

Again, "It follows that we shall be taking the religious point of view, if we are atheists whose thinking is based on the assumption that all religions are untrue . . . no one can wholly escape the religious point of view, because in the end one either believes or disbelieves"; or "the tendency in some quarters to reduce theology to such principles as a child can understand or a Socinian accept, is itself indicative of cultural debility." Or take the following: "Culture-consciousness as a means of uniting a nation against other nations was first exploited by the late rulers of Germany." (page 90); "the increasing assertion of one dominant Muscovite culture . . . the Russians have been the first modern people to practise the political direction of culture consciously." (page 93).

WELL, what is the general theme?—for the book is statement rather than enquiry. Disentangling it as well as one can, one finds something like this: Culture is everything that makes a society a society. There is a culture of the individual and of the group and of the region as well as of the whole society. The cultures of groups or classes, on different levels, make up the culture of society. The appropriate culture of each stratum is of equal importance. The culture of the highest level is of particular importance. Culture is religion, culture depends upon religion, culture is an incarnation of religion, culture is inconceivable without religion, there is such a thing as a culture severed from religion. The highest culture would be the culture of a truly Christian society. Culture cannot be taught, it must be inherited: "We cannot directly set about to create or improve culture." A desirable culture is a class culture; an élite may be useful for government or other specialised functions, but it must not be confused with an upper class. A uniform culture over the whole of society is impossible, and it is an error to aim at it by education. Education should help to preserve the class and to select the élite. Modern educational practice and philosophy are wrong, for they aim at equality of rights and opportunity, and imply a disintegrated society. The highest culture depends on inequality and privilege, and privilege should be inherited. There are "superior political grades" of society. Diversity of cultures, within the whole culture, and diversity of sect, is valuable. Christian re-union may under certain circumstances accelerate and confirm the general lowering of culture.

Now I do not want to be taken as guying the book, for it is a sincere book and it does say a number of true things and some valuable things as well as a number of confused and contradictory things. But I do not think that, really, it has much to contribute to a valid contemporary theory of culture. The trouble is, that Mr. Eliot has set out to give strict definition to one of the loosest-fitting of all words. He was not unaware of the dangers of trying to impose a classical austerity upon this uncertain, this embarrassing, this dubiously vagrant conception. His deliberately austere manner does not conceal the fact that the dangers have had their way with him. He has not succeeded in manoeuvring into even verbal reconciliation anthropology and the older universities, the Church of England and the social service state. (And I am quite certain that a study of the religious advertisements in the Saturday editions of our newspapers would convince him of our own cultural delinquency—

though not many of them are Socinian; for there surely we have a free and easy equalitarianism.)

Let us, therefore, take the book as a progress report. It needs re-thinking and re-stating. The poet, animated by a sense of duty, has after all written a political tract. There is indeed something nostalgic about Mr. Eliot; he wishes to define permanent values, but somehow he has got mixed up in the 18th Century. True, that is not a century that we can afford to despise. Culture lies in assimilation rather than in contempt. The fact nevertheless is incontrovertible, the 18th Century is gone. To attempt to revive its hierarchical civilisation would be as unwise as it would be vain.

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