

THE COSMIC VIEW-POINT.

BY T. SWANN HARDING.

ONE day during the war some pictures of fighting men appeared in a newspaper: they were German prisoners, the attempt being to depict Kultur by its undesirable fruits. And they were sorry, unkempt looking fellows: for close-cropped Germans, heavily bearded and freely smeared with trench mud, are not exactly inspiring creatures. Which reminds me that Sven Hedin, in his *With the German Army on the Western Front*, took particular pains to print many sorry-looking pictures of French and English prisoners in order to "prove" that England and France were degenerate nations. And so indeed many on each side verily believed that the enemy was rather a wretched animal.

But yet, we must consider the fact that to millions of people every one of those men was a hero in disguise, a diamond in the rough: his dirty bandages were badges of honor, his very condition was a matter of just pride. As William James has told us, scientist and bricklayer appear very similar to the shoemaker who sees in each but a pair of feet which require shoes of a certain size. It depends altogether on who judges. To your Hindenburgs, your Cadornas, your Petains, your Haigs and your Pershings how differently some placid hillside appears than to us. We see it as a picture of pastoral beauty. But to them—well, just as the engineer would instantly begin to calculate how to put the hill into a near-by valley in the interest of flat monotony, so on their part the generals would be mentally placing their artillery and blowing the landscape to atoms. And, until the world's Reventlows and Renans and Treitschkes and Bernhardis and Wilkinsons learn to see things differently—learn, in short, to see them cosmically—the world will be the loser.

In fact, I have about become convinced that what I choose to

call the cosmic view-point,¹ the view-point of what is a catholic philosophy, is precisely the only thing capable of preserving peace. And until the world gets this larger view-point, war must remain. Its adoption will not mean the righting of isolated wrongs here and there after the manner of the reformer; it will mean something bigger than this. It will mean an ideal attained, a way of looking at things engendered and an atmosphere of good will created which shall bring all the little things along in its wake and shall magically transmute wrong into right. Viewing things cosmically, strife, pettiness, intolerance, bigotry, war—these all are outlawed and impossible.

De Quincey had the idea in "The Manchester Grammar School" when he referred to a concession "to an interest in human nature that, as such, transcended by many degrees all considerations purely national," speaking of "...something inexpressibly nobler and deeper [than nationality], viz., patriotism. For true and unaffected patriotism will show its love in a noble form by sincerity and truth. But nationality, as I have always found, is mean; is dishonest; is ungenerous; is incapable of candor; and being continually besieged with temptations to falsehood, too often ends by becoming habitually mendacious."

But, to turn from international politics, here we see the ardent Christian vociferously upholding his Man of Nazareth as earth's noblest spiritual pattern—which is all well and good—yet he is unable to comprehend that a Buddhist may feel his Gautama incomparable. But, it is asked, what right has a pagan to think that he has any truth in his religion? I answer, that he is sincere and that Truth absolute has many facets of which Buddhism may well be one. But the pagan is not civilized. Look at us! We have sky-scrapers and motor-cars and printing-presses and railroads and everything. We are blessed with science.

And when I begin to think thus my mind reverts to the naive Turkish *cadi* quoted by James who insisted, "Shall we say, Behold this star spinneth round that star, and this other star with a tail goeth and cometh in so many years! Let it go! He from whose hand it came will guide and direct it!" Who, then, shall be the judge that our civilization is absolutely superior to that of any other age?

¹ And I used this term in print several years before the following sentence occurred in Marvin M. Loewenthal's review of Albert Bigelow Paine's letters of Mark Twain in the *Dial* of Feb. 8, 1919—"This could be the scolding of a satirist if there were not behind it the cosmic view that lumped mankind with himself." I am inclined to think that Mr. Loewenthal's meaning is not exactly mine, but the coincidence interested me.

Who shall weigh mechanics against culture, science against Greek art, modern philosophy against Socrates, modern ethics against Confucius?

A dirty, eccentric old deaf man with habits too execrable for the polite society of to-day, composed nine symphonies which the elect of future generations must appear to appreciate in order to remain the elect! Who are truly civilized—he with his music and his rudeness or the elect with their luxury and their crass inanity?

Dear funny old Charles Lamb comes to mind, he who frankly itemized his surpassing ignorance in "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," saying:

"But the fact is, a man may do very well with a very little knowledge, and scarce be found out in mixed company: everybody is so much more ready to produce his own than to call for a display of your acquisitions. But in a *tête-à-tête* there is no shuffling. The truth will out. There is nothing which I dread so much as the being left alone for a quarter of an hour with a sensible, well-informed man that does not know me."

And yet the *Essays of Elia*, the product of this self-confessed ignoramus who openly declared therein that he knew nothing of and cared less about the rules of English prose composition, always form one of the classics meticulously studied by our youthful students of to-day.

What explains these paradoxes? They vanish if viewed in the light of a more catholic philosophy, if examined from the cosmic view-point. Christ may be our constant inspiration while certain devotees of Gautama the Buddha find their captain satisfying without detracting one bit from our faith. And Beethoven may compose marvelous music and Lamb magnificent prose—and their efforts may have been made in ignorance of set rules (or in disregard thereof)—yet later, and lesser, minds have been persuaded to analyze their works and invent rules to account for them. Beethoven was more or less of a boor; Lamb all too frequently imbibed wine in disconcerting quantities; Wagner was a libertine and Bobby Burns a scalawag—one way of looking at it.

But considered more broadly, each and every genius has moments of inspiration which never occur to us common, average mortals; moments of such intense spiritual and mental activity that the very nervous strain may have made them the more easy prey to temptation in other moments. It is, nevertheless, our duty to learn from them, to be cultured by them, and, while not condoning

their faults or even extenuating them, to absorb as much as we may of their sublimest and best.

The world suffers from the lack of a cosmic view-point. By this is meant the view-point which transcends the trivial, which looks beyond the dogmatic, which envelops the narrow and which makes of the human animal a *man with an intellect*. Matters viewed cosmically present an aspect totally different from that under which they appear when viewed through the distorted medium afforded by creedal, scholastic or nationalistic bias.

In Emerson we find this view-point. Indeed, the following from his essay on Intellect indicates that trend of mind very strongly.

"God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please; you can never have both. Between these, as a pendulum, man oscillates. He in whom the love of repose predominates will accept the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political party he meets—most likely his father's. He gets rest, commodity and reputation; but he shuts the door of truth. He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism and recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his being is swung. He submits to the inconvenience of suspense and imperfect opinion, but he is a candidate for truth, as the other is not, and respects the highest law of his being."

This is indeed an empirical statement of the attitude of mind more scientifically described as a discriminating course of action in Edwin B. Holt's *The Freudian Wish*, the method which does not err psychologically by suppressing anything, but which investigates the facts and acts accordingly and whole-heartedly, and which avoids the extreme of desire on the one hand and that of remorse on the other. It resolves itself into the old question of conformity or non-conformity, heterodoxy or orthodoxy, conservatism or radicalism. A concrete illustration is White's *Warfare of Science and Religion*.

We wonder sometimes whether Emerson did not swing too far over toward lack of repose in search of truth. Or could one swing too far? He tells us somewhere that if we do but take our stand fearlessly the whole world will in time come round to us! But perhaps this depends upon how dogmatically we stand. For nothing can be more dogmatic than self-righteous liberalism, and the utter intolerance of the incorrigible radical is in a class by itself. We can take our stand in such a manner as to antagonize and to make

prejudice sufficiently tangible to defeat our ends. And in so doing we again miss truth without attaining repose.

"Reform is affirmative, conservatism negative; conservatism goes for comfort, reform for truth, . . . each is a good half, but an impossible whole," wisely continues our sage. He gives the conservative his place in the scheme of things, and well enough—for who was it but Emerson who conformed by voting "Nay" when compulsory chapel came up before the Harvard Board of Regents—for its abolition was certainly more in accord with his philosophy.

Certainly the conservative is right in upholding the dignity of things as they are, of the present, to the point where new truth is discovered. But new evidence reopens the case. If your conservative is going to sleep in dogma, or creed, or philosophy, or politics, or nationalism, so soundly that he becomes impervious to the demands of truth in other systems and in other nations, he has lost his claim to respect. Or if your truth-seeker sets out deliberately to demolish established systems from pure love of destruction and in barrenness of any constructive touch to offer, he is unworthy to be a leader. A type of mind can be conceived which respects and retains the good in present systems, but which gladly discards anything, however sacredly enshrined by precedent, when conclusively proven in error; a mind which does not permit formal statements of belief to deflect the light of truth or to inhibit development. Such a mind is after all the noblest and cosmically the most valuable.

A further example of the attitude, worthy to be added to that of Emerson, is from the *Journal Intime* of Amiel:

"My point of view is philosophical, that is to say, impartial and impersonal. The only type which pleases me is perfection, is mankind, is the ideal man. As to the national man, while I tolerate and study him, I do not admire him. I may only admire beautiful examples of the species. Great men, men of genius, sublime characters, noble souls, and those types are found in every ethnographic compartment. My 'chosen country' (to quote Madame de Staël) is among chosen individuals. I have no weakness whatever for the French, the Germans, the Swiss, the English, the Poles, or the Italians any more than for Brazilians or Chinese. The patriotic illusion, fanatic, exclusive, professional, does not exist for me. On the contrary, I more readily become conscious of the deficiencies, the ugliness and the imperfections of the particular groups of men to which I belong. My inclination is to see things as they are, allowances made for my individual point of view and all passion and desire banished. My antipathy is not toward this person or

that, but toward error, intolerance, prejudice, foolishness, exclusiveness, exaggeration. I love only justice and the just."

The cosmic view-point was that of Socrates, "the citizen of the world"; and of Jesus, the spiritual elder brother of all men—he who ruthlessly destroyed that he might fulfil, and who first conceived the tremendous idea of a one and only God for all men, although this notion had before been adumbrant in other minds. Among moderns it is the attitude of Charles Ferguson in religion, of Felix Adler in ethics and of Ralph Lane in politics.

A recent number of the *Hibbert Journal* (Jan., 1919) contains an article by Rhynd which strikingly describes the destroying Christ. He it was who swiftly overturned a narrow, nationalistic sacerdotal system to construct a world faith, and whose God was "of a truth no respecter of persons." In religion, the cosmic view-point means the ability to study and to appreciate the evolution of religion through countless and varied forms, up to the present phase—and then to realize that this aspect must in turn and in time give place to other manifestations of man's endeavor to get into harmony with the unseen.

In philosophy and in science the cosmic view-point brings the breadth of vision to sift the good from the evil in all schools; it gives all systems their due and profits from the most useful in turn. In art, science and philosophy it refuses to adopt any one school to the blind exclusion of all others, but merely presumes to follow one particular path toward truth in open-mindedness. The advance of cosmic evolution is ever impeded by a false loyalty to an artificially limited sphere of action. Religion is greater than sect, healing than any school of medicine and the welfare of humanity than any political party.

In world politics we sorely need the cosmic view-point as a guarantee of future peace: the view-point which sees matters not through the eyes of this or that nation, but with the evolution of humanity toward true spiritual freedom ever at heart. We sadly need to learn that the welfare of humanity, the ability to develop unhampered spirituality and mentality—these are of vastly more significance than whether we shall live or starve or die in or for some restricted area called "nation" looking upon those without as more or less tolerable barbarians. Until we decide that colonial expansion shall be neither exploitation nor a greedy desire (camouflaged as altruism) to uplift some inferior race for the glory and the aggrandizement of some one country, we shall have failed to get the cosmic view-point. Viewed cosmically, the evolution of the

human race toward that truer democracy which frees man intellectually, places sovereignty in the collective heart of humanity and abolishes false loyalty transcends all else.

And then I begin to wonder about the practicability of it all. Does it work out in practice or is this cosmic view-point philosophy perennially in the clouds? For what can it avail if it loses its efficacy in the petty things of life? Yet I rather think it would and does, when tried, work out in practice right in every-day life.

Said Epictetus that the true test of philosophy was not the quiet meditations of the sage in the closet, but the philosopher's reaction to the constant stress of daily life. The philosopher in the storm-tossed ship at sea is no philosopher if he be not calm while lesser minds howl in desperation. Were he to rage and moan and cry out to fate, what avails this theory he so highly commended to humanity at large? So said he of the lame limb but the stalwart mind.

And it was Socrates who so perfectly fulfilled Epictetus's definition of what a philosopher should be. And how? By what prodigies of dialectics? By what marvel of profound intellect? By what magic of interrogation? By what subtle syllogism? Aye, by none of these! But what then did he do? Why, he lived with a shrew unperturbed and remained calm when taunted by an ingrate son. When his ebullient spouse danced in an ecstasy of anger all over a fine cake some friends had sent him he laughed quietly and murmured, "There now, you shall not have your share of the cake!" This it was that so impressed Epictetus; the Socratic philosophy did not cravenly desert him in the little things.

Socrates was, in truth, a real philosopher—and when the ignorant came to him and asked to be directed to some teacher at whose feet they might learn wisdom—did he say with pardonable self-esteem, "Here am I; you need seek no further"? He was too much of a philosopher for that! He was so truly a philosopher that those who sought a spurious product easily overlooked him. For he kindly directed them to other sages.

And so should our scheme of things, however good it appears academically as a world tonic, fit into the petty irritations of life. When a superior is vexed, a street-car delayed, a typewriter recalcitrant—do we bite our nails and mutter atrocious exclamations in a pale blue language all our own? Big things tend to arouse those excellent dormant qualities half comatose in all of us; war makes heroes of necktie clerks; but the little things—verily these require

an effective philosophy. Will the cosmic view-point tide us over the small crisis?

Or must we admit as did David Hume that those realistic visions of the thinker's closet fade away into thin mist and lose their reality under stress of the city's throbbing life and the business of workaday existence? David almost gave up in despair when he considered it all. He almost resolved that he was no sage at all, and that he might as well forsake his elaborate theories and seek pottage with the common herd.

And possibly old Ben Franklin, despite his wise maxims, wasted many an hour; perhaps Roosevelt had rare moments when he was not strenuous; doubtless Epictetus was not ever and always the stoic *par excellence*; in fact Socrates may now and then have spoken half irritably to his hot-tempered spouse; and we all know that Jesus at least once cast aside his pacific idealism and forcibly ejected the hypocrites from the Temple. And so, while we may not every minute find ourselves equal to the impossible task of placid deliberation, we may make the cosmic view-point our ideal and equability of temperament our end and aim.

In conclusion I would insist that such a view of things does not negate nationalism; it transcends and glorifies it. It lauds the nation whose culture produces a world heritage—a Shakespeare, a Goethe, a Dante or an Emerson. It holds in just admiration the land where men are happy and free and development is wholesome and normal. It glorifies national achievements as such, but does not hope to inculcate culture with the sword. It tacitly assumes that right is bound to live and that that nation is greatest which contributes most to spiritual, intellectual and moral uplift. An Ibsen, a Swedenborg, a Grieg, a Maeterlinck, a Chopin, a Rubens, a Björnson—these in the cosmic view-point, demonstrate that true greatness abideth not in force of arms, or in great territories, but in ideals. True democracy will succeed to-day's crude efforts when the cosmic view-point breaks the bonds of tradition, looses the shackles of shibboleth and divided loyalty, emancipates mankind from the slavery of conventional anachronisms and childish mental formulas, places sovereignty in the great heart of collective humanity, teaching man simply to trust his fellow-man.