



The Seventieth Birthday Address

I am more than honored—somewhat, indeed, overcome—by your kindness in being here tonight, by the messages that have been read, and by the presentation of Mr. Bharatha Iyer's *Festschrift*.¹ I should like to recall the names of four men who might have been present had they been living: Dr. Denman W. Ross, Dr. John Lodge, Dr. Lucien Scherman, and Professor James Woods, to all of whom I am indebted. The formation of the Indian collections in the Museum of Fine Arts was almost wholly due to the initiative of Dr. Denman Ross; Dr. Lodge, who wrote little, will be remembered for his work in Boston and Washington, and also perhaps for his aphorism, "From the Stone Age until now, *quelle dégringolade*"; I still hope to complete a work on reincarnation with which Dr. Scherman charged me not long before his death; and Professor Woods was one of those teachers who can never be replaced.

More than half of my active life has been spent in Boston. I want to express my gratitude in the first place to the directors and trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, who have always left me entirely free to carry on research not only in the field of Indian art but, at the same time, in the wider field of the whole traditional theory of art and of the relation of man to his work, and in the fields of comparative religion and metaphysics to which the problems of iconography are a natural introduction. I am grateful also to the American Oriental Society, whose editors, however much they differed from me "by temperament and training," as Professor Norman Brown once said, have always felt that I had a "right to be heard," and have allowed me to be heard. And all this despite the fact that such studies as I have made necessarily led me back to an enunciation of relatively unpopular sociological doctrines. For, as a student of human manu-

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¹ [AKC saw only galley proofs of the volume edited by K. Bharatha Iyer, which was soon after published under the title *Art and Thought: A Volume in Honour of the Late Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* (London, 1947).—ED.]

factures, aware that all making is *per artem*, I could not but see that, as Ruskin said, "Industry without art is brutality," and that men can never be really happy unless they bear an individual responsibility not only for what they do but for the kind and the quality of whatever they make. I could not fail to see that such happiness is forever denied to the majority under the conditions of making that are imposed upon them by what is euphemistically called "free enterprise," that is to say, under the condition of production for profit rather than for use; and no less denied in those totalitarian forms of society in which the folk is just as much as in a capitalistic regime reduced to the level of a proletariat. Looking at the works of art that are considered worthy of preservation in our museums, and that were once the common objects of the market place, I could not but realize that a society can only be considered truly civilized when it is possible for every man to earn his living by the very work he would rather be doing than anything else in the world—a condition that has only been attained in social orders integrated on the basis of vocation, *svadharma*.

At the same time, I should like to emphasize that I have never built up a philosophy of my own or wished to establish a new school of thought. Perhaps the greatest thing I have learned is never to think for myself; I fully agree with André Gide that "toutes choses sont dites déjà," and what I have sought is to understand what has been said, while taking no account of the "inferior philosophers." Holding with Heraclitus that the Word is common to all, and that Wisdom is to know the Will whereby all things are steered, I am convinced with Jeremias that the human cultures in all their apparent diversity are but the dialects of one and the same language of the spirit, that there is a "common universe of discourse" transcending the differences of tongues.

This is my seventieth birthday, and my opportunity to say farewell. For this is our plan, mine and my wife's, to retire and return to India next year; thinking of this as an *astum gamana*, "going home." . . .² We mean to remain in India, now a free country, for the rest of our lives.

I have not remained untouched by the religious philosophies I have studied and to which I was led by way of the history of art. *Intellige ut credas!* In my case, at least, understanding has involved belief; and for me the time has come to exchange the active for a more contemplative way of life in which it would be my hope to experience more immediately,

² [Some brief personal references, of no relevance to the theme, are deleted at this point.—ED.]

more fully, at least a part of the truth of which my understanding has been so far predominantly logical. And so, though I may be here for another year, I ask you also to say "good-by"—equally in the etymological sense of the word and in that of the Sanskrit *Svagā*, a salutation that expresses the wish "May you come into your own," that is, may I know and become what I am, no longer this man So-and-so, but the Self that is also the Being of all beings, my Self and your Self.