gentle one with the other can fear cease. When I know that my brother's smile is from his heart and not from the scheming of his mind, I shall no longer fear. There is no fear where honesty rules, there is no fear where integrity is the basis of relationships, there is no fear where kindness is the integral element in the compound of relationships.

True religion is integrity in action. It is the DOING of honesty, and the working of truth. Religion is that constructive force which is evident in the lives of truly superior men. The seeds of religion were sown with the beginning of the race, and the full flowering of it will come only with the perfection of the race. But as civilization progresses it is essential that the religious impulse shall progress with it, tincturing and enlivening all material accomplishments and rendering them usable in the permanent structure of progress.

When our wealth, our power or our domain, increases more rapidly than our spiritual development, the result is despotism and tyranny. In the last fifty years we have concentrated our entire resource upon physical progress, suffering from the delusion that with the increase of our worldly goods would come security and happiness. We neglected our spiritual lives. Our religions became mere

forms and ceased to be vital forces. The result is a purposeless generation. We have things but not knowing how to use them wisely we have abused them fatally. WE MUST NOW PAUSE IN OUR ECONOMIC DEBACLE TO ALLOW OUR ASPIRATIONS TO CATCH UP TO OUR AMBITIONS.

Have you ever asked yourself, "where is the world going? what is civilization trying to accomplish? what is the actual reason for this terrific pressure of life?" If you ask these questions, you will get no answer. We know not where we go nor why. We are purposeless, drifting on the currents of impulse, laughing today and crying tomorrow, but absolutely without intent or reason. Tomorrow is only a vacuum into which we seek to shift the responsibilities of today. Tomorrow is no longer an opportunity; to most it is an impending fatality. Tomorrow is pregnant with the reactions of yesterday. We fear tomorrow even as we regret yesterday.

Can you not realize how greatly, how desperately this modern world needs spiritual guidance? Exploited on every hand by dishonesty and selfishness, is it a wonder that man's faith weakens under the strain of long suffering? If ever in the history of civilization we have needed an honest religion, it is now. We cannot fail this afflicted world. We must rise in new strength and with higher resolve, putting aside the small matters over which we have haggled, and rededicate our faiths and ourselves to this supreme human duty.

Fear is man's basic weakness, and it is founded upon ignorance and oppression. Courage is the supreme strength in man and is based upon wisdom and justice. A civilization which is established in fear will perish in fear, but a civilization which is established in the courage of conviction and upon the principles of justice will survive as long as the universe endures. All true progress points towards enlightenment. Enlightenment is the ultimate state of man and enlightenment is wisdom in action. The primitive barbarism in the human soul will ultimately be transmuted into a real and permanent civilization. Ideality must not only uphold this goal, it must point the way to the accomplishment of this end through practical example. The perfec-



tion of the race does not imply a final identity of purpose or action but rather a magnificent cooperation in purpose and action. We look forward to the age in which all men, performing these labors most suitable and desirable to themselves, shall unite in a common admiration for all good works.

Religion must point the way in this new era, taking its stand firmly amidst the crumbling ruins of materiality. The spiritual codes of the earth must rescue the vision of the race from the obscurity which threatens it. There is no perfection of the part separate from the perfection of the whole. There is no single department of society which can function smoothly while the rest is in chaos. Man cannot be spiritually normal and at the same time physically disorganized. He must put his whole world in order in a Fellowship of Faith and a co-ordination of effort. Let us each according to our light, but with sincerity of purpose and honesty of heart, strive to preserve and disseminate those essential truths which are indeed the hope of the world.

THE END

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#### A LITTLE ESSAY ON BEAUTY

Beauty is an elusive power, whose presence is an invisible asset, whose absence leaves a supreme need unfulfilled. Beauty has been defined as symmetry, or the harmony of form. It is a proper adjustment of parts, a reasonable synthesis of members, an order pleasing because it is proper.

Beauty is not identical with an object nor with the grouping of objects. It is a spirit which is created by the proper bringing together of a number of parts which may not be necessarily beautiful in themselves but which produce a harmonious whole. Physical beauty is invoked by a consistent co-ordination of elements. We may ask what is the criterion of consistency and, with Plotinus, we may say that the soul which is the criterion of consistency in man, rejoicing in beholding other natures harmonious to itself, becomes the determinant of beauty. The soul of man is rational. Rationality is simply beauty upon the plane of reason. Thus the rational soul, beholding other reasonable

natures, rejoices in the similarity and hence establishes the criterion of excellence.

In addition to the beauty of form we have beauty of sound, which is HARMONY; beauty of mode or tempo, which is RHYTHM; beauty of morality, which is VIRTUE; beauty of mind, which is INTELLECT; and beauty of spirit, which is the ultimate GOOD.

The Platonic Triad is the One, the Beautiful, and the Good, and the unity or wholeness of the world was erected upon this triangle. The One was the substance of all natures and beings; the Beautiful, the perfection of all natures and beings; and the Good, the utility of all natures and beings.

Without beauty the soul of the people cannot develop itself properly and sanely. We say that a man must eat in order to live. Not only does he need physical food, but there is a metaphysical nature within him which must be fed with a superior sort of diet. The soul is fed through the eyes and the other sense perceptions. That which is grotesque or distorted is a poison to the soul; for, sensing the asymmetrical figure through the faculties, the soul suffers from the shock of the incongruity. The inner nature feeds upon environment and he who surrounds himself with beauty nourishes his aesthetic nature, without which he must fail as a rational creature.

Beauty is essential to human survival. Deprived of its influence, man speedily deteriorates into a state of crassness and degradation. Plotinus declares the most worthy profession to be the service of the beautiful and that to destroy beauty was the most heinous of all crimes. Greece produced the most beautiful civilization the world has ever known by emphasizing the necessity of aesthetics and establishing beauty as one of the pillars of the state.

One of the great needs of our civilization is a greater emphasis upon aesthetic ideals to modify the extreme utilitarianism of our age and thus permit the survival of the subtler elements of culture.

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