

ART AND AFFECTATION

B. RUSSELL HERTS

ALL people are endowed by nature with certain methods and mannerisms of speech and movement. The conscious alteration of these attributes is called affectation. The term is used, however, in general as one of reproach and so when the onlooker approves of the particular method of distorting "natural" characteristics, he does not associate the change with affectation. Thus, for example, if a man "naturally" had a tendency to suck his thumb continually in public or to scratch the sole of his left foot, or to kick one of his heels high in the air whenever he was pleased, and if this picturesque individual managed to rid himself of the peculiar habits, the average observer would not call such a good riddance an affectation. If, however, a man has a harsh, unpleasant voice and he manages to turn it into a modulated tuneful one, or if he finds the movements of the average male ungraceful and he manages to make his own more effective, he is immediately liable to be termed an affected person. This generally happens because the other folk in his particular community are unused to the kind of voice in which he speaks or to the type of movements which he has trained his body to perform.

It is perfectly obvious that all forms of affectation are the product of an exercise of will power and their growth must therefore be coördinate with the growth of self-control. An uncontrolled person cannot be an affected one. Moreover, affectation requires the observation of one's own mannerisms and the comparison of one's own with other people's, together with a wholesome self-disparagement coming as one of the results of the comparison. If this were not so the person would never be affected, for, failing to observe the superiority of any other form of discourse or motion, it would never occur to him to approximate his own to the observed form. We have then in affectation also an exhibition of keen desire for self-improvement.

With the practice of affectation bolstered by this tremendous galaxy of excellent qualities essentially connected with it, it seems

scarcely necessary to utter any further defence, but when we examine the process a little more fundamentally, we find that it is very closely bound up with that most valuable asset of human existence, the genuine expression of personality.

Examine the authors who are supposed to be affected: men like Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Gilbert K. Chesterton and George Meredith. They are invariably the writers with a distinctly personal style. They are in each case the men whose work accurately and profoundly reflects their own individuality and whose expressions and ideas are in complete accord. The "natural" writers are practically without style and nothing but their supreme genius has enabled them to succeed in spite of this very serious defect—in fact we never hear of a natural writer unless he happens to be a great genius such as Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Goethe and Homer. The smaller men fall by the wayside unless they turn the expression of their thoughts into an individual form, and to the extent that they do this they are supposed to be affected. The same thing is true in graphic art: Turner, Whistler and Beardsley being affected, and Rembrandt, Hals, and Michael Angelo being supreme enough to have succeeded without a deeply self-expressive style.

Your typical fat-head is no contemned creature of affectation. He is far too lazily self-satisfied to tax himself with any alteration in his natural qualities. Likewise your gratified matron, who, having captured her legitimate prey, settles down to a living of scandal-mongering, rich food and bridge whist—she is not concerned with the addition to her personality of the graces and kindlinesses of life. Who, indeed, are your affected poseurs, but the most talented, the most cultured, sophisticated, thoughtful, brilliant and suggestive members of your acquaintance?

It requires considerable will power to act out an affectation to its inevitable conclusion of becoming an authentic piece of self-expression. Persuade a weakling to attempt this and he will generally fail, but his will power will improve under the effort. Induce a thief to affect honesty and he will end up as virtuous as you please. "Become what thou art" is an ideal; "become what you affect," a reality.

One of the iconoclastic onslaughts of this generation must be directed against the prejudice of the unthinking regarding the social and very valuable art of affectation. Without this we should have no conscious advances in personality, no growth of self-control. We must not condemn even a poor exhibition, or not any more strongly than we do an inferior work in painting or literature. In such cases our function as appreciative critics is to demand improvement. We are all in a state of "becoming" and only he who stagnates can be completely consistent or supremely sincere.

THE COST OF A DECENT HOME

CAROL ARONOVICI

"The home is the school of all individual, national and human virtues."—DISRAELI.

THE last quarter century has been pregnant with generous efforts to improve housing conditions in the cities and towns of the United States. From the little mountain village where the missionary and settlement workers are endeavoring to raise housing standards, to the slums of the large and congested centres of population where housing reform has been organized, legislated for and made part of the necessary expenditure of the tax-paying public, the feeling exists that the effort has failed to produce the desired results. After years of legislative and administrative activity in New York, there still exists a problem of congestion which, although different in character from the earlier conditions, claims its quota of lives yearly and remains the subject of discussion of the philanthropic groups whose clientèle is the product of these conditions. Philadelphia, the city of homes, has in some cases produced dwellings which, in design, appearance, lighting and sanitation, do not compare favorably even with the more appalling barracks of New York represented by the new-law tenements. In all this effort it is evident that we have failed to bring about a general and permanent improvement. What we have succeeded in doing is to establish a minimum standard for protection to health and decency of the lowest economic and social strata of our population. If it was expected that the housing movement would produce an increased proportion of home ownership and promote a type of structure which is characteristic of the owner and represents his individuality, needs and sense of pride, we must recognize that hopeless failure has been our reward.

Cities throughout the country have faced their local problems single-handed and bravely, fighting against ignorance and greed, humbly beseeching law-making politicians to grant powers for control and improvement and lending themselves to the most