

THE LOST SONG
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Undated

There is a famous fairy tale written by Hans Christian Andersen and said to music by Stravinsky in the well-known Firebird Suite, which is a suggestive parable for the modern day. The story goes like this: Once upon a time long, long ago there lived an Oriental prince who treasured a beautiful nightingale. This bird sang so sweetly for the emperor that she was kept at court and held in great honor. Her sweet and melodious song seemed to strike a chord of harmony for all the people in the kingdom.

Then one day, a packet arrived from a neighboring prince containing a wondrous gift, a marvelous mechanical bird whose song was an almost perfect imitation of the live nightingale. All the court was intrigued and fascinated by the mechanical bird - all but the real nightingale, who, after the first performance of her arrival, sadly flew away.

But no one really cared, for as the music master said, "With the real nightingale we never knew exactly what the song would be, but with this bird, everything is known. We can even open it up and by showing the mechanism make the people understand exactly how the songs are made." So, everyone was happy with the new mechanical bird.

Finally, when everyone knew the mechanical songs by heart, something happened: a cog snapped, the spring whirred, and the music stopped. The emperor scoured the kingdom for the experts - but no one could fix the bird.

And then the emperor fell ill; he called upon the music master to provide a song to charm away the specter of death which was hovering closer and closer - but the real nightingale had flown away - and the mechanical bird was still. There was no song.

This story is a grim parable for our day. Somehow the living song has left us as we turned to embrace a mechanical civilization. This in turn has broken down after we felt we knew all about it. And no one seems able to fix the complex mechanism. As we wait perplexed, the specter of death hovers above us all, and no artificial music of our own making can charm it away. Thus we look at the crisis of our times, the decline of the West marking the end of an era - leaving us with the Predicament of Modern Man - man in a world of power, seemingly powerless to make peace; having controlled his natural environment, unable to control himself, having pushed his god science into control, now finding himself controlled by it. And so, beset by fears, he embraces science in a death clasp - turning to psychology for his Peace of Mind - Peace of Mind of the name of the current nonfiction bestseller. And so the specter of death comes closer, carrying in this modern scene, instead of a scythe, a bomb.

There is a grim lyric by A. E. Houseman which reads: "If by chance thy eye offend thee, pluck it out, lad, and be whole - but play the man, stand up and end ye, - if your sickness be your soul." Modern man is beginning to suspect that his sickness is his soul - and by playing the kind of man

he is - will soon end himself. He will lose his life in spite of his best efforts to save it. With the specter armed as he is life will end with a bang, not whimper.

We vaguely sense the cause of our ills in our modern mechanical life, in the rapid secularization of our society. We can lament with Carl Van Doren that man no longer believes in angels - for then he seemed to be capable of loftier visions of his role on earth than now when he studies rats in the laboratory for behavior patterns. We see the failure of the easy optimism of the old liberalism. We used to think we could swing the world around our head by its tail - but now, it rests heavily, Atlas fashion on our shoulders.

We can see the mechanism broken and explain the presence of the specter - but how are we to recapture the lost song which might chase the specter away? How are we to put the pieces together which form our broken world?

The story is told of a father who gave his child a jigsaw puzzle which when put together pictured a map of the world. The father was amazed to find that his son put the pieces together in an incredibly short time. When asked for an explanation, the boy replied, "I noticed that on the back of the puzzle there was a picture of a man, so I turned the pieces over and all I had to do was put the man together properly and then the world came out all right."

This is what I would suggest today - it is necessary to put the man together before the world will turn out all right. And the song needed to charm away the specter of fear and death is to be found where it has always been found when it is found at all - within man.

Man can pick up the broken pieces of his society and put them together only after he puts himself together. In an age under the shadow of collectivism the individual must emerge. Rousseau, one of the forefathers of our democracy, insisted that the good society can come only when men undergo a moral conversion and let their true selves appear. It is just such a conversion which is needed today, a new dynamic coming from within man, forming the lost song needed to save man from his fears.

This new beginning must include, first of all, an intellectual awakening, an intellectual awareness of the real issues in life coupled with the intellectual honesty, courage and freedom essential to face them. You who are voluntarily seeking a college education should have the least need of such a reminder - yet the danger is great that because of your preoccupation with the knowledge necessary to prepare for a vocation, you may neglect the wider questions of the meaning of life.

There must be a new emphasis on hard, deep thinking to counteract the prevailing indifference and superficiality of today. It has been said that the only thing we learn from history is the fact that we do not learn from history. We do not learn, because we do not want to - because we are too preoccupied with our petty desires and interests, because we are blind to the deeper meanings in life. We are like the little boy who was taken to church for the first time. After the service as parents asked him what he thought of it. The little boy answered - "the organ was nice - and I liked the singing - but the commercial was too long!"

We can sympathize with the little boy - he can't be expected to appreciate the commercial. But to how many people are the serious values of life mere commercials to be endured! Interruptions of the main program of life the satisfying of one's desires!

We must wake up and think - realize that the deep and difficult questions concerning man's nature and destiny cannot be ignored. It takes more than science to make better things, for better living! It takes ideas and values. An unexamined life is not worth living, as the sage Socrates wisely taught. If man does not know what he is living for, he does not know how to live. And if ever a civilization needed wisdom in leadership, wisdom to rethink our values, it is ours.

Toynbee, the historian, has pointed out that civilizations are never killed or murdered - they commit suicide - because they no longer have anything worth living for. Thus a civilization has only itself to fear. Our forefathers knew they had a civilization worth living for - it contained values - definite moral and religious ideals concerning the worth of man - preserving the freedom, dignity and integrity of the individual. "We hold these truths to be self evident," they wrote, "that all men are created free and equal, and are endowed with certain inalienable rights; among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And on the basis of these ideals scorned by the Neros and Hitlers and oppressive monarchs of the centuries - this democracy was founded.

The important fact for us today is this: our strength is founded on moral values - the fruits of democracy have basic roots reaching far back into the Hebrew Christian stream of thought. Without these roots, the fruit will wither and die.

This is the grave danger of today. In our preoccupation with the superficialities of a gadget geared civilization, we forget the deeper values of life. In our struggle for worldly success individually and nationally, we lose sight of the values that give life meaning thus run the risk of committing suicide. In our struggle to save our life, we run the risk of losing it because we forget the values and ideals of that undergirds our civilization. A new awareness of the values of justice, freedom, cooperation, decency must be found. This is the lost song to be recaptured

Thus the necessity of thinking - hard thinking. And hard thinking is the most difficult thing to do. That's why so few people do it. They are perplexed by the problems of a torn world - and push the problems aside because they are weary with thinking. The danger, however, of this attitude is clear. In a world geared for power there is always someone ready and able to do the people's thinking for them - as we have seen.

If we are impressed with the cycle of the rise and fall of civilizations, we can see also a linear development through the cycles. Men have moved falteringly toward a higher goal of life through the centuries. They have done so because of their vague awareness of a truth dimly seen, which is the true polestar in man's voyage through life. It is this truth proclaimed by the wisdom of the ancients - the truth that shines all the brighter as the night grows darker - that we must find today, by which we must live. We must find that truth which dares to say that what is highest in man's ideals is deepest in his nature. If this seems visionary, let us remember that the so-called realists have made a pretty thorough mess of things, - it is the visionary who catches a dream and

communicates it to the people who contributes to man's development. Perhaps it is time to give him a chance. We need an Augustine not a Bismarck. We need a world in which the old men can dream dreams and the young men see visions, for without vision the people perish. We need intellectual awakening to dispel the specter hovering over us.

What does this mean specifically? It means that the thinking man will look beneath the surface of things instead of skipping around on top with a water-spider mind. He will stand on the side of truth; alone, if need be, and not follow the suggestions of the mob. He will follow truth wherever it to may lead even into the unknown. He will develop a respect for facts and reasoning that will enable him to weigh properly the screaming headlines in our newspapers. Instead of becoming confused with conflicting opinions he will be able to evaluate them independently.

He will be wise enough to look in all directions, so that if everyone's attention is directed toward a fear of communism, he will be awake to see the threat of a fascism striking from behind. He will see that some of the organizations most violent in their warnings of the red menace have not been conspicuous in the preservation of our bill of rights. He will be awake to preserve the basic values against any foe.

He will develop the serenity of mind that rules out hysteria. He will think with his brain, not his viscera; judge by reason, not emotions.

He will see above all that fear of subversive activities, that fear of the overthrow of our way of life by a foreign ideology is a tacit but frank admission of lack of faith in our own ideals

He will see that it is can be met only with ideas, that suppression by force is weakness - that shrill strength lies in intelligence, freedom and honesty. He will see that if we reach the point where we feel we must restrict the expression of ideas, it will mean we have lost the ideals of our democracy. We will then have admitted that the ideals framed in the Constitution are no longer strong enough to defend themselves because we no longer believe them. The faith of Jefferson in the common man, and Lincoln in what he called the ultimate justice of the people will have given way to fear and force and failure.

The thinking man will see all this and realize that his hope and the hope of civilization lie in a reawakening of the belief in the basic values of our civilization - faith in the brotherhood of man, in the ability of man to live a little lower than the angels, rather than a little higher than the beasts - faith that man's inhumanity to man can change to peace, faith in the ultimate justice of the people.

This reawakening, this intellectual awareness of what is really worthwhile, is the lost song needed to charm away the specter of death. It is our task to contribute to this reawakening.

Much more than an intellectual awakening is needed. This will help to clear our minds and make us realize that there is more to life than what we see with our senses, that there is a deep undercurrent of ideas and values which are paramount. But this is not enough.

There is an eye for the heart as well as an eye for the brain - another light which we sometimes call the light of conscience. This must be rekindled in men today. We must return to the moral consciousness which is our true guide and strength. We must relearn the old lesson that no man is an island unto himself, and remember the folly of asking for whom the bell tolls. As Dostoevski put it in his novel "The Brothers Karamazov", "There is only one means of salvation, to make yourself responsible for other men's sins. . . . as soon as you make yourself responsible for everything, for all men, you will see at once that it is really so and that you are to blame for everyone and for all things."

We fear the danger of political isolationism - it is moral isolationism that is to be feared. It is the callous smugness that can look at others' misery calmly - the greed while others starve that grasps, the complacency that thinks it can't happen here - these must be eradicated.

A moral reawakening is a difficult task, for the voice of moral cynicism is strong in our midst. Two world wars have shaken our faith in man. It is the fashion, therefore, to be tough, realistic, and cynical - to reorient our morality on the basis of self interest - to "do unto others before they do you". It is fancied that this is the only strong-minded view possible.

We must realize however, that moral cynicism is not being realistic or tough-minded. Moral cynicism is defeatism of the basest sort. It is easy to be cynical; it takes real strength to believe in the possibility of the goodness of man. The weakling is the cynic; the strong man has a will to believe.

There is a real strength in morality, which has been proved through the centuries. The ideas of Plato and Christ push the Alexanders and the Napoleons of our history into insignificance.

The moral ideals of a tiny band of freedom loving people have pushed aside the strongest rules of oppression. There is a power in moral ideals that captures the loyalty of people, kindling them with an inspiration which cannot be extinguished. It is this moral fervor which explains the miracle of our democracy, it is this power which is the real force for progress in history.

This is the fact that must be seriously considered, for leadership in the world depends today, as it always has, upon moral leadership. If we fail to provide this leadership, popular support will move in another direction.

If we are to provide the moral leadership the world needs, we must reawaken it in our own hearts and in our national life. This means, specifically, we cannot very well insist upon free elections throughout the world when we have a poll tax at home - we cannot expect free elections in the Balkans when we do not have them in Georgia - this is not the same as saying that if things are wrong in Georgia, USA, they are right in Georgia USSR - it does mean, however, that an awakened moral honesty is needed, if we are to win peoples to our way of life. It means also that if we are to promote the interests of freedom loving peoples and gain their respect, we must be careful to show we are interested in freedom more than in oil. We cannot enlist the respect of colored people's when we cannot guarantee on FEPU.

Moral leadership is the need for today. An awakened conscience individually and nationally is the best strength for our society, and the only hope for the future. Moral power - not strength of arms - will decide the future.

These will restore the lost song of our civilization - an intellectual awakening and a moral fervor. This alone will drive away the specter.

The task is difficult but the alternative is intolerable - a civilization committing suicide because it has lost sight of its true values.

When the first atomic bomb exploded in New Mexico, the desert sand turned to fused green glass.

This fact according to the magazine "Free World," has given certain archaeologists a turn. They have been digging in the ancient Euphrates Valley and have uncovered a layer of agrarian culture 8000 years old, and a layer of herdsmen culture much older, and a still older cavemen culture. Recently, they reached another layer. . . of *fused green glass*.

Whether this is the remains of another atomic age or not - we would not want future archaeologists to find this as the culmination of our age.

The only alternative to this is a moral and intellectual awakening on the part of all of us. It can come only from within each man.

The ancient Greeks had a theory that all learning was a process of remembering things once known but long ago forgotten. This is the basis for the old adage "Know thyself", and for Socrates' strange insistence that he could not teach, but acted only as a midwife to bring out the truth already within man.

The suggestion is that we have but to look within, and remember to find that intellectual and moral awakening we so sorely need. We need but to recall the song that once was ours.

There is more to that story about the emperor and the specter. The emperor did not die. Just as he was about to give up the struggle in despair, while the useless mechanical bird lay neglected and forgotten - the real nightingale returned. She sang so sweetly of death's garden that the specter longed to return, and disappeared like a mist in the morning sun.

And so the living song returned - but the nightingale remained in the garden and would not stay in court, for, as she said to the emperor, "I love your heart more than your crown."

Thus ended the parable. - It is not too late. Let us remember this - the living song can return to our hearts. Let us look within to find it there as we turn to our churches in this holy season. May God help us remember the lost song of the soul.