

*Study of Man* By A.C. Harwood

RUDOLF STEINER'S lectures to the teachers of the Waldorf School at its foundation have just been published in English under the above title. They deal with man as a threefold being of body, soul and spirit, and the being of man is considered in turn from these three aspects. The lectures begin with a survey of man from the aspect of the soul, and I think that Dr. Steiner chose this entry both because childhood is essentially an experience of the soul, and because the soul, standing between the other two and drawing its experiences partly from the body and partly from the spirit, is the best gateway to an understanding of the Trinity in human nature. The first lecture alone will convince anyone who reads it that there is here a psychology quite unlike anything which is taught in the modern world. In one sense the first lecture especially may be said to answer the question, What is education for? You may think of all the answers that might be given to that question by educators to-day; to make good citizens; or to make good men; or to fit a child to earn his living; or to teach him to appreciate the cultural inheritance to which he is born. But when you have thought of them all (and they are very numerous) you will come nowhere near the answer which Dr. Steiner gave to the group of teachers who were about to receive the children into his first school. It is: to teach the children how to breathe properly. It is indeed an answer to take the breath away. .

There are perhaps two interpretations of this advice which might be found in the world to-day. From the West would come the physical interpretation of such breathing exercises as are sometimes given even to quite young children; from the East would come the mystical interpretation of Yogi, by which the soul overcomes the body and wins spiritual experiences. Dr. Steiner does not mean either of these. He leads you instead into what might almost be called a Meditation on breathing. Nor does this mean that you are to observe the process of breathing, though Meditation might certainly include that. But observation takes you only through a series of processes. If you observe a leaf falling you follow its course from the tree to the ground, you notice the nature of its flight in the air, its colour, texture, etc. But if you meditate on a falling leaf your mind will take you to all other experiences which have the same gesture or quality as the leaf in its fall. So it is with breathing. There are many processes in life, which we do not call breathing, but which, in their essence, are as much breathing as the systole and diastole as of the lung. For instance, Joy and Sorrow, Laughing and Weeping are a breathing of the soul-and become even a breathing of the body. We breathe out in joy, we go into an ecstasy, we stand outside ourselves. In sorrow we are contracted, we go into ourselves, we lose our connection with the out side world. Laughing empties our lungs, we laugh on the out breath; but we cry on the in breath; though it comes painfully and brokenly, we are always drawing our breath into our own lungs in the act of weeping. The children in the Bible complained to their companions that they had piped to them and they had not danced, and they had mourned with them and they had not wept. They could not understand those who did not enjoy the healthy breathing of the soul. The children who learn this breathing will draw their physical breath rightly as well. For the whole rhythmical system in man is the expression of the life of soul. In ancient times the soul could properly be approached through the body. It is one of the great changes in evolution that the body should now be approached through the soul. .

Then there is the larger rhythm of night and day, which is breathing both of the earth and of the soul. In the daytime children are breathing in their experiences; even sense perception is a form of breathing. But when they are asleep at night they take those experiences into the spiritual world where they breathe them out again. But the spiritual world cannot receive all experiences, and if the children bring into sleep things that it cannot accept, then comes something like a congestion of the out breath. In waking life the physical body and the life forces are sustained and strengthened by high spiritual Powers-those which in Christian terms are called the Archai and Archangels-but at night, when the-soul leaves- the body, this support is withdrawn. It is then a question of whether the Angel can sustain the thoughts and experiences which the soul takes with it into sleep. The old habit of saying a prayer before sleeping was meant to prepare the soul to bring the right thoughts into the spiritual world. But the most important thing is whether the children have gained during the day thoughts and pictures of the world which are acceptable to the spiritual Powers who receive the soul in sleep. This form of out breathing is conditioned by their parents and teachers.

A still greater rhythm of breathing is that of birth and death. Birth is incarnation, breathing in: death is excarnation, breathing out. Even physically the first breath we take is breathing in, while the spirit leaves the body at death on the out breath. It is natural, then, for a child to cry at birth, because it is an inbreathing process. If life is rightly lived, death should be the opposite. We should leave the body, not perhaps laughing, but at least with joy in our hearts. Sir William Jones, one of the early orientalisists of the eighteenth century, has given the perfect expression to this double polarity of birth and tears, joy and death.

On parent knees, a naked new-born child,  
Weeping thou sat'st, while all around thee smiled,  
So *live*, that sinking to thy life's last sleep  
Calm thou may'st smile, while all around thee weep.

It is perhaps significant that it was an orientalist who wrote these lines, in which birth and death are united in such exquisite contrast. In the ancient East, and even into the age of the Greeks, birth was as much considered as death, and the incarnation of the soul was no less a part of common philosophy than its departure at death. Reincarnation was the foundation-stone of the Hindu conception of the soul, and Plato allows it to appear at the end of his greatest work, the *Republic*, in the culminating myth of Er, the soldier who was left for dead on the field of battle and on his recovery could describe how he had seen the journey of souls after death, and their choice of a new lot in life for their rebirth. It was one of the necessities of evolution that for many hundreds of years the thought of man about the soul should centre itself only on the life after death, while life before birth was almost entirely disregarded. From the time of Christ this was true of pagan and Christian alike. The Emperor Hadrian did not speculate as to where his little wandering soul had come from; he was interested in where it was going to.

Animula vagula blandula,  
Hospes comesque corporis,  
Quae nunc abibis in loca,  
Pallidula rigid a nudula,  
Nec ut soles dabis ioca.

But the Christian preoccupation with death rather than birth became more and more marked. By the fifteenth century men were giving all their wealth to endow chantries where mass might be said in perpetuity for the good of their souls; and though in the new age there were some sensitive spirits who experienced their own birth and childhood as a process of "coming down"—the mystics and poets like Traherne and Vaughan—the great preoccupation with death continued, and every other hymn of the nineteenth century ended with a reference to death (*piano*) and (*fortissimo*) to the entry of the soul into Heaven.

This was a necessity in the age when man was finding his ego through the experience of life on earth. But there was a real egotism in thinking that my duty on earth is to prepare myself for eternal happiness in heaven. Philosophically also the preoccupation with death lent strength to the view that the mind at birth is a *tabula rasa*, that man is born—out of nothing and acquires all his experiences through sense perception—a view which lies behind the method of all modern natural science. But if birth is looked on as the high moment of incarnation and reincarnation (though this is in itself a gradual process) quite other views will be taken of life. You live in order to make good past misdeeds, to pay back to others what you owe, *you* share in the responsibility for the conditions of life which you find on the earth. And it will make a great difference, not only to you, but to the whole spiritual world what thoughts and impulses you take with you through the gate of death no less than through the gate of sleep. You make the balance between past, present and future.

Then from a right consideration of birth and death you will come to a new psychology, where the dimensions of time reveal themselves in their true relation to the soul. Most people imagine that they live only in the present, that the past is something which has disappeared and the future is something which does not exist. It is true that certain schools of thought are questioning this view to day, but their speculations have not yet had much influence on practical psychology. But the truth is that powers from the past and from the future are always flowing into the soul at every moment of our lives. Every time we *think*, we are using powers which flow into our life from before birth. If we are not really able to think about the future at all except (as we all do) in terms of the past, it is because the forces of thinking itself flow in from the world before birth. But every time we *will* we are calling into ourselves forces from the future. That is why our deeds of will carry their effects so far beyond themselves. *Thinking* has an image character, it is reflection, it is something which we breathe in from before birth. *Willing* has a seed character, it draws the future into itself, as the seed draws the forces which will build and form the flower. When we will we commit ourselves to the stream which flows on beyond our death. Between the two poles lies the realm of *feeling*, the essential kingdom of the soul. So that in each moment of life the soul breathes in and breathes out the past and the future. It is a rich experience.

With such thoughts as these Rudolf Steiner inaugurated the Study of Man for the teachers of his first school. It may be possible in future articles to deal with some of the manifold sketches from which finally emerges the masterpiece of Man. But it will be better if this brief gloss on the breathing of man will encourage some readers to study the lectures for themselves. They will discover what it is to conceive of man again as a microcosm reflecting in himself all the forces and powers of the universe—"in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God, the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals."