

ASIA AS A TEACHER,

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SINCE the war, the people of Europe have longed for peace, not only political peace, but inner, spiritual peace. Aversion to controversy and abhorrence of violence characterize this new attitude. Our Western world is weary; not weary of life, but of strife and hatred. Indeed, our peculiar society and civilization have been found wanting. They were ceasing to function normally even before this tragedy. However, the result has not been apathy and callousness, but new restlessness and new wants,—‘a fairer vision beckons to another shore.’ People are exploring provinces of the human soul which have remained untouched by Europe’s torment, and seem alien to the typical European. Men are looking to the East unconsciously, and therefore sincerely. It is not a mere fashion. The world of Asia draws us with its promise of something new and something that will liberate. We are learning to love the gentleness and the wisdom and the tenderness of the ancient and lofty culture of the Far East. We can study that culture oblivious of the enmities which divide Western nations. Today, Germany welcomes as a gospel of salvation, as a glad message, the unwarlike doctrines of Far Asia, the pacifist mentality of the Indians and Chinese; and particularly the self-sufficient social repose of the Chinese people, their strong family spirit, their clan ties, their communal industry, their powerful collectivist civilization, their

peaceful domestic history, their long experience with self-government, and their Confucianism—that ideal guide to the conduct of a good citizen. Germany is conscious of a similar outpouring of sympathy toward Holy Russia—not toward the chaotic, barbaric Russia which is now on top, and which has always existed side by side with the other—but toward the Russia of the spirit, of great poets and writers, in whose works the Russian is revealed as the most brotherly man in Europe.

It is true that unflinching champions of ‘pure German instinct,’ of ‘the do and dare spirit,’ condemn such tendencies as ‘a spiritual infection produced by the narcotizing opiate of Asiatic philosophy,’ and predict that they will hasten our decadence. Quite the contrary. From these distant sources we may draw inspiration for a new life. Furthermore, it will profit us now to learn how to accept the inevitable; for we are forced, and shall be forced hereafter, to resign ourselves to many inevitable sorrows and hardships. We must, however, seek for and discover in the spirit of Asia inspirations instead of apathy, regeneration instead of decadence.

Certain blind critics have condemned Goethe because he sought to escape from the anarchy of Napoleonic Europe to a higher realm of repose and order; and found this in the idealism of the Orient, and its patriarchal atmosphere. We understand today

the sentiment which inspired his *Westöstlichen Diwan*. That was not a merely negative sentiment, a turning away from the world, and reality, and action; it voiced the need for productive repose, for contemplating things in their unclouded, undistorted aspect, for experience of what is permanent, for values which do not wither in a day, for those universal ties which bind together nations and continents. Rising above the petty, domestic discord of little Europe, Goethe heard the harmonies of ancient and enduring culture expressed through the cosmos of world literature.

Modern Europe even before its recent disaster, was making tentative essays in this path. Already before the war, a growing interest was obvious in Chinese lyric poetry—an interest which had passed the stage of mere curiosity regarding foreign forms of self-expression. Today our intellectual urge toward the East is less literary than in Goethe's time, but it is more largely ethical and cultural. Humanity is far more profoundly shaken than it was a century ago, and the hope for new spiritual life from the East is incomparably more general. Our knowledge of Asiatic thought has now extended beyond the field of literature, but still letters remain the most convenient bridge to it. Rabindranath Tagore has succeeded Lafcadio Hearn, whose books upon Japan were widening the vision of many Europeans only a decade or so ago. Leaving aside the question of how completely and accurately these writers portray the spirit of the two nations they describe, and allowing for their own European prepossessions, there still remains enough of the characteristic gentleness and tenderness of the East to sooth our nerves. Furthermore, Asia has

for many years now played a role of increasing importance in the fine arts. Toward the end of the last century, Japan attained a political status which brought it within the sphere of Western civilization. Japanese painting fructifies European impressionism. The art criticism of Germany occupies itself largely with China and Japan. More recently India has become another focus of art interest. We are giving deeper study to Indian sculpture and architecture. This is not a mere passing fashion, but a serious tendency. Our art interest in the East has, of course, nothing to do with the war, but it is reenforced by the general trend toward Asia.

In philosophy as well as art, a certain Orientalism has begun to manifest itself. I need only note two recent philosophic works: Kayserling's *Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen* (Diary of a Philosopher's Voyage around the World,) and Spengler's *Decline and Fall of Western Civilization*, in which he prophesies that our present culture will disappear to be succeeded by a new civilization rising in the East. India has influenced Western philosophy for a century, particularly through Schopenhauer, and even more recently through Deussen's researches into the history of philosophy. The great religious philosophies of India are metaphysical ways of expressing a typical and constant conception of human life; they are by no means limited to India and their comprehension and mastery do not require a direct knowledge of India. These philosophies constantly win new adherents, in all nations and all ages,—not appealing to everyone but only to certain temperaments and to certain states of sentiment in the individual or in society. Such a favoring con-

dition of sentiment is now sweeping through the Western world, and particularly Germany. The absolute value of what any individual thinker contributes to the body of human thought, is measured by the number of his fellow men whose minds are swayed by his thinking. The deeper his vision penetrates into the common sentiment of humanity, the broader its appeal. Popular interest is not turning so strongly toward the ideals and teachings of Asia out of mere weariness of the world and of life—which superficial thinkers are so ready to ascribe to Buddhism—but in search of satisfaction for positive spiritual needs. The original writings, with whose aid we attain these spheres of spiritual thought, are available in a German translation, by Carl Eugen Neumanns, whose rhythm and the melody of language possess an independent charm. Its parallisms and repetitions and constant returning to the same theme, its fond, reposeful and meditative dallying with each pearl of thought, rests and calms us by its contrast with our hard, harsh, laconic, military mode of mind, which has no comprehension for other than immediately practical and material things. In this literature, we rise to the height of spiritual meditation and contemplation.

Almost simultaneously with the appearance of Spengler's *Decline and Fall of Western Civilization*, and unquestionably independent of that work, the painter Paul Cohen-Portheim has written a book entitled *Asien als Erzieher*, (Asia as a Teacher), which resembles Spengler's work in its reasoning and in its bold conclusions; only it demands less labor of the reader and is easier to understand. It starts out with the reaction from our war experience. It was written

in a prison camp, and the barbed wire fence which surrounded the camp is a symbol in the author's eyes for all artificial hindrances and confinement. He says: 'Artificial divisions create contrasts, and from contrasts spring suspicion, aversion, and hatred. Hatred is, in final analysis, merely lack of understanding, misunderstanding.' That is naturally assuming a good deal; for there are natural contrasts which cannot be eliminated, and there is hatred which is justified and not based on error. But the author is right in his idea that we are all kinsmen, that there is a fundamental unity beneath our variations, that we should seek for that unity in order to conquer hatred. He calls this seeking to discover our higher unity 'universalism,' because it is an effort at a universal understanding; and he believes that individualism is the principal obstacle to such a state of mind. However, individualism is, in his opinion, the typical form under which Europe conceives human existence. Europe has raised reason above sentiment; and reason analyzes and distinguishes, while sentiment, or intuition, or mysticism, identifies or assimilates the object of its thought with the thinker, and brings them together. In this respect, the book is close kin to Spengler's. The author recognizes that our theories of knowledge are determined by the age in which we live and the fashion of the time. Europe's philosophy has culminated in a fight of all against all, which reached its *reductio ad absurdum* in the world war. Asia possesses the secret of a path out of this impossible situation toward mutual harmony and world reconciliation. He believes that an understanding of the Asiatic as well as the European philosophy of

conduct, and a synthesis of the two, are the principal tasks demanded of our age.

The author starts out with the Indian conception of maya. Indian wisdom has conceived contrasts and differences as the source of illusion. The world of the senses is illusion. Truth lies behind a veil, because in this world contrasts and differences, which we ourselves create by our rational processes, form the weft and woof of things. We are, in truth, compelled to analyze, compare, and contrast in order to attain an intellectual understanding of the world. Individualism, nationalism, and race sentiment are in the opinion of the author the product of an intellectual process. In contrast with this, he calls feeling, or intuition, the unifying or inclusive world principle. The profoundest of all the contrasts in the world, in the opinion of the author, is that between the 'individualist' and the 'universal' attitude. But that contrast between the individual and the universal is not irreconcilable; each reciprocally conditions, each serves the other. It is the author's ambition to reconcile them, and in doing so to reconcile the philosophy of the East and the West. He starts out by comparing the two fundamentally different views of life with each other. 'The spirit of the West is active, individualist, intellectual, because it is a spirit which craves for power.' It conquers and subdues nature through modern science and inventions. It pins its faith to organization and machinery. Its highest type is the ruler, the master, the man of power, the victorious warrior. He cites as examples: Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Bismarck, and our great captains of industry and trade. This is partly

the result of our faulty philosophy of history, but that very defect is itself characteristic. 'To be sure, the West has also had its intellectual and spiritual heroes, but it has only recognized the greatest of them, like Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe, cloudily and half under compulsion. They are, in fact, strangers to the Western world, precisely because that world perceives that they are super-personal and universal.' This is too one-sided a view, but it contains a large element of truth,—it seems to us the decisive truth for a true diagnosis of the European mind today. In contrast to this, the East represents passivity, universalism, intuition. The Asiatic is conscious of his close brotherhood with nature, with the plants and animals. He does not try to master them, but to live in spiritual and sensuous harmony with all living things, to merge himself in nature. To be sure, the Western man who possesses a vivid consciousness of nature feels this too; but there is a great difference in degree. The Asiatic mind has developed this attitude more deeply and broadly than the typical European mind. 'When man identifies himself with the universe completely, he attains a state of indescribable happiness, Nirvana. Therefore, the Indian sages teach: Destroy all that in you which separates you from the universe. The I is the cause of all suffering and evil. Destroy the I.' The European likewise understands this. He is not solely egoist, but like every living being has altruist impulses. The European, like the Asiatic, knows the freedom which comes through renunciation. Still this truth is relatively less recognized by us. However, the author goes too far in saying: 'Unconscious ecstasy seems to the

European understanding an impossibility.' No, we likewise know, possibly because we are so rational and our minds give us no rest, that for large periods of our existence the only road to happiness is to cease thinking. Our keenest intellects comprehend best that happiness is something vegetative and physical. They treasure it no less for that reason, but long for it as for childhood and home. That is why they are so attracted by the spirit of Asia, which is pervaded with this atmosphere. Our author continues: 'And yet does not the European conceive the highest happiness at the verge of unconsciousness? To faint with joy? Have our poets not instinctively conceived the kinship of love and death? Goethe's Gretchen exclaims: "I would die of his kisses," and Wagner's Tristan-Drama ends with a lofty paean to love and death.'

Quite true. Otherwise there would be no bridge between the East and the West. In Cohen-Porthheim's opinion, to be sure, only art has discovered this bridge. He names intuition 'the genius of the East.' The Asiatic despises the intellect. That is why the sciences could arise only in Europe. 'The heroes of the East are not its emperors. When history there preserves the name of great rulers, it adds, as so often occurs in the annals of China, that they were great poets or painters or philosophers: The only hero to the Asiatic is the sage,—Confucius, Laotse, or Buddha. The ideal man of the West is the world conqueror; the ideal man of the East is the world contemner, the man who conquers himself, and thereby—though in a different way—becomes a conqueror of the world.

Yet the author himself admits

that he is comparing modern Europe with an Asia which has almost ceased to exist, and that he thus overemphasizes the contrast between the two. For more than a thousand years, the two continents have been interacting upon each other. The Asia of pure idealism was somewhat akin to Gothic Europe. And, in truth, a person who knows the spirit which inspires our modern worship of the Gothic Age, will easily discover analogies between it and our present urge towards Asia. Christianity, which was so important a part of the Gothic spirit, was in earlier days a tie between the East and the West, since it represented the revolt of feeling against the supremacy of the intellect. 'What we now experience is a new readjustment of the same antithesis between the Occident and Orient. As a matter of fact, Europe has begun again to learn from Asia.' At this point, the author reaches a different conclusion from that of Spengler, and I think a wiser one. The latter tells us Europe is growing senile. But senility is incapable of assimilating what is strange, or of influencing other forms of life, the way Europe and Asia continue to assimilate from each other and to influence each other. Europe has before this carried its civilization to the Far East, and is even now doing so. The most striking example is Japan.

Japan, however, shows how harmful such a wholesale importation of alien thought may be for an indigenous culture. It illustrates the disastrous effects of too complete adoption of the European spirit. Thus Japan's experience is a warning for Europe not to reverse the process, not to lose itself entirely in the Asiatic way of thinking. The author himself notes that the influence of Europe in Asia

has been regrettable in many ways. Tagore's recent poem, 'Home and the World,' describes the struggle of the true spirit of India against the invading spirit of Europe. The same author has just written a book on the spirit of Japan, dealing with this subject from another aspect. We have also had recently another book by the Chinese, Ku Hung Ming, which, under the title *Vox Clamantis*, discusses the meaning of the war. This book uses Confucianism to illustrate the profound pacifism of the Asiatic mind, and warns the people of Asia against the European mind. This author had published previously in Germany a *Defense of China Against European Ideas*; and also a third book, where he prescribes Chinese philosophy as a remedy for war.

Our author predicts the eventual victory of Eastern 'universalism' in Europe, and believes that a synthesis of the two philosophies will enable humanity to attain its highest possibilities. He thinks that even in the Russia of today, amidst its chaos, confusion, and barbarity, the ideals of the East will eventually be victorious, and that thus a transformed, regenerated European society may arise closely related with the East. Personally, I consider this unlikely. None the less, we can, without sur-

rendering completely to Asia's influence, draw profit and pleasure from a sympathetic study of its teaching. It would not be desirable, were it possible, for all the differences between the East and the West to cease. Absolute uniformity would be deadly. Life itself consists in reaction and struggle. None the less, the Eastern pacifist ideal is needed to correct our Heraclitan joy in war as the sum of existence, our Hobbian conception of society as a place where 'man is a wolf which preys on his fellow men,' our Darwinian theory that even civilization is but an ordered struggle for the survival of the fittest, our tacit endorsement of Nietzsche's glorification of battle.

Last of all, Spengler and Cohen-Portheim teach us that the European spirit is our spirit, which it is our task in the world's history to incarnate. The broader vision we gain from his book does not lead to skepticism, but rather to faith in the intellectual nature with which we have been endowed. We can complete and enrich that nature with the treasures of Asiatic thought, and still remain intellectually good Europeans. We are still permitted to admire and love the 'eternal Greeks.' In fact, the author himself says: 'Greece is the birthplace of European intellect and of European science and art.'

THE FASCISTI

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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CERTAIN recent events in Italy echo curiously in British and Irish ears: D'Annunzio's adventures in Fiume, for example. This adventure and Sir Edward Carson's Ulster "rebellion" had, it is true, very different endings. But both rebels professed to be more loyalist than the King; both counted—one of them rightly—that the Army would not be moved against men who made such a profession. You have only to wave your country's flag more vigorously than the rest, and you will be immune against the law: so ran the argument in each case. The analogy, again, between the present war in Ireland and the shooting and bomb-throwing which have accompanied the struggle between Fascisti and Communists in Florence, Modena and other Italian cities is, superficially, equally striking, and more than superficially for those who regard the Black-and-Tans as "a class-weapon forged in Ireland for use in Great Britain." There is quite an absurd similarity between the discussions at Westminster on reprisals and the sorts of charges and counter-charges that are flung to and fro daily in the Italian Chamber:

BOMBACCI. The Chamber should occupy itself with the indirect policy of Giolitti, who is responsible for the deeds of bloodshed that have occurred. The object of Giolitti is to destroy the youthful Communist party which is now affirming its power in the life of Italy. I deplore the acts of barbarous violence committed at

Florence and Empoli, but these are only episodes in the policy of violence which the Government has adopted against the Communists.

SAZZOCHI. At Florence three wounded Carabineers were carrying in their arms the mutilated corpses of their companions, and they invited the passers-by for assistance. These replied insolently, "One the less." It (the reprisal of the Carabineers, who then shot a passer-by) was a melancholy occurrence, but we must allow for the state of mind of those police, and their access of wrath. (Subsequently the editor of an Anarchist journal was murdered at his desk.)

At Florence, the cause of the reprisals was the firing from an allegedly "Socialist" quarter upon a procession of students and Fascisti who were being escorted by police. At Siena, shots were directed at the Fascisti from the Casa del Popolo, whereupon the Government troops accepted the aid of the Fascisti in bombarding that building with two field guns. More recently, a Socialist deputy of the Right has been found with his throat cut, and a political crime is suspected. The Socialist interpretation of these events is that the Fascisti are, at worst, *agents provocateurs*; at best, secret allies of the Government in the struggle against the Communists. The view of the average *bourgeois*, on the other hand, is that, although the Fascisti may be a "morbid phenomenon," their rise is