

TRAVELS OF A PHILOSOPHER

A REVIEW

COUNT Hermann Keyserling was born in 1880 in Raykull, Esthonia, which is in the present Czechoslovakia. He was educated by tutors, in Russian schools and at Heidelberg, where, following in the footsteps of his distinguished father, he studied geology and other natural sciences. At twenty-two he elected to study philosophy and soon attached himself to that school of thought known as the Vitalistic (as opposed to the Mechanistic) theory. The idea of personal perfection as opposed to that of professional efficiency is Keyserling's great contribution to the schools of philosophy, and his ruling passion is to prove to himself the truth of this theory.

In 1903 Keyserling left Vienna to live in Paris. From Paris he often visited England, becoming acquainted with the British schools of philosophy. His stay in France was devoted to study and writing. The French regarded Keyserling as the most charming and versatile scholar of the day, saying that he not only had a great abundance of learning and ideas but, what was rarer, expressed himself with accomplished art, "is extraordinarily entertaining, making brilliant with wit and satire one of the most serious minds the world has ever known."

In 1905 as a result of the Russian Revolution Keyserling lost his fortune. For two years he thought himself penniless. In 1908 he inherited his father's estate and title. He returned to Raykull, becoming deeply interested in farming and directing the work on his vast lands; at the same time he kept in touch with his philosopher friends Weber, Bergson, Russell, Balfour, Lord Haldane and others.

In 1911 Count Keyserling started on his

journey around the world, the outcome of which is *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*. The period of 1912 to 1918 was spent in writing the *Diary*. Volume one was with his publisher in Berlin when the World War broke out. The author, being a Russian subject—his estates were partly in Russia—had no way of communicating with Germany. During the war Keyserling devoted his time to writing volume two of the *Diary*. His object in writing was to find a means of self-realization. This desire was so strong that at one time he contemplated retiring into a Korean monastery.

The war itself had little effect on Keyserling. He used those years for meditation and thought. In 1918 he was again deprived of his estates, beginning life anew as a refugee on German soil. In 1919 he married a granddaughter of Bismark.

Keyserling thought his *Diary* would not be of interest to people of the present day. The extraordinary success of his work in Germany disproved this, and he was urged to establish the School of Wisdom at Barmstart where he now lives and lectures to classes from all parts of the world. English scholars have called Keyserling "one of the great ones of the earth." The aim of the School of Wisdom is to regenerate mankind on the new basis created by the war, through the renewal of spiritual life. Since the *Travel Diary* brought such fame to its author throughout Europe and America, *The Book of Marriage*, *The World in the Making*, and *Europe*, called a spiritual Baedeker of Europe—have been published.

This in brief is the history of Count Keyserling's activities; his most remarkable qualities are to be found in the man himself.

Count Keyserling is six feet four inches tall. His face is fair and full of sunshine, his voice full and sympathetic. His conversation is sincere and high without the slightest touch of coldness. In his pursuit of knowledge he has climbed high; like Bach, Goethe, and Kant, he believes that the uni-

THE TRAVEL DIARY OF A PHILOSOPHER. By Count Hermann Keyserling. Translated by J. Holroyd Reece, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1929. \$5.00.

verse is not a mere machine but has deep significance; and the spirit of man is the mount of God.

His journey is the *Odyssey* of a soul rather than an account of countries through which he travels. Before starting, Keyserling asks himself why he should go and answers, "The impulse which drives me into the world is the desire for self-realization. There is no help for it. I am a metaphysician and that means I am interested in the world's potentialities, not in its actualities."

We speak very glibly of philosophy, when most of us are ignorant of the theologies of the world. Philosophy is of comparatively recent origin, while religion is as old as humanity itself. By reflecting upon itself religion becomes theology; theology by reflecting upon itself becomes philosophy.

It has not seemed irrelevant thus to present this biography which I have disengaged from the diary itself so that we may the better follow this spiritual Proteus through his journey.

Following one of the great trade routes, Count Keyserling went through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, stopping long enough at Aden to conclude "the black continent possesses the greatest creative power of any in the world. Africa remains African forever in mind and spirit." He thinks the beautiful Arabs have very little intelligence.

His first long stop is at Ceylon. Here in the tropics he lets his soul vegetate, as do the natives. He says the only creative impulse in the inhabitants is their longing to escape this world. "Indeed," he says, "where nothing is left to be desired, where abundance literally jumps from the soil and the humming of thousands of insects among the palms exhausts the will, there is nothing else to do but to long for Nirvana."

From Ceylon, the land of lions and elephants, Keyserling goes to India. The greater part of volume one is an account of his soul experiences as he passes from atmosphere to atmosphere, partaking of

philosophy after philosophy, drinking in the wisdom of the sages. He sees the dancers in the temples and is greatly impressed. He says, "They moved in front of me to the accompaniment of that strange orchestra which always plays during holy ceremonies, in semi-darkness; and the longer they danced the more did they fascinate me. The story goes that Nana Sahib, after he had ordered the massacre of the English prisoners, sent for four Nautch girls and watched their flowing movements during the whole night. I used to think that such a choice of relaxation, and such endurance, required a special temperament. But today I know that mere understanding is sufficient; I, too, in the presence of these girls, lost all consciousness of time and found happiness. The idea underlying these dances has little in common with that which underlies ours. It lacks all great broad lines; it lacks every composition which may be said to have a beginning and an end. The movements never signify more than a transient ripple on smooth water. The glittering garments veil and soften the mobile play of muscles. The bodies are resolved into golden waves in which their jewels are mirrored like stars. As an art no matter how mobile it may be the dance expresses no accelerating motive; for this reason one can watch it ceaselessly without fatigue. This is the significance of the Indian dance. It is the same significance that underlies all Indian manifestations, only the Nautch makes it unusually evident. Hindu art alone has perhaps succeeded in manifesting invisible things in the visible world. One single dancing Shiva embodies more of the essence of divinity than a whole army of Olympians."

At Adyar Keyserling visits Mrs. Annie Besant in the magnificent headquarters of the Theosophical Society. He values Mrs. Besant and the Theosophists highly because it was they who revealed the wisdom of the East to the West. The manner in which they have revealed it he disapproves, feel-

16

ing that they stress the unimportant and miss altogether the real significance of the Indians.

We can consider only a few of the many places in India made vital by Keyserling. Agra is of great interest because here is the most beautiful work of architecture in the world. Volumes upon volumes have been written about the Taj Mahal, but for me, at any rate, Count Keyserling has added a new significance to this strange and perfect jewel of loveliness. Architecture is a philosophical art. Goethe did architecture a great injustice when he called it "frozen music." There is no art save music alone that can be so warmly human, so spiritually alive as thought translated into buildings, or architecture.

For Keyserling the philosopher the Taj Mahal rejoiced the very foundations of his truth-seeking soul. He connects the wonderful Mogul art with the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, concluding that "divine grace" was back of the "spiritual influx" which made possible the spiritually perfect Taj Mahal as well as some of the great masters of Florence.

In Benares, which he calls holy, he laments the fact that Europe no longer has any really sacred places.

Keyserling's account of his feelings on beholding the great Himalayas comes as near being abstract mind, pure soul, as a Bach fugue.

In Calcutta Count Keyserling visits the Tagores. "It was a memorable time," he says, "the noble figures of the Tagores with delicate spiritual faces, their picturesquely folded togas fitted into the lofty hall, hung with its ancient paintings. Abendranath the painter was like the type who once was an ornament to Alexandria. Rabindranath the poet impressed me like a guest from a higher, more spiritual world. Never have I seen such spiritualized substance of soul condensed into one man."

From Calcutta Count Keyserling goes

across the Bay of Bengal to Rangoon and on to Singapore where, because of illness, he had to take heed of his body, but he uses this time to discuss Indian Yoga and plant life, saying, "Once more I realize that from anyone who could understand plants perfectly, life would no longer hold any secrets."

He is glad to leave the tropics and even before arriving in Hongkong he begins to transform himself into a man of vision in order to be in harmony with the alert Chinese mentality.

It is unfortunate that he arrives in Canton during the revolution, for China is the land of everlasting peace and order. But he gets a better knowledge of the Chinese attitude toward war. "What disturbs me more," he says, "was the impassiveness of the people. The calm of the Indians does not surprise me, nor that of the Turks; the former lack vitality and energy, and the latter are phlegmatic by temperament, but the Chinese are not phlegmatic at all no matter how calmly they demean themselves, and they are vital to the tips of their fingers. Neither as individuals nor as a nation do they seem to be capable of exhaustion. In India the people disappoint me; they are less than their literature. What is highest and profoundest in them has found expression in abstract thought. The vital Chinese on the other hand are more than their wisdom, almost more than their classic literature. I am beginning to understand Confucianism. . . . Every Chinaman demonstrates in his life the eternal truth which *our* greatest men have preached to deaf ears, namely, that happiness is a question of inner attitude, and that it is not dependent upon external circumstances as such. *We* are masters of nature, but how dearly we have paid for this achievement! We have transferred the problem of happiness to the external world, and have thus condemned ourselves to helpless misery until we change our ways. Every Chinaman, no matter how he thinks or how he acts, demonstrates a

deep philosophy of life. He counts the outer world as something truly external, and seeks essentials in other dimensions. In Europe only women do this; they are by far the profounder philosophers of life."

"How perfect the courtesy of the cultured Chinaman! It is a delight to have intercourse with him. The Chinaman has perhaps the profoundest of all natures. No one is rooted so deeply in the order of nature, no one so essentially normal. In order to do justice to the Chinese one must survey the fundamental vital power of their character; their courtesy, with their grandeur of nature."

From Canton the beautiful to Peking the home of "The Temple of Heaven." The Chinese are less individual than we are. The man of the future will probably be like the Chinese. "The power of memory of the Chinese is overwhelming; it might almost be defined as the incapacity to forget. China impressed Keyserling more than any other country, but he gained less, because of its too human life. It lacked for him the stimulating powers of a more complex people like the Indians. In China the wisdom brought from India has found expression in life. Count Keyserling is very charming among this most human of all races, and despite his great size becomes one of the boys. He visits some of the famous "gambling hells" and amuses himself with fan-tan. He reviews the army and remarks, "What quaint soldiery!" and then says that they never connect war with any kind of idealism. In Chinese literature the general is never represented as a hero, but as a ruffian or coarse churl. There is a delightful story he tells. Envoys sent from a king of barbarians to the emperor threaten him with war and conquest. The emperor knowing well the worthlessness of his own army sends for the court poet. The poet, though full of wine as usual, improvised such a fine speech describing the emperor's soldiers in such thundering and crashing terms that the enemy, on reading

the poem, fled in terror as they would from dragons riding the lightning.

Again I quote, "I am now living almost entirely like a Chinese; I have most of my meals outside the embassy. The change in itself does me good; I am convinced, if the Hindus did not eat the same dish of rice three times a day, they would not appear so stereotyped; the fact that we Europeans feel the need for variety of food has no doubt a close connection with our inventive impulses. My friends take me to those out-of-the-way gourmet restaurants which are typical of Peking as they are of Paris. Only the arrangements of the Chinese interiors possess more style. They are very tiny, generally offering a view upon the surrounding hills; the walls are covered with pictures, handwriting, and poems. Some of these inns have existed since the Ming Dynasty (1600). An atmosphere of refined culture predominates. The waiter puts the dishes together for us as a poet chooses his words. Is not a great cook a creative artist? Once we were served duck six times in succession and its preparation was so delicately varied that it did not give the effect of repetition; while I had to admire as a technical masterpiece a pickled jellyfish. How these unsubstantial creatures could be dressed is beyond me! The Chinese, of course, use materials which we are not accustomed to; every habit is a matter of convention and every adherence to habit is a limitation. Thus I am ashamed that I at first shuddered at a dish of maggots which afterwards turned out to be exceedingly delicious. If only I did not have to drink so much! But I never guess the riddles which are asked during these delightful meals of forty courses, and it is the custom of the country that he who fails to answer the riddle must drain the cup of rice wine to the dregs. Course follows upon course, riddle upon riddle and these Chinese gentlemen never tire. The solving of riddles presupposes a delicacy of mind. The solution of many of the riddles may have

to do with an unimportant quotation from the classics. How quickly they solve them! Men who know how to handle their subjects thus playfully are very scholarly, of vital minds and souls. Their expressive eyes sparkle merrily, they seem indefatigable in their carousals, and their laughter is so infectious, so seductive, that I join in even when I do not know why."

Keyserling's story of the Chinese peasants almost rivals Santayana in its poetical expression of their life and philosophy.

The Occidental Keyserling becomes satiated with Oriental fulfilment and he longs for the ecstasy of innovation.

For many reasons Japan does not seem a foreign country to us; but Keyserling has a pungent odor of truth to offer that has not heretofore been dwelt upon. His daring powers of analysis have gone deep into the causes for the Japanese way of life, where the greatness of little things may make the great things seem little, where the peasants have learned to arrange flowers and the laborers offer a salute to the rocks and waters. To the empirical school of philosophy what a wonderful textbook Japan, the Land of Cherry Blossoms, must be! The Japanese owe their charm to Chinese schooling. Their inner life takes place in sensibility. The ruling passion of the Japanese is their intense love of country; their profoundest qualities are expressed in patriotism. Keyserling praises the wonderful beauty of their gardens and says:

"While I rest in these magical gardens, I am reading *Lady Muraski*, which gives such a perfect picture of the life of princes of Japan; this quality of refinement no court of the West has ever known; nor probably any court in China. What characterizes this culture is a relation which was only possible in Japan; between the animal-like intuition for sensuous phenomena and their extreme artistic elaboration. When Prince Jengi enjoyed the mood of a moonlight scene he did not dream like a Persian poet: he was attentive like a beast of prey

lying on the watch, but he felt what he observed as an exquisitely sensitive aesthete."

Japan Keyserling thinks is esthetically the most charming country. Under the influence of Japan's magic he, "the brooding monk of Europe," turns epicurean and amateur of art. "Before I had seen a Japanese dancing festival I would never have dreamt," he says, "that rhythms as perfect as Byzantine mosaics could be presented by living beings. The lute players on the right, the drummers on the left, seated in identical attitudes, line the amphitheatre. They carry out identical movements in uniform time, and form together a living frieze of perfect rhythmic unity. The Geishas, who performed their character dances, produce the effect of angels in mediæval pictures of Paradise. I felt as though I was being enlarged."

To do justice to Count Keyserling and Japan one should quote all he has to say, but time forbids; we must with him embark on the Pacific for the New World!

In Honolulu and other places in the Hawaiian Islands the great natural wonders remind him of the old heroic sagas; he thinks the natives are "like those in mythology, warm-hearted, and careless, light-minded and good, fritting away their life from feast to feast; yet in war cruel and merciless. The Gods of Olympus were not different." For a short time he tarries in this land of sensuous delight feeling the impulses of desire and love.

Count Keyserling sails for America. He has like many Europeans and especially the Austrian aristocrat, a horror of the United States. But realizing that his prejudices are due to faulty adjustments of theories, he schools himself in making mental readjustments. During his week from Honolulu to San Francisco he loses his ego in the immensities and arrives in San Francisco with a complete openness of mind. For those interested in psychoanalysis the methods and findings of this great philosopher will be intensely illuminating.

Arriving in America where the very architecture shouts aloud with irreverence, Keyserling asks "which form of existence is to be preferred, the Eastern or the Western? Already I want to grow, to become, to create. The Indians at home in the world of ideas have merely allowed themselves to be driven by the stream of events. For this world the West has chosen the better part."

We must hasten through Yosemite Valley, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Salt Lake City, to Chicago, to New York and back to Raykull, though it would do our hearts good to hear what he thinks of us, our great trees, the Grand Canyon where "ten thousand living things put forth the beauty of their colour," and where he does not bemoan the fact as do our modern poets that "the moon is dead," but rejoices that the sun still lives and that Christianity is just at the beginning of its great work.

Keyserling, after listening to the symphony arising from the orchestra of many lands, goes home feeling he has won through to a higher unity of being.

Keyserling is beyond style. All his wealth of learning he conveys with a haunting charm. His mind is a miracle of delicacy; his criticisms are enriched with faultless judgments. For the best theories of art, for the subtlest description of music he possesses a deep psychological insight, blended with poetical sentiment and fervent religious sense. A man of rare feeling for perfection in beauty, he has laid hold upon all varieties of human nature, all developments of history, and like Goethe he is "resolute to live" in harmony, being a living evidence of the truth of Christianity. His book is like a clear horn that sounds over the hills. We look up from our work—never have we heard so clear a note—and we go whither the horn calls over the hills to new green fields where there is better living.

SUE PORTER HEATWOLE

MISTAKES

To worry ourselves and others about what cannot be remedied.

To consider impossible that which we cannot ourselves perform.

To attempt to mould all dispositions alike.

To expect protection for all our own actions.

To fail to make allowance for the fool and the inexperienced.

To fail to make allowance for the weakness of others.

To expect our standards of right and wrong to be accepted by all.

To expect uniformity of opinions in this world.

To measure the joy or sorrow of others by our own.

To yield when our conscience condemns.

To fail to help somebody, whenever and however we can.

To estimate by the exterior quality, when it is that which is within that makes the man.

—A. A. RIGGS

IF I HAD DIED

If I had died, and already

Corruption, the changeless, the old,
Had found me where I was hidden,
Afraid of the worm and the mould,

I'd cry to you out of the blackness,
I'd cry without movement or sound,
"Love me, darling, so that I'll know
Even here in the lonely ground!"

I'd break your heart with my crying,
You'd hear me, O tender and bright!
*You would not hear; I would not cry;
But it seemed so, here in the night.*

—EDNA TUTT FREDERIKSON

Any executive who does not know how to delegate authority to others is only an inefficient busybody, and no executive at all.

—JOHN R. OLIVER, in *Foursquare*.