

A Harvest of Wisdom

ART AND FREEDOM. By Horace M. Kallen. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1942. Two vols. 1006 pp., with index. \$6.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT BIERSTEDT

IT is sometimes fortunate that our language does contain adjectives of superlative degree. For once in a while a book comes along which deserves them. The present study by Horace Kallen, professor of philosophy at the New School for Social Research, is such a book. Having labored on it during the entire period between the two wars, he now gives us the harvest of his ripe wisdom in what is beyond any reasonable doubt the best book of its kind ever published.

The thousand pages in these two volumes detail what the author calls in his sub-title "a historical and biographical interpretation of the relations between the ideas of beauty, use, and freedom in Western civilization from the Greeks to the present day." The book succeeds in doing all of that and also, in a sense, in doing for art what Andrew D. White did for science more than a generation ago. For Mr. Kallen has discussed the warfare between art and authority in terms of a historical quest for the meaning of beauty. He firmly believes and amply demonstrates that of all human enterprises art can most effectively challenge totalitarian authority and totalitarian values, whether they be political or ecclesiastical. This art can do with laughter as well as with passion.

While Mr. Kallen's manner is interpretative and his interest philosophical, his method is historical. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle he discusses in turn all the figures in our tradition who have had anything to say about art, including the classical Roman writers, the neo-Platonists, the patristics, the scholastics, the men of the Renaissance, and the men of the eighteenth century, on up to the birth of a separate discipline called esthetics in the era of the industrial revolution. In the nineteenth century the treatment properly becomes more detailed, and the next four books deal first with the marriage of beauty to freedom in romanticism, the role of art in the workingman's struggles for liberty a little later in the century, the period which focusses upon the hegemony of Ruskin in the art world of Europe and which ends with the *reductio ad absurdum* of Oscar Wilde, and then the impact of the Darwinian insight upon the arts. In the following books the story continues with newer influences, scientific psychology and the new studies of motion which the elec-

trically-controlled camera made possible. In the succeeding book, the cinema, cubism, and the mathematical logic of Bertrand Russell are shown to have artistic elements in common. Enter next psychoanalysis and Freudian psychology, the disillusionment of the post-war period, and the "swing" manifestation of surrealism. The pe-



Horace M. Kallen

multimate book turns political and discusses the relation of art to totalitarian theories and practices, notably in Russia, Germany, and Italy, and also its relation to a free society in the days of the Great Depression when federal theaters, federal symphonies, and federal writers' projects injected new vigor into the artistic life of the people. In this connection there is special praise for the first head of a state to declare the liberty of the artist in a public pronouncement.

Although these pages are filled with the names of philosophers and artists, it would be false to label the book either a history of philosophy or a history of art. It is both, and neither. It is a history of the philosophy of art, but not even that in a traditional sense. It might most appropriately be called a history of ideas, particularly of the ideas of beauty, use, and freedom. With the "stereotypy of the philosophic cults" and with that rather barren sort of philosophy which goes by the name of esthetics, Mr. Kallen has little or nothing to do. He is much more interested in what art means to men than in what it means to philosophers, although all of the traditional esthetic theories are given their just treatment. He concludes his study with a "metaphysical reprise," a summing up which is the most thoughtful essay

on the philosophy of art and the esthetic experience yet to distinguish the intellectual history of our own century. It is a pragmatic account of the nature of art, a strong defense of the "*de gustibus non disputandum est*" maxim and of Montaigne's "*Chacun à son gout*," and a clearly reasoned promulgation of the author's own conviction that the true nature of beauty must be found in the category of relations and not in the category of things. Whatever powers there be that liberate the human spirit, whether they be powers of pattern and order or of disorder and confusion, beauty is the relationship between those powers and ourselves. The fact that beauty finds its meaning in a relationship of use makes of it a pragmatic theory, and one so cleanly articulated and so well developed that its author's name must be added to the list of the great American pragmatists.

But more than this, the book in its entirety is a defense of the fundamental and inalienable right of men to be different from one another while living with one another. The artist has a role to play in the enterprise of freedom, for the artist who is true to his being must of necessity be free. The book is thus a defense of the freedom of art, of individualism in art, and of the personal use of art, and an attack, powerful in its erudition, upon all values imposed from without. Let no artist lie on Procrustean beds, especially those manufactured by politicians and priests. When he does so he renounces his artistic heritage.

"Art and Freedom" is a tremendously learned book, but Mr. Kallen wears his learning lightly, and no academic dust disfigures the countenance of his pages nor afflicts the nostrils of his reader. There are a few footnotes, but they are hidden away at the end of the second volume. "Art and Freedom" is in no sense a reference book, but a book to read, to enjoy, and to study. In sum it may be called an intellectual history with special relevance to the arts and to the artistic enterprise. With the history of Western civilization as his text, Mr. Kallen has this above all to teach, that beauty is a relation whose consequence is use and whose consummation is freedom. Brilliantly conceived and beautifully written, profound as well as humane, it is a classic book, an altogether excellent book.

Award Winner

Dodd, Mead & Company announce the award of their thousand dollar war novel prize to John Lodwick for his story of the battle of France being published under the title of "Running to Paradise." Lodwick was the only Englishman to fight with the French from the beginning of the Battle of France.

The Keeness of Walter Duranty

SEARCH FOR A KEY. *Walter Duranty. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1943. 321 pp. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by STRUTHERS BURT

WALTER DURANTY is always interesting; he couldn't be otherwise. Often he is exciting. Invariably he is provocative. Sometimes he is irritating, and occasionally he should be questioned; not on his facts but his conclusions. He has an enormously quick and observant and questing and omniverous mind, but in the way that mind digests what it feeds upon, there is now and again, and too much, a trace of rapid swallowing, also, at moments, a curious atmosphere of evasion, of haste, as if this mind were a trifle weary and overloaded. Impatient of repeating to itself and others what it has known for so long and repeated so often. Willing to take the easiest way out and let it go at that. In short, as if this mind, except when greatly moved, refused at the last moment the grim and bitter and dogged final analysis, plus emotion, which is the pursuit of truth.

And this is a pity, for in a large and thickly populated world where most people are anonymous and few have anything they really want, and still less are capable of saying what they think or "writing as they please," Walter Duranty has a great deal, and now that he has turned from journalism to novel writing, a head-start of many miles. He is already distinguished; what he thinks and says is already important; he has a vast storehouse to call upon; and when he chooses, he not only can write with a pencil shaped like a sword but celebrate with equal keenness; indeed, with a shining keenness. He is too important not to be important, and he should remember that of all forms of writing, the novel calls more for grim and bitter and dogged final analysis, and in all its details, than any other. He has plenty of "keys" to open many doors if he will use them.

In this last book of his these virtues and faults are patent. It is the story of an Englishman, Oliver Joby, from early boyhood when the simultaneous death of his parents in an accident left him an orphan, through Harrow and Cambridge, and then up and down pre-First World War Europe, and First World War Europe to the edge of the present catastrophe. There is also the Far East and China, and a great deal, naturally, about Russia. And there are many people and events, and this young Englishman, eventually coming to his forties, has especial op-

portunities to meet people, the great and near-great, and not great at all, and to see behind the scene, and to be present on occasions, for presently he becomes a foreign correspondent. "Search for a Key," is in other words, autobiographical; Oliver Joby is Walter Duranty, but just how much so no one but the author knows. And, as has been said, Oliver Joby, or Walter Duranty, is consistently interesting and



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most of the time exciting; interesting and exciting in what he does, what he sees, and what he thinks. But somehow or other the book does not quite add up; there are plenty of 2s but the final equation, the 4, is not altogether there. And you wonder why. The 2s are perfect.

But, and for the third time, let me repeat that "Search for a Key" is the best sort of reading. You do not want to put it down and you have to finish it. And that, I suppose, is about as high a general compliment as can be paid a piece of writing. You are eager to follow the career of Oliver Joby to the end; the only trouble is that when you get to that end, you haven't cared

enough about Oliver Joby. He seems a curiously cold, half realized hero. You are much more moved by some of the other characters; by Henri, the "pale triangular" faced murderer and thug of Marseilles, just back from enforced service in the "Bat'd'AF," or Bataillon d'Afrique, or by the beautifully described Russian girl, Mariusha, Marie Lvovna, the heroine. You are even more moved by Clifford Hawtrey, the tired and lonely old Englishman of Saint-Tropez, who taught Oliver Joby the use of opium when he was suffering unbearable pain from an accident to his hip, and thereby enabled Walter Duranty to write one of the best descriptions of the poppy drug in existence. Clifford Hawtrey is finished off in a few lines, but there is texture there and a big sense of a story untold. And you are consistently moved, of course, by the real protagonist, Europe, and Asia, moving toward their dreadful destiny.

I don't altogether know why this is so—the 2s so nearly making 4, but not quite. Perhaps the book is too short; the frame too big for the canvas, or, rather, the canvas too big for the frame. You can't cover so much ground, forty years or so of Europe and Asia, forty years or so of a thoughtful young man's life, in only 313 pages. But perhaps, again, that is a compliment. Not many books suffer from the virtuous vice of too much brevity. Perhaps it is because Walter Duranty has not yet altogether shaken off the trained objectivity of the newspaperman; not so objective after all, since Hitler and a few definite evils have made their appearance in the world. But the real trouble, I think, lies in Walter Duranty's openly expressed fear and distrust of emotion; he says "I have always been shy of feelings, as false beacons that lead men astray." Well, you can't be that way; at least an artist can't. A novelist can't. Perhaps a foreign correspondent can, but not a novelist. A novelist has to stick his neck out and take chances. He has to be utterly un-selfconscious.

Soldier

By Sergeant J. P. Wright

AN arrow brought me low at Agincourt;
At Crecy field the Normans found me dead.
I, the young man who fell at Marston Moor,
Riding with Charles to glory, so they said.
A humble man, down through the years I shed
My blood in every war. Did I not die
At Somme and Dunkirk? Do not ask me why.
I think it was because a great man said
That only thus could my young wife remain
Untroubled and unraped. I count this more
Than hoping that this time I'd reach three score.
But damn, I've died at Twenty-five again.