

OBITER

ANANDA K. COOMARASWAMY was no stranger to the readers of this review, and it may safely be prophesied that the fundamental rightness of what he had to say about art and the function of work in a sane society has yet to make its full impact. In an appreciation in a recent number of the *New English Weekly* Anthony Ludovici writes of him as 'a tall, strikingly handsome man, with features decidedly Eastern, one in fact who could speak of beauty, as it were, by the right of an instinctive affinity'. He goes on:

His contributions to the philosophy of art, despite the mass and distinction of his predecessors in the field, are original, profound and uniquely important; whilst his successful attempt properly to place the artist in society, is indispensable to all who pretend to any grasp of sociological problems. . . . The artist's rôle, his functions, his impulses, even his moral code, are all defined with the coolness and exactitude of a mathematician discoursing on the magnitude of given bodies. But the reader feels the burning passion which could inspire such calm clarity; for only fire could have reduced to their elements the scattered and heterogeneous heaps of refuse which constitute Western æsthetics and the Western conception of the place of æsthetics in a civilisation.

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THE FRIENDS TEMPERANCE UNION has done well to reprint Lord Moran's *Spectator* article on 'Venereal Disease and Conscription'. Too few people realise the appalling price that is being paid for peacetime conscription in terms of the moral collapse of many of its victims. Of the British armies of occupation that in Japan has a rate of infection of 228 per 1,000 men; for Germany the figure is 185, and for the Far East 141. At home 33 per 1,000 men are infected. Lest this latter figure should encourage a comparative complacency, it must be remembered that it is twice the usual rate. And these figures are of course merely clinical statistics; they take no account of the general moral anarchy of which they are a symptom. Lord Moran, whom no one could accuse of sentimentality, points out the iniquity of a system which sends 'immature boys abroad to do the police work of an army of occupation in a demoralised country'. Again:

Where the facts are known there seems general agreement that these figures supply an indictment of the conditions under which these boys are living. They mean that during the conscript's time abroad his experience in the Army is a demoralising experience. To segregate young men under these conditions at the beginning of their lives is a poor preparation for the more serious view of life on which alone we can hope to build.

The alternative, as Lord Moran shows, is the policing of occupied countries by professional soldiers. And if it be objected that the men

are not available, then public opinion should influence the Government to make them available, for 'if the Government takes steps to reassure the soldier that he will not be cast adrift when his service is done, it will get the men the country needs'. There is all the difference in the world between a temporary mob of half-trained boys with too little to do and a quite small force of trained soldiers with the discipline and tradition of a career to inherit.

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'THE CRISIS OF EUROPEAN CONSCIOUSNESS' is, as one might expect, the title of an address by Berdyaev, given last summer in London and now reprinted in the December issue of *Christendom*. It might not unfairly be described as a piece of eschatological masochism. For instance:

We are faced with the enormous task of spiritualising the processes of the modern world; but to fulfil this task it may be necessary to be taken captive by them, to taste their fruits to the end and thereby to overcome them, to reach out to their transcending meaning.

Yes: but are 'the processes of the modern world *capaces baptismi*? In plain English, can a Christian sign a blank cheque to sin? Berdyaev speaks of the 'creative destiny of man', but gives little enough indication of what that destiny might mean. To countless thousands in eastern Europe today it means the concentration camp and the denial of basic human liberties. For them, in their innocent pain, one can believe that they are indeed bearing the iniquity of us all. But that is by no means the same thing as the speculative—and irresponsible—defence of injustice. The victim may be blessed, but one cannot under the guise of discovering a 'transcending meaning' justify his torturers. The detachment of a philosopher can be bought at too high a price.

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ROUAULT IS STILL TOO LITTLE KNOWN in this country, though the paintings acquired for the Tate Gallery during the War included some characteristic works of his. The recent exhibition of Rouault's work arranged by the Oxford Arts Club was a worthy introduction to the profound and tragic depths of his genius. In particular his illustrations to the *Fleurs du Mal* reveal an imaginative understanding of the springs of human misery—and, by implication, of human redemption—that make the 'religious art of most of his contemporaries a banal embarrassment in comparison'.

The latest *Art Sacré* volume, *Explication de la Décadence*, (Blackfriars, 4s. 6d.) goes far to explain the poverty of sacred art today. Written with all his customary learning and his most destructive wit, Père Régamey's essay proves that 'academism' is the fundamental artistic cause of the decadence in contemporary religious art. (There

are spiritual and social causes too). Academism is 'unreal': it

has no idea what it is really concerned with. It takes refuge in generalisations that have no meaning. It constructs systems which give the intelligence a false satisfaction. Above all it sacrifices everything to a generalised conception of something that it perhaps once saw as sharp and single.

Père Régamey provides numerous examples of this process at work: the dead hand of pseudo-classical 'correctness' reducing architecture to a safe mediocrity, the painstaking exercises in gothic revivalism that cry aloud for a little vulgarity, the exhausted paintings that have reproduced their models in all but the creative impulse that alone makes them significant. And he has some valuable things to say on the spiritual correlatives of all this.

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER (November 26) has 'Some Remarks on the Relation of Science and Religion' by Michael Foster: 'Against natural science many Christians have thought themselves bound to defend a conception of nature which is not Christian at all, but pagan'.

THE CATHOLIC MEDICAL QUARTERLY (No. 1 of new series) prints an address by the Archbishop of Liverpool on 'Psycho-analysis in its Scientific and Ethical Bearings': 'what is true in psycho-analysis is not new, and what is new is not true'.

LA VIE SPIRITUELLE (December) includes 'Outlines of an eschatological Spirituality' by J. Caryl, a corrective to—inter alia—Berdyayev.

THE MODERN SCHOOLMAN (University of St Louis) prints 'Democracy and the Rule of Law' by Charles McCoy, a plea for accurate terminology.

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