

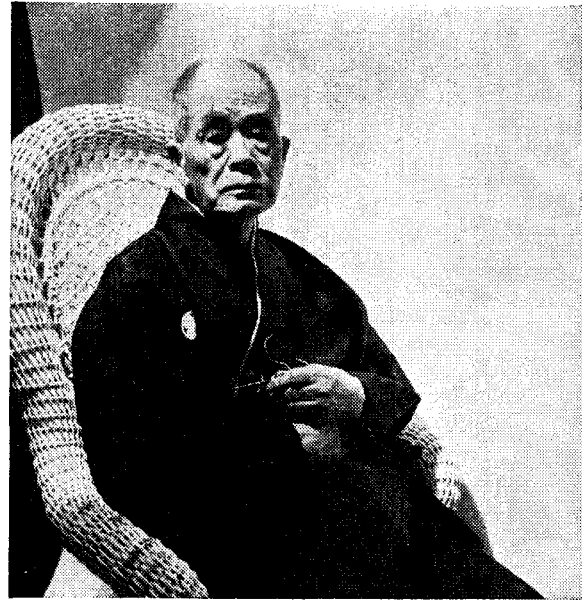
textbook. Some of the precepts are so transparent as to seem irrelevant. We are told that it is "useful" to find diaries kept by a wife or near relative of the subject; that sometimes non-fictional writings of novelists are more "useful" in supplying biographical data than the novels they wrote; that a "typed letter is seldom really personal." Such apparent truisms might have value if an ounce of analysis were applied; but they are given to us blandly *ex cathedra*. Garraty does not seem to allow for the fact that diaries kept by near relatives are sometimes extremely distorted; that a novelist's novels sometimes tell us more about him than anything else he may write. And he is certainly wrong in believing that in our century a handwritten letter is more personal than a typewritten letter. It depends, in reality, on what's in the letter. The important thing, after all, is that whether the biographer is confronted by diary, novel, or nonfiction, by letter, handwritten or typewritten, it is the use of insight and analysis that counts above all. For this, no rule of thumb can be devised.

But Garraty is searching wholly for rules of thumb in the apparently mistaken belief that some biographical slide rule exists by which we can measure "tension" in personal documents, or can indulge in word-content analyses, or study in some mechanistic fashion the elements and ideas in a subject's writings. Biography will not yield to this kind of literalness, because it has for its subject creatures once composed of flesh, blood, flame, passion, reason, and unreason.

Nor is it possible to accept the historical absolutism of a statement that biographers should "steer clear of the *deservedly* forgotten figures of history." Who is to say what figure is "deservedly" forgotten and what figure is not? Each century decides for itself. In 1900 Herman Melville seems to have been adjudged "deservedly forgotten"; yet twenty years later one biographer, Raymond Weaver, was of another mind. By Garraty's law we would also banish the writing of the lives of secondary figures; yet these can be of great significance in any national tapestry.

The truth is that we cannot write biography by any one set of rules. The "nature" of biography is something much more complex and subtle than Garraty will allow; it touches profound depths of human relationship and identification with the past—and there are no precepts by which we can learn to understand the human heart. A young would-be biographer might do better to read a chapter of Boswell, a page of Proust.

IDEAS



—Cecil Beaton.

Dr. D. T. Suzuki—"finds Christianity combative, exclusive."

Search for Inner Truth

What is Zen Buddhism, the philosophical way of life currently being widely discussed in this country? Daniel J. Bronstein, chairman of the philosophy department at the City College of New York, considers the phenomenon through the focus of two recently published books edited by William Barrett and Ruth Nanda Anshen.

By DANIEL J. BRONSTEIN

NOT long ago Zen Buddhism was virtually unheard of in America. Now, books on the subject are not hard to find, even in paperback; study groups devoted to Zen meet regularly in New York, on the West Coast, and probably in between as well. The First Zen Institute of America, according to one report, boasts more than 100 members, and lecturers on the subject are attracting enough attention to be photographed for popular weeklies. Does this mean that in the mid-twentieth century the West is about to participate in a large-scale revival of a way of life taught to the Chinese by Bodhidharma fourteen centuries ago? I for one don't think so.

Nor do I expect Zen to offer serious competition to the currently popular "religious" favorites, which appeal to

a mass audience. But one need not accept all of Zen's teachings to find something of value in it.

The best-known interpreter of Zen, writing in English, is Dr. D. T. Suzuki, who has been lecturing and publishing books and articles on Zen for over half a century. What is Zen Buddhism? I'm not sure I know, although I tried not to let my mind wander during my initiation into its labyrinths, provided by Dr. Suzuki's two sprightly volumes: "*Zen Buddhism*," edited by William Barrett (Anchor; paperback, 95¢), and "*Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*," edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen (Harper, \$3.50). On the surface, Zen would appear to be an unorthodox blend of anti-rational metaphysics and Buddhist religion, with a liberal dose of psychotherapy thrown in.

Let us consider these three ingredients in turn. According to Dr. Suzuki, there is an "inner truth" hidden deep within our consciousness which Zen aims to discover. This cannot be done by any ordinary methods. It is not something that one man, even after he discovers it, can tell another. Each must grasp it himself. One of the devices used to clear the student's mind and help him discover "the truth of Zen" is the "mondo" or dialogue between pupil and master. Although the master never directly an-

swers the questions which students are prone to ask—such as “What is the self?” or “How is *satori* (enlightenment) attained?”—he knows (that is why he is a master) how to make the truth flash into the student’s mind. Sometimes the very irrelevance or impertinence of the master’s replies does the trick. But in stubborn cases, as when the student is addicted to rational or intellectual habits of mind, it may take him a long time to attain *satori*.

I think I should warn the serious reader that unless he is a patient man he may find himself developing an inferiority complex as he reads Dr. Suzuki’s exposition of Zen. “There is nothing hidden in Zen,” he writes; “all is manifest, and only the dim-eyed ones are barred from seeing it.” One of the author’s favorite Western thinkers is the German mystical theologian Meister Eckhardt. But even he does not quite measure up to Zen standards. “When Eckhardt declares that ‘the eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me,’ or when Plotinus refers to ‘that which mind, when it turns back, thinks before it thinks itself,’” writes Suzuki, “we do not find it altogether beyond our understanding.” The trouble with Eckhardt and Plotinus, according to the Japanese Buddhist scholar, is that they are “unable to be quite free from the taint of intellection,” whereas the Zen masters, like true mystics, have succeeded in so shrouding their utterances in ciphers that the student is completely baffled.

If you like your philosophy peppered with paradox, and find contradictions challenging or thought-provoking, then Zen may appeal to you. “For Zen,” writes Dr. Suzuki, “the finite is infinite, time is eternity, man is not separated from God.” Or again, “It is *Prajna* which lays its hands on Emptiness, or Suchness, or Self-Nature. And this laying-hands-on is not what it seems. This is self-evident from what has already been said concerning things relative. Inasmuch as self-nature is beyond the realm of relativity, its being grasped by *Prajna* cannot mean a grasping in its ordinary sense. The grasping must be no-grasping, a paradoxical statement which is inevitable. To use Buddhist terminology, this grasping is accomplished by nondiscrimination; that is, by nondiscriminating discrimination. The process is abrupt, discrete, an act of the conscious; not an unconscious act but an act rising from self-nature itself, which is the Unconscious.”

If, like the reviewer, you find it a bit difficult to understand this, you

may take comfort in Dr. Suzuki’s explanation that “Zen has a standard of its own . . . it upsets the existing scheme of thought and substitutes a new one in which there exists no logic, no dualistic arrangement of ideas. In spite of these apparent confusions, the philosophy of Zen is guided by a thoroughgoing principle whose topsy-turviness when once grasped, becomes the plainest of truth.” So much for Zen’s first ingredient.

We come next to the religious aspect of Zen. A key concept is *satori*, defined as an intuitive rather than an analytical grasp of the nature of things. He who attains *satori* enjoys a spiritual enhancement of his whole life, an *enlightenment*, somewhat resembling what other religions call a “conversion.” But the latter term is too emotive. A better word picture for *satori*, as suggested by the author, would be “brightening up of the mind-works.” In contrast with conventional religion, Zen attains its goal without benefit of such notions as sin, faith, God, grace, salvation, a future life, etc. It is non-theological and nonecclesiastic; even the ethical component plays a minor role in Zen Buddhism.

Comparing Christianity and Buddhism, Dr. Suzuki finds Christianity combative, exclusive, inclined to be autocratic and domineering; while he sees Buddhism as a religion of peace and serenity, dedicated to broad-mindedness and universal tolerance. These judgments are connected by the author with the familiar images of Christ and Buddha. He attaches great significance to the fact that the former died *vertically* on the Cross while the latter passed away *horizontally*. “To stand up means that one is ready for action, for fighting and overpowering. It also implies that

someone is standing opposed to you, who may be ready to strike you down if you do not strike him down first. This is ‘the self’ which Christianity wants to crucify . . . Horizontality, as in the case of the lying Buddha, makes us think of peace and satisfaction or contentment.” These provocative remarks may serve to show us ourselves as others see us. But they are only opinions or interpretations and not what the author calls them, implications or meanings. It is worth noting, also, that in making these criticisms Dr. Suzuki has lapsed into our ordinary “dualistic” logic, and has abandoned the “topsy-turvy” nonlogic of Zen.

I would guess that the therapeutic ingredient of Zen has attracted most of its disciples. Who wouldn’t like to find a new point of view in which life “assumes a fresher, deeper, and more satisfying aspect,” where tensions and anxieties are replaced by contentment and serenity? When Dr. Suzuki describes this phase of Zen, he drops his customary reserve and writes like an ad man doing a blurb for the latest best seller. But there is one significant difference. He doesn’t promise that the regeneration of the individual will require only fifteen minutes a day, but admits that it will be “the greatest mental cataclysm one can go through with in life.”

Both volumes under review are collections of previously published studies by Dr. Suzuki. This reviewer found the Anchor volume a better general introduction to Zen Buddhism. Professor Barrett’s introduction is suggestive and, on some aspects of Zen, illuminating. The Harper volume concentrates more on the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western approaches to religious mysticism.



The Space Balloon

By William Burford

LIKE a specter, it rose from the mine shaft,
Emerged, slipping free, with its long shroud
Flowing round it, like a great jellyfish,
And ascended from earth into the stratosphere,
Where was its home, where it disappeared from men’s sight;
Drifting upward, through the day and night of space.

And what returned, when the morning came,
In North Dakota, in a farmer’s field
What they found again, was the shriveled skin.

The Isle of Man

"Man and People," by José Ortega y Gasset (translated by Willard Trask. Norton. 272 pp. \$4.50), is a group of lectures concerned with the nature of society, the last work of the distinguished Spanish philosopher. Brand Blanshard of Yale reviews it.

By Brand Blanshard

PHILOSOPHY, in these days, is in a distracted state. It means different things as one crosses geographical boundaries. In Britain it means clearing away traditional confusions by clearing up the meaning of words. On the Continent, where Heidegger is still the great figure, it is only too likely to mean a set of profound and pontifical pronouncements about being and nothing. In Spain and Spanish America it is something different again. There is no line in these countries between philosophy and a sort of literary psychology and sociology, so that a book on philosophy is likely to be an adventure in all three fields at once.

This is true of José Ortega y Gasset's "Man and People." It is the last book of Spain's most distinguished recent philosopher, and consists of a series of lectures given by Ortega shortly before his death. His concern is with the nature of society. He starts by saying that people talk constantly about social facts—laws, the state, public opinion, socialism, liberalism—but without any clear idea of what "society" means. Even the experts do not know. "The ineptitude of sociology," he says, "is one of the plagues of our time." He hopes in some measure to set it right by thinking through afresh the relation between "man and people."

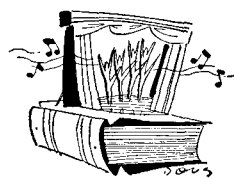
The view he ends with is briefly this: each man is an island, in the sense that he lives and dies in the solitude of his own consciousness. For Ortega this private world is all-important; the attempt at a purely behaviorist sociology he would regard as ignoring the chief thing of interest. Yet, for all our solitude, we find ourselves hedged round and coerced by other people whom we never see or directly know. How do they manage to cabin and confine us in the way they do? Ortega answers that it is through usages. And what are usages?

They are customs which either law or public opinion compel us to obey. Ortega's favorite example is that of the handshake. Originally shaking hands meant something. The inferior would take and kiss the hand of another by way of saluting his superiority. As times grew democratic the superior would deprecatingly withdraw the hand, whereupon the inferior would insist on taking it again, and the superior would again resist; whereupon there was an Alphonse and Gaston performance with at least spirit and significance on each side. The handshake still remains, but as a routine performance, a mere skeleton of what it once was. And the danger for humanity is that life should become so wholly a thing of custom, of rites dutifully performed merely because everyone else performs them, that we shall be robots rather than spontaneous minds.

Whatever one may think of his theory, Ortega himself was a good example of the man who resisted convention, and thought and wrote with freshness. He was a Latin to his fingertips, bursting with feeling, ex-

pansive in expressing it, emphatic and frank in his prejudices. These traits come out with an odd force in the present book when Ortega has occasion to mention women and Englishmen. Englishmen he admires for their independence, but he deplores their impassiveness. Indeed, "we might sometimes suspect that if one Englishman understands another, it is because, since conversation among them normally consists of pure commonplaces, he knows beforehand what the other is going to say." A fairly strong line, this, for one who admits that he never visited England.

But his frankness about Englishmen is nothing to his frankness about women. On the embattled question of the differences between men and women, he leaps into the fray with characteristically uninhibited confidence. He holds that there are three such differences. One is that woman's mind is "essentially confused" while man's, on the contrary, is "made up of clarities." Secondly, woman is "a form of humanity inferior to the masculine." Thirdly, "woman's whole psychic life is more involved with her body than man's." You are a brave man, Señor Ortega. If an Englishman or American said such things, he would be filled as full of arrows, launched by indignant Amazon archers, as ever St. Sebastian was. Can it be quite otherwise in Spain? Are señoritas mice or women?



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

SAY IT WITH MUSIC

The plays and novels in the first column below have all, at one time or another, been made into the stage musicals assorted in the second column. Stanley Green of New York City asks you to match each song-and-dance reincarnation with its appropriate source. If you hit a sour note, turn to page 70.

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| 1. "Arms and the Man" | () "Arms and the Girl" |
| 2. "The Comedy of Errors" | () "Hello, Lola" |
| 3. "What Every Woman Knows" | () "Let's Face It" |
| 4. "God Sends Sunday" | () "By Jupiter" |
| 5. "The Cradle Snatchers" | () "Regina" |
| 6. "The Importance of Being Earnest" | () "The Boys from Syracuse" |
| 7. "Smilin' Through" | () "Banjo Eyes" |
| 8. "Broadway Jones" | () "St. Louis Woman" |
| 9. "The Good Fairy" | () "Maggie" |
| 10. "Having Wonderful Time" | () "Whoopee" |
| 11. "The Prisoner of Zenda" | () "The Chocolate Soldier" |
| 12. "Three Men on a Horse" | () "Leave It to Me" |
| 13. "Seventeen" | () "Wish You Were Here" |
| 14. "The Pursuit of Happiness" | () "Make a Wish" |
| 15. "If I Were King" | () "Princess Flavia" |
| 16. "Clear All Wires" | () "Billie" |
| 17. "Cry, the Beloved Country" | () "Through the Years" |
| 18. "The Little Foxes" | () "Lost in the Stars" |
| 19. "The Warrior's Husband" | () "The Vagabond King" |
| 20. "The Nervous Wreck" | () "Oh, Ernest!" |