

January

From a series of monthly meditational essays by Eugene Halliday

The month of January received its name from Janus, The ancient Roman God of the Portal, of gates and doorways, and of the beginnings of all new things. Janus thus presided over the opening of the New Year, and over the birth process as the beginning of a new being.

Janus was represented with two faces to symbolise the act of looking into the past and into the future; for at every New Year it was customary to review the past year's experience, to take out of it the essential lessons it had to teach, and to use these as a basis on which to make resolutions for the coming year.

"New Years Resolutions" appear to have lost the popularity they once had, probably because resolutions are not always easy to keep. But difficulty in keeping promises made to oneself is no justification for not making them. There is a sense in which all human improvement and evolution depends on resolutions, on resolute will.

Certainly if we do not reassess ourselves, our position on the path of life, the patterns of our actions, our relations with others, we are likely to continue in our old ways without appreciable change.

Probably the breaking of New Years resolutions arises from the undertaking of too much at once, the assumption that we have the power to "make up our own minds" for long distances ahead. To swear to ourselves that in the coming year we shall do a certain act is perhaps to over-estimate our capacities, our power of self-control and self-direction.

A man may swear to himself that in the New Year he will never again lose his temper with his wife and children, and then find himself the next day caught off-guard, triggered into an irritable response by some un-anticipated event. Repetition of such failure may cause loss of self-confidence, loss of belief in his capacity to fulfill his own word. And this may result in his abandoning of further efforts. It is not pleasant to have to contemplate one's failures. One's image of oneself tends to suffer.

Nevertheless, we have a duty to ourselves and to others. We have to remind ourselves that human evolution has not yet attained its goal - the development of full intelligence and freedom. It is not so very long ago that our ancestors lived in conditions of extreme simplicity, conditions in which they had not yet succeeded in separating themselves from nature as a whole. It is only about 6,000 years ago that men learned to write down their thoughts, so that they could easily refer to them and re-evaluate them.

About 6,000 years hence our descendants will be looking backwards at us and viewing our efforts at self-improvement in a similar way to that in which we view our ancestors.

We, standing, Janus-like, with one face looking backwards at our ancestors, and

tile other face looking to our descendants to come, stand in the position of a man at the gate of a New Year trying to decide what resolutions he shall make for the future.

It would be foolish of us to resolve what our children's children will be doing in 6,000 years forward from now. The whole world condition will have changed, and more so than it has changed since man first learned to write.

But although we cannot determine the particular actions of our future descendants, we can determine certain basic attitudes within our own organisms, within our own substance. We can decide whether we will condition ourselves to love or to hate each other. We can decide whether we will co-operate with each other. And we can record our decisions in writing and speaking to each other. We can exchange ideas, discuss them, clarify them, select from them the best, and pass them on to each other in words spoken and written.

We can recognise an interesting fact. The human race holds in itself, in its collective and individual minds, in ideas held within those minds, and in books and works of art produced by these minds, a totality of knowledge which may lead humanity to its ultimate goal.

It is the duty (and "duty is the shadow of love") of each of us to make ourselves aware of our own creativity, our own God-given power to contribute to humanity's future. It is our duty to make ourselves acquainted with as much of the essential knowledge so far gathered by mankind as is available to us. For the sake of our children's children's children, onward into the future, we are to acquire and meditate upon and apply at least the basic and essential truths that our ancestors and our contemporaries have made accessible for us.

Every moment of our lives we stand, like Janus, with one face gazing into the past and one face looking forward into the future. In this position we stand in a very decisive present, and this we will be wise not to forget.

For although we are to be conscious that there has been a past, and will be a future, we are still to remember that it is only in the *living* present that a decision can be made. Janus has two faces; but there is a point between them that belongs to both the past and future, and to neither of them - the point of *The-Here-and-Now*.

"Here" is the place we stand in. "Now" is the time. When we think about the past or future we think about it in the *present*, and we cannot do otherwise. All our worries about the past, all our hopes for the future, are experienced in the *present*, in a particular place, and in a particular moment of time, in a Here-and-Now.

It is in the Here and Now and *only* in such, that we can make any decisions whatever. The past exists only in our memory, the future is a mental speculation. We can examine in our memory our past experiences and select from it what is worth using, but we do so in a Present.

We can speculate about our future in terms of our past experience, but this also we

can do only in a Present.

The present moment is the meeting point of the past and future, the point at which the future will emerge from the past. The present moment is a Janus-point, a door between what has been and what may be.

What has been is, as such, unalterable. But one can in a present moment change one's attitude towards it, one's interpretation of it. And what is to be in the future, for each one of us, depends on how we interpret the essential experiences of our past. And we can interpret only in the *present*. The consciousness of the content of the present *is the key to the control of the past and future*.

In the past we can control the memories of our past experience, and in the present we can make the decisions which will project themselves outwards into our actions and so create the future that will effect not only ourselves but also others around us; and not only for the immediate future, but for the long term future of everyone of us.

Just as a pebble dropped into the water of a pool send ripples outwards from the point of impact, so every decision we make starts a series of actions which spread out from us, ultimately to affect other human beings we have never met.

And just as ripples on the pool, spreading from the point of the pebble's impact, eventually beat against the edges of the pool and are reflected back to the point of impact, so the decisions we make result in actions which have an impact on the world around us and on everyone in it, and are reflected back to us.

Let us make a New Year Resolution to remember that the present is the doorway through which the past must go into the future, a doorway in which we stand facing both ways with the power of decision in our hands, for into the future we must carry the memory of our past and all the effects of the actions we have performed in it.