

engaging attention without favors. It is all so clear and pleasant that the scent of food and cigarettes and the flavor of the chatter seem to rise out of the picture to complete it.

Atmosphere and characterization, these are the things, rather than the pen and the press, which do Bellows' work. And for both he seems to need so little. Take, for example, his several fascinating studies of the good plump sisters. Their smooth, fat, stupid faces are drawn with the severest economy of line, their fat bodies, concealed in the stiff black encasements of their calling, are firmly suggested. One feels that one could walk round them, and what is more that one would meet the same kind placid countenance, without wonder or surprise, when the circle was completed.

Irony, even its finer, gentler aspect such as is seen in these small pictures, seems to be a familiar accent in the work of American artists. If we examine the productions of John Sloan or Robert Frost, of Joseph Pennell or Henry James, we find this distinctive tendency. It may be the note of our steel and stony cities or of the confused age in which we live. To trace its origin is probably as fruitless as it is difficult, but certainly it has few more eloquent exhibitors than George Bellows, few stronger advocates of its uses and its charm.

BABETTE DEUTSCH.

On American Philosophy

IV. George Santayana *

THE philosophic temper of an age can be judged by the kind of merit it neglects as well as by what it worships. For this reason as well as for the unique value of his work, no account of American philosophy should omit the consideration of George Santayana. If a European critic like Taine were to ask for an American book of philosophy containing a distinct and comprehensive view of human life, its aims and diverse manifestations, we could not mention anything more appropriate than Santayana's *Life of Reason*. Most American philosophic works are either monographs on special topics or else more or less elaborate controversial pamphlets on behalf of one view or another. Santayana more than any other American since Emerson has cultivated the ancient virtue of calm detachment which distinguishes the philosopher from the partisan journalist or the zealous missionary. His zeal, if any, is that of the artist freely picturing the whole of human experience as surveyed retrospec-

tively by one interested in the life of reason. "The unsolved problems of life and nature and the Babel of society need not disturb the genial observer." Dewey's anathemas against the purely contemplative philosopher, the "otiose observer," do not disturb one who holds that man's natural dignity and joy—as manifested in art, pure science, and philosophy—consists "in representing many things without being them; and in letting imagination, through sympathy, celebrate and echo their life." Man's proper happiness is constituted by the interest and beauty of the mind's "inward landscape rather than by any fortunes that await his body in the outer world." Philosophy is not merely a means for improving the conditions of common life, but is itself "a more intense sort of experience than common life is, just as pure and subtle music heard in retirement is something keener and more intense than the howling of storms or the rumble of cities."

That which distinguishes Santayana from all other modern philosophers is the way he combines thoroughgoing naturalism with profound appreciation of the wisdom commonly called idealism or other-wordliness. Completely free from all trace of supernaturalism in metaphysics, he is thoroughly Greek or humanistic in his valuation of those reasonable restraints which give order, dignity, and beauty to human life. Like Dewey, perhaps more than Dewey, Santayana is a thoroughgoing naturalist, believing that mind is the natural effect of bodily growth and organization. But unlike any other philosopher since Aristotle, Santayana holds fast to a sharp and clear distinction between the origin and the validity of our ideals. Though our ideals are of bodily origin they need not serve bodily needs, and above all they need no actual or sensible embodiment to justify their claims. There is no necessity for accepting the modern evolutionist's identification of the best with the latest. "Modern Greece is not exactly the crown of ancient Hellas." Other confusions between morality and physics such as the Hegelian identification of the ideal and the real, of the desirable and the existent, are vehemently rejected as servile worship of brute power and treacherous to our ideal aspirations. Thus while naturalism is the only intelligible philosophy, the attempt of naturalists to look for all motives and sanctions in the material world always generates a profound melancholy from which mankind instinctively shrinks. The sensuous optimism called Greek or the industrial optimism called American are but "thin disguises for despair," against which the mind will always rebel and revert, in some form or other, to a cultus of the unseen. The explanation of this paradoxical fact Santayana finds in a Greek distinction between the form and the brute existence of

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things. The form and qualities of things are congenial to the mind's free activity, but "when an empirical philosophy calls us back from the irresponsible flights of the imagination to the shock of sense and tries to remind us that in this alone we touch existence,—we feel dispossessed of our nature and cramped in our life." The true life of reason, however, is not to be found in wilful idealistic dreams, but in the logical activity which is docile to fact and illumines the actual world in which our bodies move.

As a child of Latin and Catholic civilization, Santayana is profoundly devoted to those classic forms which enshrine the wisdom and happiness of the past. He abhors German philosophy for what he calls its romantic wilfulness, that protestant or rebellious spirit which regards the mere removal of restraints as a good. "The life of reason is a heritage and exists only through tradition." Traditional forms may, indeed, cramp our life, and a vital mind like Shelley will revolt, but the end or good is not freedom but some more congenial form. Santayana holds in contempt the prevailing philosophy which glorifies striving and progress but in which there are no ends to be achieved and no ideal by which progress is to be measured.

The burden of his philosophy is the analysis of common sense, social institutions, religion, art, and science to show how reflection can distinguish the ideal from the physical embodiment in which traditional wisdom is delivered from generation to generation.

In his social philosophy he is essentially an aristocrat, valuing highly those historic institutions, cultivated forms, and reasonable restraints which impose order on our natural impulses. He recognizes the shallowness of purely personal culture and admits that our emancipated, atheistic, international democracy is not only replacing the old order, but that "like every vital impulse (it) is pregnant with a morality of its own." Religion to Santayana is essentially a mode of emancipating man from worldliness and from merely personal limitations. But the wisdom which its dogmas, ritual forms, and prayers embody is not truth about existence but about those ideals which give us internal strength and peace. To regard God as an existence rather than an ideal leads to superstition. Religious superstitions, he admits, often debauch morality and impede science, but the errors of religion should be viewed with indulgent sympathy. Thus Catholic dogma is viewed as involving a reasonable deference to authority but leaving the mind essentially free. In his theory of art Santayana follows his master, Aristotle, closely in spirit though not in words. Art looks at life from above and portray-

ing our passions in their beauty makes them interesting and delightful, at the same time softening their vital compulsion. "Art is abstract and inconsequential . . . nothing concerns it less than to influence the world." But in revealing beauty it gives us the best hint of the ultimate good which life offers. Without this sight of beauty the soul would not continue its mortal toil. Perhaps the most characteristic of Santayana's views is his estimate of the value of modern science for the life of reason or civilization. He accords full recognition to mechanical science not merely as a source of useful insight but as a liberation of the human soul. But though the various parts of science are mutually illuminating, scientific achievement is fragmentary and a mechanical science like physiologic psychology may not give a man as much insight as does some poetic suggestion. Science grows out of common experience, but its power is new, comparatively feeble, and easily blighted. "The experience of the vanity of the world, of sin, of salvation, of miracle, of strange revelations, and of mystic loves, is a far deeper, more primitive, and therefore probably more lasting human possession than is that of clear historical or scientific ideas."

Why, in spite of the incomparable distinction and modernity of his work, has Santayana received so little recognition? In part this is doubtless due to the unfortunate manner in which his principal book, *The Life of Reason*, is written—a manner which does not attract the public and repels the professional philosopher. Despite unusual felicity of diction and a cadence which often reminds us of Walter Pater, his books are difficult reading. It is difficult to find the exact thought because of his preference for pithy and oracular aphorisms rather than for fully and clearly developed arguments. His abstract and distant view of the world unrolls itself without any vivid or passionate incidents to grip our attention. In the main, however, Santayana has failed to draw fire because few people are interested in a frankly speculative and detached philosophy that departs radically from the accepted traditions and makes no appeal to the partisan zeal of either conservatives or reformers. He does not aim to be edifying or scientifically informing. American philosophy has attracted two types of mind—those to whom philosophy is religion rationalized, and those (a smaller but perhaps growing number) to whom philosophy is a scientific method of dealing with certain general ideas. To the former a combination of atheistic catholicism and anti-puritanic, non-democratic, aesthetic morality, lacking withal in missionary enthusiasm, typifies almost all that is abhorrent. To the scientific group Santayana is

just a speculative poet who may value science very highly but does so as a well-groomed gentleman who knows it at a polite distance, afraid to soil his hands with its grimy details. These judgments illustrate the great tragedy of modern philosophy. In view of the enormous expansion of modern knowledge and the increased rigor of scientific accuracy, the philosopher can no longer pretend to universal knowledge and yet he cannot abandon the universe as his province. Genuinely devoted to philosophy's ancient and humanly indispensable task of drawing a picture or unified plan of the world in which we live, Santayana is willing to abandon the pretension to scientific accuracy and to face the problem as a poet or moralist. But whether because interest in a unified world view is weak and the possession of poetic faculty such as Santayana's uncommon, or whether because philosophy has been too long wedded to logical argumentation and scientific pretensions, the dominant tendency is to make philosophy like one of the special sciences, dealing in a technical way with a limited field. As philosophy is thus abandoning its old pretensions to be the sovereign and legislative science—it is no longer taught by the college president himself—all the fields of concrete information, physics, economics, politics, psychology, and even logic, are parcelled out among the special sciences and there is nothing left to the philosopher except the problem as to the nature of knowledge itself. On this problem Santayana has some suggestive hints, but no definitely worked out solution. Hence his essential loneliness. But perhaps every true philosopher like the true poet, is essentially lonely.

MORRIS R. COHEN.

Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind

(*"The past is a bucket of ashes."*)

1.

The woman named Tomorrow
sits with a hairpin in her teeth
and takes her time
and does her hair the way she wants it
and fastens at last the last braid and coil
and puts the hairpin where it belongs
and turns and drawls: Well, what of it?
My grandmother, Yesterday, is gone.
What of it? Let the dead be dead.

2.

The doors were cedar
and the panels strips of gold
and the girls were golden girls
and the panels read and the girls chanted:

We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

The doors are twisted on broken hinges.
Sheets of rain swish through on the wind
where the golden girls ran and the panels read:

We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

3.

It has happened before.
Strong men put up a city and got
a nation together,
And paid singers to sing and women
to warble:

We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

And while the singers sang
and the strong men listened
and paid the singers well
and felt good about it all,
there were rats and lizards who listened
.. and the only listeners left now
.. are .. the rats .. and the lizards.

And there are black crows
crying, "Caw, caw."
bringing mud and sticks
building a nest

over the words carved
on the doors where the panels were cedar
and the strips on the panels were gold
and the golden girls came singing:
We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.

The only singers now are crows crying, "Caw, caw,"
And the sheets of rain whine in the wind and doorways.
And the only listeners now are .. the rats .. and the lizards.

4.

The feet of the rats
scribble on the door sills;
the hieroglyphs of the rat footprints
chatter the pedigrees of the rats
and babble of the blood
and gabble of the breed
of the grandfathers and the great-grandfathers
of the rats.

And the wind shifts
and the dust on the door sill shifts
and even the writing of the rat footprints
tells us nothing, nothing at all
about the greatest city, the greatest nation
where the strong men listened
and the women warbled: Nothing like us ever was.

CARL SANDBURG.