

The New Pioneers

"The Modern Renaissance in American Art," by Ralph M. Pearson (Harper, 300 pp. \$5.50), is an account of fifty-four artists and their work written by a man who has long been a personal and enthusiastic devotee to modern art. Here it is reviewed by Robert Goldwater, head of the fine arts department at Queens College, New York.

By Robert Goldwater

WITH too few people writing about contemporary painting and sculpture, one must admire Ralph M. Pearson's long devotion to modern art in this country. With so few writers willing to record an enthusiastic, partisan personal taste, one must welcome his combative spirit and defiant exposition of one man's preferences. With too many critics analyzing from a distance, one must approve Mr. Pearson's old acquaintance and frequent friendship and dedication to the artists he presents. He writes as someone who likes artists and enjoys art, and who does his utmost to allow them to speak for themselves. "Everyone gets a hearing," he says, "except the one central authority whose knowledge is based on experience—the artist who produces the art." In his new book, *"The Modern Renaissance in Modern Art,"* he has given fifty-four artists a chance to speak for themselves, with their pictures and their words, and has stepped in only to relieve their reticence.

And yet this is a difficult book to understand. Publisher's hyperbole may perhaps explain its title. *"The Modern Renaissance in American Art"* implies a coherent, considered account of the tremendous expansion of, and interest in, our own painting and sculpture during the last decades. Qualitatively and quantitatively, esthetically and sociologically, from the points of view of both artist and audience, this is a fascinating occurrence. And its history, written by someone like Mr. Pearson, who has for years been a part of it (and written as personally and unobjectively as he likes), would make wonderful reading. Instead, we get a selection of what the jacket describes as "fifty-four distinguished artists," whose "work and philosophy" is recounted in a series of short sketches, grouped under three main headings: Expressionists; Abstraction—Non-Objective; Realism—Surrealism. Even with the author's introductions, conclusions, and comments, his prefatory remarks upon the importance of plastic values and cre-

ative design, this is no story of a renaissance.

Avowedly uninterested in the connected historical approach, Mr. Pearson has written another kind of book, and with this can there be no quarrel. His personal and intimate presentation has great advantages in warmth and directions, and it admirably conveys Mr. Pearson's real concern for art, besides allowing some of the artists to say interesting things about themselves and their work. But such a book must, as he says, stand or fall upon the author's personal taste and judgment and his ability to convince us of the coherence and quality of the standards upon which they rest. Here is the difficulty. Mr. Pearson's tastes are catholic, and this is all to the good, provided quality is always observed. So too are personal discoveries, if they can be justified. But after noting the wide variety of his inclusions, how explain his omission of figures who are at least as distinguished members of our "renaissance" as many whom he cites. Mr. Pearson likes realism, but among many lesser lights, forgets Edward Hopper. He mentions imaginative naturalism but omits Loren MacIver. He heartily approves of cubism and its offshoots, including Stuart Davis and McFee, but omits Niles Spencer, Tomlin, Vytlačil, and Gatch. He endorses expressionism with such outstanding artists as Beckmann and George Grosz, but leaves out Hyman Bloom, Roszak, and Jacques Lipschitz. Though he has little sympathy for pure abstraction, he does admit Albers, Rice Pereira, and Calder, but fails to mention Glarner, Noguchi, or Gorky.

In short, the author's standards of judgment are difficult, if not impossible, to follow. He puts much emphasis on "created design" as a touchstone, but includes artists whose main interest is in anecdotal narrative; he stresses "meaning" but gives his blessing to many a mannered exercise in a derivative style. Given his shifting grounds of judgment, given the title of his book, and given his desire to let each artist have his say, Mr. Pearson's wholesale dismissal of the tendencies of the last decade is incomprehensible. His almost uncontrolled hatred for the movement that has come to be known as "abstract expressionism" is in direct contradiction to his great indulgence for all other directions. De Kooning, Pollock, and many others less famous have constituted the vital movement of the last ten years, and are surely essential in any discussion of a renaissance in our art. It is, besides, unfair, on Mr. Pearson's own premises, to use the words of critics to condemn these artists, instead of allowing them to speak for themselves.

My Thanks

Continued from page 16

First and then again during the Second World War taught me, as a temporary civil servant, two lessons that I have found invaluable for an historian.

The first lesson is that the acquisition of information is, not an end in itself, but only a means to the end of taking action. In the service of a government or any other institution the action which is the purpose of the acquisition of information is, of course, action of the "practical" kind; but the golden rule which I had learnt in the Foreign Office from the business of acquiring information for use in such "practical" action proved to apply with equal force to an historian's work. Action taken on any plane will be in danger of going wrong if it is not taken in the light of the truth and of nothing but the truth; but it will be in equal danger of getting nowhere if it is not also taken in the light of no more of the truth than the minimum that is relevant to the particular piece of action that is on the current agenda.

JOHN STUART MILL, in his *"Autobiography,"* taught me to keep my mind fresh by alternating, on some regular rhythm, between different kinds of intellectual work. Between the wars I used to write the Chatham House Survey of International Affairs in the winter and spring in London and *"A Study of History"* in the summer and autumn in Yorkshire. In writing Parts VI-XIII of *"A Study of History"* since July 1, 1947 I have been able—thanks to the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation of New York in making it possible for Chatham House to release my time to the necessary extent—to follow a daily cycle in London, working at home in the mornings and at Chatham House in the afternoons. The shorter the wave of this alternating rhythm of intellectual work, the longer, in my experience, is the time for which it is possible to go on working continuously on a long task without the mental engine's "seizing."

PLATO TAUGHT me not to be ashamed of using my imagination as well as my intellect. He taught me, when, in a mental voyage, I found myself at the upper limit of the atmosphere accessible to the Reason, not to hesitate to let my imagination carry me on up into the stratosphere on the wings of a myth. In never being either too proud or too timid to take to a myth for the sake of reconnoitring regions of the Spiritual Universe beyond the Reason's range, Plato was showing

both the humility and the audacity of a great mind, and this Hellenic philosopher's example fortified me in an adverse Western mental environment in which I did not find any outstanding contemporary good example to follow.

LIONEL CURTIS taught me, by example, a method of production and an attitude of mind which I have found, by experience, to be a sovereign help in dealing with difficult and, above all, with controversial subjects. He taught me that, in the writing of a book, as in every other human activity, the worst of all vices is the *hybris* that is the nemesis of self-conceit. An author is convicting himself of being past praying for if ever he allows the Old Adam in him to close his mind to a suggestion for some modification of his first draft by answering "What I have written I have written." An author had better retire from business if he has not the humility to conceive of the possibility that, after all, he may be mistaken, and if he has not also the common sense to see, in the living authorities on his subject, not critics to be combated after publication, but mentors to be consulted before it, at a stage when it is still not too late to profit by this fruitfully chastening strictures. Taking my cue from Lionel Curtis, I have learnt to put my work through two stages when a controversial subject is on my agenda. The first stage is to produce as good a draft as I can manage out of my own resources. The second stage is to circulate this draft to a number of authorities who have diverse experience, knowledge, standpoints, and feelings, and then to rewrite the passage in the light of their comments on the first draft. The first stage is indispensable because a draft is apt to draw comment—in contrast to a questionnaire, which is apt to find its way into a pigeon-hole, if not into the wastepaper basket. But this first stage is merely a prelude to the second, which is the fruitful one. The process of rewriting in the light of comments is fruitful because of a synoptic vision of his subject which is not attainable by a single pair of eyes. This method of taking counsel's opinion does not, of course, dispense the author from the responsibility of eventually taking a line of his own and staking his head on this. But it does put it in his power to give himself the best chance open to him of being of some service to his readers.

VI. TO PEOPLE AND BOOKS, FOR TEACHING ME METHODS OF LITERARY PRESENTATION

THEODOR MOMMSEN, in "The History of the Roman Republic," which I read in my Aunt Gertrude Toynbee's copy of the English translation during the summer of A. D. 1907, between leaving



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TOYNBEE ON HUMAN NATURE: "[By 1921] the writer had made an empirical discovery of the truth that Human Nature is nowhere and never proof—not even in the communities that have traveled the farthest along the road towards Civilization—against the temptation to commit inhuman atrocities. There will always and everywhere be a point at which the mounting pressure of this temptation will burst the precarious dam within which social habit imprisons the floodwaters of Original Sin."

school and going up to the University, taught me that an historical work was a better presentation of history for being also a work of art.

ARISTOTLE taught me his method, of which he makes a masterly use in the "Politics," of illustrating general propositions about human affairs by recounting apposite historical anecdotes.

I AM THANKFUL for the personal good fortune of having been born just not too late in the day to receive an old-fashioned English humane education in the Classics and in the Bible. Enough of the language of the Authorized Version of the Bible has lodged itself in my memory, through having repeatedly come to my ears in the lessons read in church, to bring into my mind, when I am writing, a flow of phrases, or reminiscences of phrases, from the Scriptures.

F. M. CORNFORD, in his "Thucydides Mythistoricus," taught me to indicate, by the use of an abstract noun with its initial letter printed as a capital, the presence of one of those psychic principalities and powers—"The Tragic Passions," as Cornford calls them—for which there are no proper names in the sterilized vocabulary of a rationalist latter-day Western Society. Hilm and Aidos, Civilization and Democracy and Industrialism, Archaism and Futurism, Time and Space, Law and Fortune are a few examples, taken at random. This usage has, of course, its own drawback. On the analogy of personal names, it might be misinterpreted as conveying the false, and unintended, suggestion that these presences are personalities, when the truth is that they are non-personal emanations from a subconscious abyss of the Psyche that is the matrix of personalities as well. Yet a usage suggesting personification is at any rate less misleading than one suggesting that these entities are abstractions—as would be implied by printing the

initial letters of the corresponding English words in lower-case type—for, though they are not personalities they are charges of psychic energy that have power to work weal and woe in Human affairs, and the lack of proper names for them in a latter-day Western vocabulary betrays a tell-tale lacuna in modern Western thought and imagination and feeling. There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in Horatio's Western philosophy.

IN LOOKING ON at a Japanese puppet show at Osaka one afternoon in November 1929, I duly found, as I had been assured beforehand that I should find, it possible to entertain the illusion that the puppets were animated by an autonomous life of their own, although the human artists manipulating them were in full view of the spectators. An artistic effect which, in the West, would have been produced by the artifice of keeping the manipulators out of sight, was produced in Japan by their artistry in keeping themselves out of mind notwithstanding their visibility. The Japanese manipulators achieved this *tour de force* of managing to deflect the spectators' attention away from themselves and on to their puppets by making their own movements appear lifeless and their own countenances impassive.

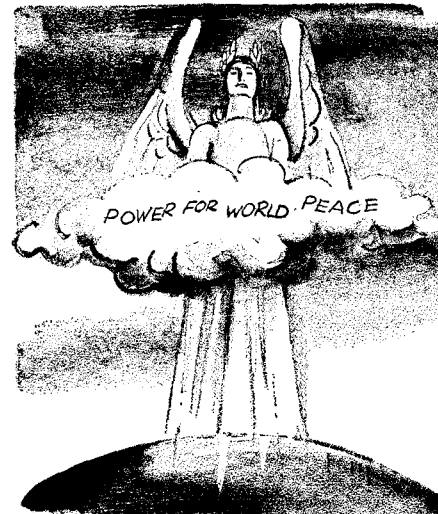
VII. TO PEOPLE, MONUMENTS, APPARATUS, PICTURES, BOOKS, AND EVENTS, FOR GIVING ME INTUITIONS AND IDEAS

ROBERT BROWNING presented me with the phrase "Challenge and Response." I had flattered myself that this phrase was of my own coinage till, more than ten years after I had first put it on paper, I came upon it in the fourth stanza of Browning's "Master Hughes of Saxe Gotha":

—O you may challenge them, not
a response
Get the church-saints on their
rounds!

The collocation of the two words must have lain submerged on some subconscious level of my mind for about a quarter of a century since the Christmas holidays of A.D. 1905-06, when I had first read the poem with my

TOYNBEE ON HISTORY: "What do we mean by History? The writer would reply that he meant by History a vision—dim and partial, yet (he believed) true to reality as far as it went—of God revealing Himself in action to souls that were sincerely seeking Him."



—Burck in The Chicago Sun-Times.

"Redemption"

Mother. When I fancied that I was inventing it I was only hauling it up from the hold of my memory.

ALFRED ZIMMERN taught me, eight years before the publication of Benedetto Croce's "Teoria e Storia della Storiografia" in A.D. 1917, that "all true history is contemporary history." I learnt this from the intellectual ferment raised in my mind in New College hall in the summer term of A.D. 1909 as I listened to AEZ delivering a course of introductory lectures on Hellenic history, for undergraduates starting to read "Litterae Humaniores," which was the matrix of "The Greek Commonwealth." As I sat listening to those catalytic words the conventional partitions between "Past" and "Present" and between "ancient" and "modern" dissolved out of my mind and have never since returned to hamper it.

POLYBIUS, in his "Oecumenical History" (Book I, chapter 4), gave me my marching orders in his dicta that "the coincidence by which all the transactions of the World have been oriented in a single direction and guided towards a single goal in the extraordinary characteristic of the present age"; "the unity of events imposes upon the historian a similar unity of composition"; "the study of general contacts and relations and of general resemblances and differences is the only avenue to a general perspective, without which neither profit nor pleasure can be extracted from historical research."

THE WESTERN GENERAL WAR of A.D. 1914-18 ("World War I") opened my eyes to the historical and at the same time philosophic truth that my world in my generation was entering upon experiences which Thucydides,

in his world in his generation, had already registered and recorded.

J. B. BURY, in "A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene," not only revealed to me the existence of the Orthodox Christian Civilization, but showed me the spectacle of one civilization changing into another under the lens of the historian's magnifying glass.

HEINE'S "REISEBILDER" and Goethe's "Faust," which I read at Winchester, opened up two new worlds to me. The "Reisebilder" gave me an inside view of Napoleon's Empire; "Faust" gave me an insight into the good of Evil. I have been perpetually grateful to E. J. Turner ("the Hopper") for introducing me to these German works of Western literary art with an enthusiasm for them that was infectious because it was the offspring of understanding.

THE GOSPELS and Herodotus made me aware of the divine irony in human affairs; the most tremendous of all the lessons of history.

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION of the Bible, made in the reign of King James I, gives me whenever I read it or hear it being read an intimation of the divine presence informing our fragment of a mysterious Universe. The effect of a diction that is archaic yet at the same time familiar is more like that of music than like

that of ordinary speech. It pierces through the Intellect and plays directly upon the Heart.

"PARADISE LOST," when I discovered it and devoured it in three days before I was eight years old, instilled into my mind, without my understanding it, my first idea of a theology.

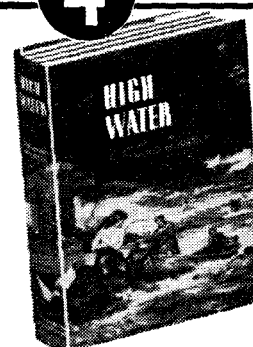
VIII. TO PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS, FOR SHOWING KINDNESS TO ME

"LET US NOW PRAISE famous men, and our fathers that begat us." William of Wykeham gave me my education; and he had made this provision for me 507 years before I was elected a scholar of his College of Saint Mary de Winton prope Winton. Here was a man who had served God by making himself a minister of God's providence. *Fui et ego puer Wiccam!*, and, like other sons of his, I feel towards our Founder a direct personal gratitude and affection which could not, I believe, have been warmer if I had known him in the flesh, instead of being born, as I was, 485 years after his death. "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God," and Time has no power to put distance between them and their adopted children.

THE COUNCIL on Foreign Relations in New York held in safekeeping for me, from before Munich week until after VJ-Day, my notes for Parts VI-XIII of my book and the notebooks in which I had put down the gist of my reading during the previous twenty years. This act of kindness gave me many times over during the Second World War the consolation of feeling *non omnis moriar*.

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION of New York made it possible for me, after an eight-years-long interruption, to write the first draft of Parts VI-XIII of this book within the four years beginning on July 1, 1947, and to send these four volumes to press in the second half of the year 1952, by providing the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London with the financial means for releasing a substantial part of my time by reinforcing the staff of the department producing their Survey of International Affairs, which had had to be taken up again, after the war, with eight years (and these no ordinary years) of arrears to make good. More than this, the Foundation made it financially possible for my wife and me to accept invitations from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton to pay periodical visits there which have been invaluable to us for making progress in our work.

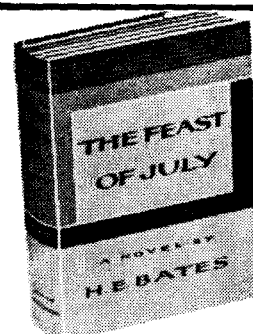
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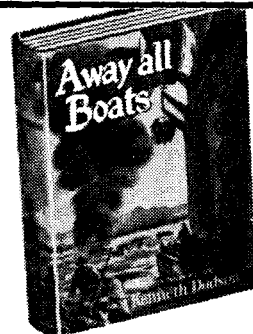


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Answer to No. 588

If a child annoys you, quiet him by brushing his hair. If this doesn't work, use the other side of the brush on the other end of the child.—Unknown.