

## REVIEWS

objective to be aimed at not take us radically out of that slough of despond into which we are sinking ever deeper, as whole generations grow up to know themselves as mere receivers of doles; unwanted; useless; surplus stock only fit to be dumped on a refuse heap?

Work for all—would such a rational, nation-wide redistribution of work not provide it? And even if for the older people such were not possible, all our energies should at least surely be bent to train the next generation for it.

H. C. E. ZACHARIAS.

### FIVE ON REVOLUTIONARY ART. (Wishart; 1/-.)

This book sponsored by the Artists' International is an attempt to study more closely and to reach some conclusion about the relationship between the social spirit and art. It is made up of five essays, the contributors being Herbert Read, F. D. Klingender, Eric Gill, Al. Lloyd and Alick West.

In the first essay Herbert Read tackles the question of what Revolutionary Art is, and after not a little reasoning concludes that it is "Constructive," "International" and (surprisingly) "Revolutionary." His conclusions are broad enough to be undeniable. It is fairly obvious that revolutionary art should be constructive, international and revolutionary in *some* sense, but such a clear (if mistaken) essay as this seems to warrant more than three conclusions that are vague enough to suit the view of almost any school of thought—whether Communist, as Mr. Read's, or simply "bourgeois."

He is concerned with Abstract art as he considers this to be the one truly contemporary and revolutionary form; in addition to which we are told that all artists of any intellectual force belong to this movement, which, to us at least, is a revelation. Art, we are told, is possessive of two distinct elements: "A formal element appealing to our sensibility *for reasons which cannot be stated with any clarity but which are certainly psychological in origin?*" (italics mine), and "an arbitrary element . . . which is the outer clothing given to these underlying forms." The formal element apparently does not change, and the "changes" in art are simply the changing valuation of this formal element.

Now all this is very reasonable and is, as far as it goes, true. There is most certainly an unchanging formal element that appeals to our sensibility, but is it the function of the theorist to tell us this or to reach for an explanation of it? Mr. Clive Bell is only too willing to tell us that all art is significant form, but he has not yet ventured an explanation telling us of what the form is significant. That is the point. Eric Gill has defined beauty as that quality in things made by which we dis-

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cover the quality of their making (wording mine), and this certainly seems a more satisfactory and logical definition than any of those we have had from the "Pure form" school. It is not in direct contradiction with their arguments but simply with their premature conclusions.

At this stage we might note that Mr. Read in *Art and Industry* says that "The utilitarian arts . . . have the appeal of abstract art." The formal element in art is unchangeable simply because it is dependent on the well making of the object (any object) and the change shown in the arbitrary element is the change in the values expressed.

Mr. Gill proclaims that "all art is propaganda" and that "the artist can do nothing that is not expressive of some value," and that "the artist cannot escape being a man." What we have to ask ourselves in this particular problem (and the argument applies to all the vital issues of to-day) is whether or not the art of what we might call the advanced studio artist (and that Mr. Read calls revolutionary) is not expressive of precisely those values that we now decry as bourgeois, and whether the conception of man expressed in his work is so very different from the current idea. It is a significant fact that both Marxist and Bourgeois accept as their ultimate standard material conditions.

Revolutionary art, *real* revolutionary art, can only come from revolutionary artists and can only be representative of a revolutionized society, and a revolutionized society is one that has changed its *standards* and not merely the expression of its standards.

Mr. Read stands for Communism, that is to say for an alteration in the distribution of wealth, and this he calls revolutionary. What needs revolutionizing is not so much the economic system (though this does) as the people themselves. A fundamental change in ideals is the only thing that we can seriously term revolutionary, and until we have this it is useless to talk about revolutionary art as though it were a new form of salvation. We can say with Maritain, "Purify the source and those who drink of the waters will no longer be sick." That is the only attitude that we can take.

I have dwelt long on Mr. Read's article because it is, with the exception of Mr. Gill's, the most intelligent in the book. The other three articles are well worth reading but tell us nothing that we have not already heard.

M. W. RICHEY.

## NOTICES

OXFORDSHIRE BY-WAYS. An account of scenes and places which for the most part lie off the beaten track in Oxfordshire. By R. M. Marshall. With an Introduction by Sir Michael Sadler. (The Alden Press, Oxford; 2/6.)