

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

by Bernard FONLON

There is in man an inborn thirst to know the facts about the world ; there is in him the urge to seek what is good for his being, and to shrink back from what is harmful to his welfare ; there is the desire, native to him, to give lasting expression to the feelings which well up within him, both when he is buoyed up and exultant and when he collides with misfortune ; there is the deepseated urge to reproduce and enshrine the manifold excellence that he sees in the world.

In other words, there surges in every human being an inborn thirst for the true, the good and the beautiful.

Because the nature of man is the same in all, people living together and exposed to the same influences and struggling like one man for *Lebensraum* in space and time, become, as it were, one body corporate worked upon and urged along by the same internal and external forces and responding, in a body, to these forces, as its members do individually.

Thanks to this thirst for the true, the good and the beautiful welling up in men, severally and corporately, each community, using the various and cumulative efforts and achievements of its members, gradually builds up, for itself, a body of facts about things, a philosophy or system of opinion about the world, an ethic to guide its corporate life and ensure the common good, a corpus of ideas to direct their imitation and expression of the multiform beauty that they see in the world.

Every people, therefore, possesses, in however rudimentary a form, its Science, its *Weltbild*, its Mores, its Aesthetic. It is all this, taken together, that we call the tradition of a people, the culture of a people.

Culture is to a nation like a soul to a man, that is, the principle of unity, of life and continuity.

A nation, therefore, is not merely so many millions of people inhabiting so many thousands of square miles and held together by the precarious grip of an external agent like a government.

A nation, thanks to its culture, is also, and essentially, a unit of thought and feeling.

Now and again, each community throws up, from among its masses, individuals with special gifts of head and heart and hand, individuals who, because they see farther and deeper into themselves and into their world, individuals who, because they feel more keenly, more rudely, the thrill of communal joy, the shock of communal tragedy, individuals who, because they are gifted with language of lasting beauty, become, as it were, the mouthpiece of the *Zeitgeist*.

And thus it happens that, when these geniuses, these scientists, writers and artists kneaded and leavened by the spirit of the times, express their inmost selves, they speak genuinely, automatically, for their nation and generation.

The mission of Africa's men of science and letters and art, today, is to salvage what can still be salvaged from our disparate, disintegrating, fast-disappearing past, to observe the forces, the influences working on their generation, to observe the reaction of the said generation to the said forces, to see what the dialectic of need commands us to borrow from the stranger, and then to weld these diverse elements together so that, from this welding, may evolve one dynamic culture for the African peoples.

Men fit for this mission are the crying need of the hour.

But they cannot be turned out at will like robots from a factory. For genius is like the spirit which "breathes where he wills". The most that we can do is to create the conditions which will enable such genius to strike root and flourish and come into flower, when it happens to sprout up among us.

If the Emperor Augustus came back to life and was asked what he considered his most enduring achievement, he would undoubtedly say that it was that he helped literature to blossom and bloom, that he created the conditions in which a Horace, a Virgil could thrive. For the Augustan Empire is gone, but Virgil and Horace endure till today.

If Alexander the Great were asked what he considered his greatest privilege, I would not be surprised if he made answer that it was to have had Aristotle for his teacher. For the glory that was Greece is gone, but Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Sophocles, have been living, dynamic, cultural forces from their own day to this.

Augustus would regret today, surely, if, for some dim-sighted motive or other, he had marred Virgil and Horace instead of helping to make them.

No country however god-forsaken and forlorn is without its share of talent. Even when the prospect is bleakest, seeds of it are there, waiting for the ground to be broken and manured and watered.

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear :
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
Some village Hampden that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

It would be a misfortune for any country if a Milton from among its children went down mute into his grave, a crime, if it was his country itself that marred him.

In so far as culture is concerned, the policy of those responsible for the public welfare should be what Mao proclaimed at a rare moment, when the philosopher-poet in him took over from the politician :

Let a hundred flowers bloom !

That is why the Ministry of National Education deserves our deepest thanks for the impulse it has given to the launching of this cultural periodical.

Were I asked to suggest a motto for this Review, to lay down the principles that should guide those who undertake to contribute to its columns, I would have no hesitation whatsoever ; I have already made these principles the burden of this article, namely, the transcendental principles of being : *Verum, Bonum, Pulchrum* - the True, the Good and the Beautiful.

If by saying that a man tells the truth, nothing more is meant than that he speaks his mind, such a definition would equate truth merely with sincerity and would be only one third correct. For a man can be profoundly sincere and still be mistaken about the facts. Truth has not only a moral, but also a logical and an ontological aspect, that is, it should exist not only in expression, but also in the mind and in things.

The truth of a thing in itself is that the said thing should correspond to the nature that it is supposed to have. In this sense, a false tooth is not a tooth, an imitation rose is not a rose.

The mind possesses the truth, if what it thinks about a thing agrees with what that thing is in itself.

For truth to be complete, therefore, in any given case, there must be agreement between expression and thought, thought and thing.

In practice, then, before a person, who wants to be wholly truthful, makes a statement, especially in an important affair, he will first of all exclude doubt and error and put his mind in certi-

tude, by leaving no stone unturned to get the facts. For an assertion in science is like a statement in court in the sense that it must bear the brunt of cross-examination and be borne out by objective evidence.

In writing for this Review, we will aim, therefore, at soundness of doctrine and, for sound doctrine, research is imperative.

Truth, as a basic quality of things, belongs to their being : if a thing is, if it exists, it is true. Goodness, as an objective property of being, presupposes truth and refers to the make-up of things, to their constitution : if a thing has all the parts and qualities that it should have, if it possesses them in full measure, it is good ; if not, it is bad, that is, faulty, deficient, lacking in something essential. The opposite of objective goodness, therefore, is defect, the absence of something that ought to be there.

It is therefore imperative, first, that subjects for these columns should be treated fully, not in the sense that they should of necessity be treated at length, but in the sense that no facts that belong to the very essence of the subject should be held back. It is therefore imperative, secondly, that subjects for these columns should not be twisted to serve any partisan purpose.

For this Review is founded on the principle that it shall serve but culture, and serve it alone, and serve it impartially, and serve it scientifically ; that it shall, on no account, be made the mouth-piece of any particular interest or persuasion.

Truth and goodness demand for this Review soundness of doctrine ; and soundness of doctrine demands, in its turn, intellectual honesty.

Beauty presupposes truth and goodness and, as an objective property of being, it refers to shape, to form. For it to exist in any thing, that thing must attain its fullest development. Things dimunitive, stunted or dwarfish cannot be beautiful, therefore.

Furthermore, beauty demands that, in the arrangement of the parts of the said thing, there should be that order that is variously referred to as proportion, symmetry, harmony. Things lopsided, ungainly, incongruous, grotesque, discordant, cannot be beautiful.

Beauty demands, lastly, that the thing in question should radiate brightness, splendour, nobleness. Things dull and dreary, slovenly, mean, things lacking in physical or moral lustre, cannot be beautiful.

The test for things beautiful is that they give joy to the sight, to the sight of the mind as well as to the sight of the eyes.

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

An elementary deduction from this, then, is that contributions to these columns should possess that solidity of substance, that correctness of form and that felicity of phrase that impress and please. Therefore, nothing vacuous, nothing shabby or slovenly, nothing that jars on ear and eye.

But we would be short-sighted and narrow if we aimed at nothing more than to pander merely to pleasure. Our aim should be levelled rather at the creation of that beauty which not only pleases but holds spell-bound and breathless, that beauty which draws irresistibly to itself and drives to action, to imitation.

For the central aim in all our efforts in these columns should be to rouse Cameroonian to the urgent need for a culture with its roots deep in this soil, to make them cease to be mere consumers of cultural nourishment dished to them by the stranger and become, themselves — makers of things true and good and beautiful, creators of culture scientists, writers, artists. We should hold up to their gaze, not the beauty that merely tickles, but beauty charged with power ; like the beauty of a Niagara ; like the beauty of a tiger, like the beauty of a jet air-liner.

When you see that masterpiece of shape and power sweeping through the skies, you see concrete proof that such beauty exists not only in things material but also in the realm of thought ; a thing so beautiful, so powerful can only have sprung from ideas equally beautiful, equally powerful. For it must never be forgotten that any such thing, however tremendous its size, took birth as a dimensionless, imponderable idea in somebody's mind. Dimensionless and imponderable indeed, but tremendously powerful notwithstanding.

Beauty charged with power, therefore, is found in embodied being, found in the world of ideas. It also exists in the moral order, that is, in the character of men, in the achievements of the world's great souls and heroes.

When you see a Socrates at his trial, serene and joyful in the presence of injury and death and the lamentations of his friends, you see beauty and power in human character — a hero victorious over fate.

In brief, therefore, our purpose should be to goad and rouse our country's youth to aim at the very highest and best in everything they undertake to achieve — scientific learning, technical know-how, artistic skill, literary skill, and, most important of all, a manly, noble character. We should get it driven deep into their minds, as Dr. Aggrey of Ghana was wont to say, that

Only the best is good enough for Africa.

We should never tire of telling them what an English nobleman once told a group of students in the University of Aberdeen :

Keep always with you,
wherever you course may lie,
the company of great thoughts,
the inspiration of great ideals,
the example of great achievements,
the consolation of great failures ;
thus equipped you can face,
without perturbation,
the buffets of circumstance,
the caprice of fortune
or the inscrutable vicissitudes of life.

This is not just pious talk. It is a categorical imperative, it is sanest wisdom for a country like ours that is young and poor, with all its tasks still undone. Has such a country not the right to call upon its youth for the highest and best in effort and sacrifice ?

For think of this : What will happen to this country if our average citizen sets his ambition on nothing higher than a Mercedes-Benz or a comfortable post from which his inflated ego can lord it over the rest of his less fortunate brethren ?

And yet, youth is essentially generous, and full of lofty ideals, and, where two roads open before them, a high road and a low road, the chances are that they will flock to the high and abandon the low.

When a greater and more ennobling enterprise is on foot, said the Irish patriot, James Fintan Lalor, when a greater and more ennobling enterprise is on foot, every inferior and feebler project or proceeding will soon be left in the hands of old women, of dastards, imposters, swindlers, and imbeciles. All the strength and manhood of the nation — all the courage, energies, and ambition — all the passion, heroism, and chivalry — all the strong men and strong minds, — all those that make revolutions will quickly desert it, and throw themselves into the greater movement, throng into the larger and loftier undertaking, and flock round the banner that flies nearest the sky. There go the young, the gallant, the gifted, the daring ; and there, too, go the wise. For wisdom knows that in national action littleness is more fatal than the wildest rashness ; that greatness of object is essential to greatness of effort, strength, and success.

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