

Innumerable Friend

By May Sarton

*"Ainsi du temple où seul l'ami entre,
mais innombrable.—St. Exupéry*

LET us forget these principalities,
Nations, governments, these mythical powers,
These real walls, these beleaguered cities;
We are theirs perhaps but they are not ours.
We move and must move always one by one
Across the perilous frontiers alone,
And what we build be builded severally.
But who are "we" and is there still a "we"
Not lost under the weight of history?
The poet, scientist, and teacher know
How fast the seeds of hate and fear can grow,
What passions can take over peaceful nations,
What anguish lurk in the safe reservations.
Can we not start at the small roots again,
Build this "we" slowly, gently, one by one,
From each small center towards communion?
Reach over the frontier stranger to stranger
To find the only sure relief from danger.
Take the immense dangerous leap to understand,
Build an invisible bridge from mind to mind;
Swung out from letters or the briefest meeting
(Lives have been changed by a simple greeting),
Build an invisible bridge toward one person.
So the slow delicate process has begun,
The root of all relationship, and then
Learn that this stranger has become all men,
Flows through the open heart like a great host
Of all the human, solitary, lost.
His longing streams through the conventions
Of diplomats and their meager intentions,
Hunting for home like a great hungry wind.
He is the one, this our innumerable friend!

Let us forget these principalities, these powers;
We are theirs, perhaps, but they are not ours.
Turn toward each other quietly and know
There are still bridges nations cannot overthrow.
And if we fight—if we must at the end—
These are the bridges we fight to defend.

Room at Dawn

By Louise Townsend Nicholl

I WAKE where all her wakings were,
With the same light the ash tree stenciled
Then, for her;
And in surprise,
The pattern of the leaves upon my eyes,
See on the wall a ghost of shadow penciled,
Her chair, its delicate double drawn
In soft delineation of the dawn.

All is in outline, faint and true and spare,
The skeletal design of leaf and chair
A sketch of bone, of essence, of intent,
The schema still discernible, unspent.
Here she awoke, as I, as surely seeing
The pure projection of her world, her being.

O Kindly Counselors

By Witter Bynner

O KINDLY counselors, who would agree
My inner with my outer amity,
Be disobliged of need to tell me when
I cannot understand my fellowmen.
Let each of us be sure of his own round,
That it is safe and circular and sound,
Before he goes to the too easy labor
Of rounding off an orbit for a neighbor.
Each one of us with feathers on his arrow
Can know a wand with damage at the marrow
Might easily turn backward for the wound.
Our days are midnighted, our nights are nooned.
To each his deep responsibility.
Count your own hours and leave mine to me.

However odd the reason seems to be,
There is a reason for anomaly,
A reason which sits inmost in a man
And circumvents his falling out of plan
With all that frames him round and yet not in
As apples rotting in an apple-bin.
Let him not choose his likeness for content
Nor yet his opposite but lineament
Which maps his own into a mingled state
By day seditious but by year elate.
Correctness is corruption at the core
Unless it be corrected more and more
By lapse and lesion and recovery,
However odd correction seem to be.

Nor would I criticize your fond offense
Taken at what I think my common sense.
It is man's business, woman's too, to know
Sunrise and noon, sunset and afterglow,
But each in his own vision, his own need:
For me a cormorant at lazy speed
Against the sun's down-going, for my friend
A wave's light lapping at the day's bright end,
For you the solemn rising of a star,
While for another none of these things are
Or could be comparable to what his thought
Has all the day considered and so bought.
Pull down a star and weigh it in a scale,
Its weight and not your handling shall prevail.

But each man to his star, not to some other,
And though it seem a meteor, do not bother
To say so if it be a star to him.
The lake moves slowly, lighted to its rim
As well by meteors as by larger lights.
Compassion moves across the darkest nights
And gains its way diversely. Manifold
Are clouds of heaven which give or take the cold
Moon in their movings over the warm earth
But are not made by man to act as birth
Or death. The only death is in not seeing
The full compassion which is fused of being:
Birth joined with death, the contraries together,
These make the wind, these make the quiet weather.



The Saturday Review

The Lovers

By Conrad Aiken

THIS painful love dissect to the last shred:
abjure it, it will not be solved in bed:
agony of the senses, but compounded
of soul's dream, heart's wish, blood's will, all confounded
with hate, despair, mistrust, the fear of each
for what the other brings of alien speech:
self-love, my sweet, no farther goes than this,
that when we kiss it is ourselves we kiss.

O eyes no eyes but fountains filled with tears,
O heart no heart but cistern of the years—
how backward now to childhood's spring we thrust
there to uncover the green shoots of lust:
how forward then to the bare skull we look
to taste our passion dead in doomsday book!
Self-love is all we know, my love, and this
breeds all these worlds, then kills them, when we kiss.

Yet would I give, yet would you take, a time
where self-love were no criminal, no crime:
where the true godhead in each self discovers
how the self-lovers are both gods and lovers:
O love, of this wise love no word be said,
it will be solved in a diviner bed,
where the divine dance teaches self-love this,
that when we kiss it is a god we kiss.

Contemporary Artist

By Rolfe Humphries

IAM lonely: this, at least, I surely know.
I am important: this I must believe
With neither Church nor State to tell me so.
What can I do but hate, unless I grieve?

Given no myth, no symbol, never drawn
On any great crusade, or lofty quest,
My occupation, like Othello's, gone,
My talent uninvited and repressed,

Where can I turn, save inward and away
From all the time's corrupting platitudes,
Whose lackeys flatter, whose assassins lay
Their ambushes in obsolescent woods?

Where can I turn, save toward the self, to find
The body and blood, the bread and wine, I crave.
The grace of reassurance for the mind,
The absolute injunction to be brave?

Men lie, and things are lied about. I must
Abstract myself from these, and for defense
Against them, put my confidence and trust
In what I have of passion and of sense

And what I have of craft, —more ways than one
To skin a cat, or keep from telling lies.
One theme recurs, when all is said and done,
Beauty is Truth, in whatsoever guise,

And Truth is always, "This is how I feel,"
And never, "This is how it is—rejoice!"
Wie sagt das sich?—gar ohne Zweck und Ziel?
Objectiveless? Not quite. Perhaps by choice,

More likely by determination, I
Given an order, share the lot of those
Who fight disintegration till they die,
And, without much composure, still compose.

MARCH 19, 1949

Let Me Not See

By Mark Van Doren

LET me not see the one I love,
The bright one, that so blinded me;
The sweet one, that like sudden roses
Filled all evening easterly.
Let me not have those senses back
That sleep in her, and only lack
Knowledge of their captivity.

They think they are awake in me
And working, as they did of old.
And still they do with her away;
Then everything is clear and cold;
Is single, and I hear its name.
Oh, let it never be the same
With her whom clouds of love enfold.

She comes, but not herself is there.
She moves, but in a mist I make.
Oh, let me never burn away
All this between us, for love's sake.
Let my desire be even such
As darkens most what then I touch—
Sudden midnight, and fireflake.

For an Assyrian Frieze

By Peter Viereck

"I, the great king, the powerful king, king of the world, King of Assyria, the king whose path was a cyclone, whose battle was a flaming sea, I am powerful, all-powerful, exalted, almighty, majestic, all-important in power."—Inscription of 670 B. C.

SOMETIMES a lion with a prophet's beard
Lopes from a bas-relief to stretch his claws.
His bestial eyes are wonderfully sad.

Then he grows wings, the terrible king grows wings,
And flies above the black Euphrates loam,
Hunting for enemies of Nineveh.

His names are Shamshi and Adádnirari,
Tiglath-Pileser, Assurbanipal,
And the first Sargon of Dur-Shárukin.

*"The day my chariots stormed the town, I waxed
My beard with oil of rose and waterlily,
And freed nine pearl-caged nightingales, and built
A pillar of skulls so high it stabbed the sun."
(Was that the tomb's voice, or the desert-wind's?
Or ours?—what ghost is still our roaring priest?)*

The scribes shall say: his will outflow his wisdom.
The saints shall say: his was the sin of pride.
The skulls say nothing. And the lizards grin.

This is the rapture that the Gentiles feared
When Joshua made music masterful.
Each sinew is a harp-string crouched to twang.

The treble of such bloodlust if he pounced
Would shriek an anti-social kind of beauty
Like parrots in a gypsy carnival.

Then back to stone. In stone he sleeps the least.
It's not with love his brooding glitters so.
Earth spawns no gangrene half so luminous
As the contagion of those molten eyes.