

ANARCHY AND ASPIRATION*.

BY HARDIN T. MCCLELLAND.

PASSING along the broad highway of history we are often struck by the many scenes of vast exploit, ambitious tenantry and shrewd aggression toward some form of political, religious or economic monopoly. These are but so many items of misfit achievement, and not only stand athwart the path of mankind's nobler aspirations, but may invariably be accounted the actual if not the immediate causes of almost all the misery and rebellion listed in Earth's bloody chronicle. For no creed of gain survives but on the lazy lounge of public oppression; and no policy of oppression continues for long before it arouses disaffection and confusion. It is foolish to expect any people, howsoever meek and non-resistant, to *always* submit to injustice, exploitation and compulsory services without complaint or occasional insubordination. And any slave or mandatory victim of extra-territorial government does not have to be very smart to see when he is being imposed upon, his goods stolen or his own social institutions subverted. History repeats itself, not because some men think they are free to enslave and mistreat others, but because their lives, their very presumption to realize selfish and worldly careers, are subject to natural and spiritual laws which are impartial and irrevocable in their application to human nature and conduct. This was why Percy Ainsworth said that "the men who really conquer the world are those who see beyond the world."

In all critical times we find that two great movements invariably come to the front; one arguing revolt in force and the other counseling a search for freedom through personal control and aspira-

*Supplementary remarks on Rev. Gilbert Reid's "Present Day Ideas on Revolution" and Tarak Nath Das' article in the *Open Court* on "The Struggle for Independence in India."

tion. The one would let down the bars to all the vicious moods of passion, cruelty and violence; thus hoping to straightway brush aside the one sort of despotism and set up its own, hence not really bettering the surrounding conditions. The other would calmly weed its own garden and raise nobler fruitage behind the hedge of moral and cultural restrictions against *both* sorts of prestige-mania, thus hoping that such spiritual example will not be long ignored and kept under the foist of those more selfishly aggressive. It knows full well that they are not real stars we see reflected in life's stagnant pool.

Rebellious feelings sometimes have a certain use in the private economy of our spiritual awakening, but not so with their public expression. When they break out in the form of mob violence or general strikes, society as an ultimate whole and the individual as the immediate unit of human life always suffer. There is no true sense of either public or private duty when measures favoring anarchy are advised or entertained. There is no actual confidence or sympathy in a creed which argues violence and premature retribution. These forms of passional expression are far too antiquated and clumsy for progressive souls to use in prospect of some day bettering the lives and ambitions of narrow-minded men.

Aspiring souls well know the more wholesome virtues and rewards of fortitude in suffering, honor in poverty, justice in wartime, and benevolence in times of panic. They look to innocence and joy for their relief; they seek no heaven bought with others' poverty and misery; they never recline at ease and enjoy the luxury supplied by worldly rancor and the ephemeral preferment of exploitation. They take all life for what it may and should become, never valuing experience as a meaningless incident in a fickle dream. And in the final estimate surviving minds will note that their existence was not lived in vain, that no experience of their inner life made plot for either goguette or revasserie.

But the aspiring soul must not be too innocent, too unsophisticated, else it be the ready victim of more subtle arts and mischiefs. It should know that the good things of life are oftenest imitated by the crude and false, that beauty is the pattern of a myriad forms of poseury and artifice, that knavery invariably shams some virtue from which to ambush its chosen victim. It should be sufficiently intelligent and noble-minded to recognize the utter antithesis between exaltation and vulgarity, that Clara Kimball Young's rare versatil-

ity of screen art as portrayed in "Eyes of Youth" is the direct opposite of the vulgar symbolism and seductive art produced by the supple spines of Hawaii's hula dancers.

Also those who are really seeking spiritual exaltation must not be too set on political or economic reform, else they overlook the personal culture of their characters and run into something like new India's recent political culdesac. That country, so otherwise well stocked with traditional wisdom and devotion, is now just about evenly divided between factions whose sentiments favor the two rival revolutionaries, Mohondas Gandhi and the Sadhu Sundar Singh; the one a pro-Indian who seeks to establish a Buddhistic non-caste form of Vedantist sociology with political justice and economic freedom for all, while the other is a pro-Anglican who claims that a Christian-Yoga panacea awaits his afflicted nation.

As a rule, anarchist movements and even their propaganda affect only a comparatively small part of a community, state or nation. And even when successful in their designs, such movements seldom exert any lasting influence beyond the reach of their immediate and more germane effects. A few social relations or sentiments may be changed, but the general eclectic character of human life goes on the same, still discriminating and choosing what best suits its aims of aspiration, helpfulness and betterment.

Aspiration, on the other hand, seeks to redeem and enoble the whole world, affects the cosmic tendency of life, and finds no rest in the finite interests of a personal salvation. It takes a saint's concern in all the weary tasks of those who toil, in all the poignant sufferings of those who have been invalidated for competent achievement, livelihood or love. It puts a sage interpretation on the dismal void of those whose prospects have been battered down and crushed by prejudice, misfortune and despair. To make a selfish pilgrimage toward Bethlehem belies the specious argument of false benevolence. And anyone with truly generous heart will take neither umbrage nor profit from what others do. He will never take fruit from the tree of life if such taking requires that he coldly let his neighbor await some other season. The relish of nobility is not concerned to satisfy such morbid claims of selfish appetite, for virtue is a spiritual restraint of physical desire.

We know full well that the staggering earth is burdened sorely with this bulky load called human folly. But we also know, or at least dreamingly feel and think sometimes, that it will some day reach its far-off destination and let down its galling pack. Then

will there be relaxation and refreshment, salvage and reward. Then will we find that the *finasseurs invétérés*, with all their raucous violence, fared not half so well as those few happy souls who calmly looked toward the stars at night and shuffled off their gnarled shell of low desire. A man must be free himself before he can expect to show the world the way to liberty and justice.

Even more thoroughly should we see why the latter sort of souls are always more skillful and courageous. They have the sense to know that meanness is ignoble, that fear and clumsiness are tokens only of ignorance and inexperience, and that a most recondite versatility is necessary if one is expected to keep up with even the modern advance of terminology in the Arts and Sciences, in Philosophy and Educational Method. They also recognize that it is a far cry from one's crowded desk-room in Threadneedle Street to another's lookout camp on the highest peak in Teneriffe. But the best part of both their valor and their wisdom is that they have no précieuse toast to offer such as once loudly resounded through Folly's 16th Salon announcing: *Vive les bagatelles et les hochets*—"Away with sorrow and care, long live trifles and toys!"

Such fickle moods are shallow and inane; they are always ready soil for seeds of vicious and rebellious tendency. The devotees of such a maxim also are soon grown corrupt, for they are too circumspect and skeptical of man's worthwhile achievements to pay homage there. They therefore never know the sweet relief of Aspiration, for all their lives they seek only vulgar conflicts, paradoxically expecting some bright day to make impossible conquest of chateaux in Spain.

Hannah More once said, "Christianity does not so much give us new affections or faculties, as a new direction to those we already have." So, too, in a world where cause and effect are found to hold impartial sway, we can neither readily miss the rewards of virtue nor escape the penalties of wrongdoing. It does not depend upon whether the world recognizes merit and repudiates wickedness. The law is deeper laid and operates inexorably just. On either side of our path, as we make life's paradoxical journey, we find cause both for joy and for sorrow, and (often unexpectedly) discover also effects both of a benevolent and a malignant nature. This is the elemental pattern of human life. It is the natural law of all intelligent existence that certain conduct has certain rewards and punishments as the case may warrant. As Drummond so well proved, it is the continuation of natural law into the spiritual world.

Very often the situation we find ourselves in or the form of conduct which seems best to pursue, is one of complex relations and hence cannot be easily analyzed into measurable items of this or that nature. I think, however, that any scheme aiming to better our condition, like any scene of problematic human experience, can be reduced to three constituent elements, namely: Environment, Character and Conduct. And after such a simplification, the said situation or form of conduct may be further reduced to the elemental conflict of character against the possible alliance of time, place, misfortune and others' opposition. It is even then encouraging to remember that a certain virtue holds good in actions which are superior to the often adverse circumstance of time and place. Character serves best in those forms of conduct which control, or at least have power to transmute, environment.

In this way, then, I have often found solace against the gray days of sorrow, found delight in the Springtime rejuvenation of the wintry world, and prospered sumptuously through the Fall term of economic recessions. I discovered also that no spice of life can prove too rich, no flavor seem too pungent, but that a special choice of diet can arrange a balanced and perennial relish. We eat of the fruits of Life's most fecund tree, never knowing and often never even asking why some of them should taste more sweet and ripe and appetizing than others.

Some people fill their days with mad pursuit of pleasure and extravagance, and in the end have difficulty in warding off ennui and caducité. Others drag along in weary toil, just barely drawing sustenance from the drying dregs of a sickly world, little dreaming that their misery and lack of nourishment is mostly a self-affliction and can at any time be thrown off and replaced with something more akin to happiness. But happy indeed by nature and by effort are those who seek not worldly charms nor cherish the crude *ravauderies méchants* of fickle hearts, for theirs is a constant joy, a resolute control of mind and soul and passion. They alone know how to live the spiritual life, aspiring to things more satisfying than anarchy and secular upheaval, and as a consequence have sturdy characters and are our true exemplars in wisdom.

It is a sad but not altogether discouraging commentary on our boasted civilization to admit that not all of us can understand the meaning of experience, that even its darkest moments of tragedy are still somewhat illumined by the flickering light of heuristic promise. There are but very few who are ever able to recognize

what kind of life is *best* to seek or live. We are as a whole species still very closely housed within the spiritual cave of instinct and fear, brute force and cupidity—the heritage of our ancestral traditions. Moods of disaffection come over us untrammelled by restraint; trials of penance grip our souls in anguish and the tardy reflection of regret. Mortal tests of spiritual rectitude annul the high esteem we have for personal power and prestige. We sometimes have clear vision of our destiny, whence we usually feel inclined to take account of our true strength of character, if we have not already found that base circumstance has overthrown our proud morale to win. It seems a tragedy, alas to know that penance takes the place of victory. But we are often solaced through our trials by realizing that penance truly done is a token of good faith, and that honest faith makes us secure from all worldly harm. It is another and more subtle sort of spiritual victory.

In the Middle Ages, when all moods of virtue or intelligence were in constant political jeopardy and ecclesiastical torment, the popular trials of penance were more physical than spiritual. Water, fire, knives, boiling oil and lead were common judges of the derelict, the witch, the courageous genius and the criminal alike. The authorities of those crude days had great artifice and passion for revenge. They had elaborate court pageantry but meagre judicial qualifications of broad knowledge and keen perception of motives; they had an exhaustive legal procedure of accusation but a pitifully weak and inaccurate system of evidential inquiry. Hence their arbitrary justice knew little leniency for those of doubtful guilt, and their pity for the weak, unfortunate victim of conspiracy was nil, not having force enough to push through the vast *pesanteur messéante* of their vested dignity. Accordingly the actual penitence of their victims was not thought genuine except when observed vainly struggling and writhing in chains at a fiery stake or in a miserable dungeon clothed in rags, diseased, starving and companioned by carnivorous rats. The rare old Gothic manuscript in Professor Scoggin's library tells vividly of all the popular vices, virtues, penances and precepts of those dolorous days. The hazards of plotting rebellion are shown to be quite as great as those of aspiring to anything above or beyond such dreary conditions of life, but why our spiritual rewards should depend upon some forced vicarious confession, there is not a word of explanation.

The same old bugbear of bigotry and superstitious fear was behind all our own New England persecution of persons accused

of sorcery and witchcraft which was in vogue until clearer-visioned folks like Channing and Margaret Fuller purified the atmosphere and relieved the situation. Dr. Rush was the first to take a scientific view of abnormal mental processes and try to alleviate the miserable condition of the defecive and suspected.

Even today when *casse-coux* and *peronnelles* dictate the fashion of our lives, who would attempt to cross life's stage with any dignity of hope in calm, intelligible dialogue? Who would even suppose that generous conduct is the truly expedient, and that selfish aggression is the poorest way to value and take advantage of life's glorious opportunities? Public life is now grown banal and bromidic, for the world, thinking and acting only in terms of materialism and jazz, is fast becoming cursed with grossness and vulgarity, vandalism and garish extravagance. Retired life, then, is the only resort left open to noble souls. It is now at high premium, because the world's elect are teaching people that its very hermitage is a mystic refuge from the mad turmoil of want and woe, violence and vice, greed and welterstench.

Away from the jungle life of self-assertive men, smug in the countryside's serene delight, no actual hazard reaches there, no true decadence can take place. In rural simplicity and solitude intelligent souls are least alone; and though their previous careers have been pronounced deplorable and bitterly remembered, their present joys preclude all sense of penance or regret. And all that should be countenanced as worth our while is just this sweet contentment and relief. No urgent moods of anarchy can be entertained while innocence and aspiration are one's constant pattern of devout employment. There is ever a bounty on the wolf, but the lambs have but to bask in the sunshine and let their wool grow; the knaves of the world can't steal *everything* the good man has. To have such really useful employment on the soil, growing food for body and mind, and knowing no base contentions or conspiracies, is a truer, more innate and wholesome sort of happiness which all the luxury and cleverness of urban artifice have not power to give.

Of course, we often miss the company of genial friends, and usually too that strange melange of lively situations, economic problems and diverse assessments on one's evening leisure, which rounds out the daily life of most city folks. But the actual reward of retirement's sage remove is sturdy and self-reliant moral character, helpful generosity and the courage to pass one's days, if need be, in the toil and trouble of heroic sacrifice. On the ground of this

great argument all worthy lives are built, all meritorious deeds are done, all worthy goals achieved. At least such scenery marks the origin of all our civil nobility, because the urban world is more a hazard than a refuge, more often a sedge of dark revolt than a high plateau of fruitage and security.

We readily understand that it makes a vast difference whether a gallivant calls his lady acquaintance *Dulcinea* or *Drolesse*; so why not look at virtue and debauchery through similar eyes of favor or disapproval? If the modern age must resolve the eternal conflict of morality versus livelihood into a mere dilemma of "Have you got the money?" why not let fly the flaring gonfalons of threatened revolt and reverse this fickle, simpering shibboleth into "Have you got spiritual aspiration?" or at least something serious like "Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?" We now have in Belgium an international and in France a newly-organized local "*Confederation des Travailleurs Intellectuels*" for all brain-workers of the high-brow order—that is, poets, philosophers, educators and scientists. So why not have also some few individual attempts to organize the world's spiritual workers—that is, all mystics, friends, heroes, meekened saints and generous souls, who are conscientiously set against war and anarchy, greed and folly, who constantly aspire to make this a better and a happier world, and are willing to share in and promote that rare *tempère mollement* which is the invariable treasure of the humble? How surer or more readily could the modern world be saved from the painful penance apparently in future store?