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Indian Constitutional Reform

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THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

JULY 1937

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JULY : 1937

THE VICISSITUDES OF THE CONGRESS

By I. D.

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PORTRAIT-PAINTING IN LITERATURE - - - - -	M. Chalapati Rau
THE LAST SACK OF CHITOR - - - - -	Shri Ram Sharma
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OEUVRE

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

[This Diary Leaf is dedicated by Prof. de Roerich to the opening of the Hall in the Allahabad Municipal Museum in honour of Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar. Incidentally, the misinterpreted word "oeuvre" is beautifully affirmed in this short literary piece.]

A clear yet at the same time an almost untranslatable French word. One can say "creative work", yet for all that one has to be agreed in the understanding in which the word *œuvre* has entered from the French literature.

About art in all its manifestations people are accustomed to judge very light-mindedly. Some have read two verses and already speak with authority about the poet. Some have seen three or four pictures or reproductions of pictures and already pass judgment on the artist. From one novel they fix the position of a writer. One book of sketches is enough for an irrevocable opinion over a cup of tea.

More than once has been noted in literature that the celebrated "cup of tea" binds one to nothing. And perhaps the pronouncements at the table likewise are not binding, yet in the meantime they often have very profound consequences. In such conversations over a "cup of tea", people do not think about the fact that the separate productions are only as the petals of the entire *œuvre*. Even an experienced horti-culturist or botanist would hardly undertake to form a judgment about an entire plant from a single petal of its blossom.

Each one has had occasion to listen to most definite

opinions about an author, yet it proved upon verification, that only some one volume of all his writings had been read by the speaker. Not to mention those in general who do not take the trouble to do any reading themselves, but pronounce their judgments according to the newspaper critiques. But the concept *œuvre*, the concept of all a person's creative work, should be set forth with special clearness. Not only a full acquaintance with all the creativeness of the author is needed, but for making a just estimate it is necessary also to assimilate his productions in the chronological order of their creation.

The whole creative work—it is like a necklace, put together in a definite order. Each production expresses this or that psychological moment of the creator. The life of the artist has been composed of such moments. In order to understand a result, one must know the cause. One needs to understand why such and such a sequence of creation took place. Whatever external or internal circumstances were stratified and produced fragments of the whole creativeness, this would mean to form an opinion about the design of a necklace from merely one or two links of it.

In all kinds of creativeness—in literature, in music, in the graphic arts—everywhere an attentive and careful correlation is decidedly necessary. Each one has had occasion to read and to hear, how much has been attributed to authors, which was entirely alien to them, by quoting snatches from their uninterrupted train of thought. You know that not only casual people take it upon themselves to pass judgment. In each domain dwells a self-appointed judge.

I recall how in the law faculty the students were considering how they would apply their assimilated knowledge. One who was attracted to the bar wished to be an adminis-

trator; another aspired to the role of prosecutor; but a third, a fun-loving student, said: "For my part, it would certainly suit me to pass judgment on all of you." Who knows, perhaps, this jest really impelled him to a juridical career, for which in the last analysis he had no special propensities.

The same happens in many professions; in judgments about creativeness much is contrived completely accidentally. But from this casualness often springs an almost irreparable consequence.

It is said that the valuation by critics changes three times in a century, that is, by generations. To observe these deviations of evaluations is very instructive. How many irrelevant considerations will influence public opinion. Competition of publishers or greed of the dealers in artistic productions, finally, any of the various forms of envy and enmity are so complexly reflected in appraisals, that for the future investigator-historian it is often completely impossible to discriminate. A great number of examples of this could be adduced.

Let us recall how two competing publishers tried to disparage an author whom they had in view, in order to secure more cheaply the right of publishing his work. You know that such specific belittlements are to be found in any annals. Let us recall how a certain dealer in pictures tried by all means to depreciate for a time the value of an artist, with the end in view of buying up enough of his productions and then commissioning someone to resurrect anew the forgotten or discredited artist.

Let us not bring up certain episodes out of the world of collectors, when competition led these people to most unworthy conduct. It is only important to remember that appraisals of creative work are singularly tortuous and personal. We recollect how a certain music lover

warned a well-known musician not to play on a particular day because an influential critic had a toothache. But when to all these vital fortuities there is united the wish in general not to acquaint oneself with a man's entire *œuvre*, then one's situation becomes truly tragic.

Let us recall any prolific writer. Can one form a judgment about him without knowing the sequence of all his works? One can, indeed, estimate separate productions of the author, but then this will be an opinion which concerns the production itself but not all the man's creative *œuvre*. It is not alone the biography of a great personality, for it is still more valuable to follow the accumulation of creative power and all the paths of its expression. Thus once again we see how significant in its meaning is the word *œuvre*. It impels one to reflect particularly broadly, it impels one to outline the entire manifestation and comprehensively to examine its influence and consequence.

History, passing from personal *œuvre*, appraises also the *œuvre* of an entire nation, of a whole epoch. If the historian does not teach himself in the small and accessible, then by what means can he draw near to and encompass broad problems? Before thinking about such comprehensive tasks it is necessary to reflect about conscientious judgments of parts, of individuals. He who sets himself the task of always staying within the bounds of truth, learns to discriminate in all fortuities and to compare causes and effects carefully. It is a pleasure to rejoice at the whole beautifully composed necklace in which are found many natural colors in unexpected combinations.

Just now, when there is so much destruction and upheaval, each clear, honest exhaustive understanding of a subject will be an especially needed contemporary task. We have just read how Stokowski has definitely expressed himself about

the harm of mechanical music for true creativeness. Stokowski has justly reminded that even between the very vibrations transmitted directly or mechanically there is an enormous difference. Certain instruments are generally imperceptible in mechanical transmission.

In a time when music and scenic design and the graphic arts have been subjected to mechanisation, precisely then must the appraisals of creativeness be still more precise, profound, and well-grounded. At this very moment, when it is the modern practice to strive for the brief, the staccato, and the casual, it is especially necessary to aspire to evaluations on the basis of the entire *œuvre*.

Though it is difficult to translate, the word *œuvre* is a very expressive one.

We rejoiced greatly to hear from our friend Pandit Braj Mohan Vyas about the inauguration of a special hall in the Allahabad Municipal Museum in honour of India's great artist, Asit Kumar Haldar. Quite recently, the Rev. Rahula Sankrityayana, enthusiastically described to us his visit to the Allahabad Museum with its addition of new collections.

Pandit Vyas, having dedicated a new hall to Asit Kumar Haldar acts precisely along the line of progressive modern thought. Exactly when exhibiting entire series of creative works we can apply the term *œuvre*,—in other words, we can already express our real valuation.

Speaking of the *œuvre* of Asit Kumar Haldar we can see not only a successful transmutation of India's ancient traditions, but also the broad scale of the artist's creativeness, which raises his *œuvre* above the modern level. Such a harmonious combination is rare and should be greatly appreciated. If we shall remember that besides his powerful creativeness Haldar is also an esteemed and inspiring teacher,

we shall find that type of artists who throughout the entire history of art stand out as great magnets and beacons.

In the June issue of the "Modern Review" we have read Gangoly's beautiful appreciation of the *œuvre* of another great artist of India—Nanda Lal Bose. Gangoly who is such a refined connoisseur and an inborn art critic, most powerfully and callingly dwells on "the tragic grandeur" of the great artist—"the interpreter of the spiritual significance of Indian Art". Indeed, the mentioned grand tragedy exists, but it depends upon the entire nation that it should be transmuted into great joy.

Let it be the seal of our age to record beautiful *œuvres*, which will safeguard for the glory of the nation entire immutable images of giants of thought and beauty!

The (constitutional) crisis has had the effect of bringing Mr. Gandhi once more into the forefront of Indian politics, and there are many who believe that he is not anxious to see the organisation drift towards the extremist policy sponsored by Pandit Nehru. Others contend that he is in agreement with Pandit Nehru about the purpose, but parts company with him over methods.

—*The Round Table*.

Ultimately the true basis of Liberalism must remain the preservation of the idea of freedom in all its forms: freedom of conscience, of speech, of trade and of the individual. Now that freedom is everywhere threatened, the party must restate its creed with confidence and invoke the support of the rising generation.

—*The Manchester Guardian*.