

ALDOUS HUXLEY—A TRIBUTE

*Huston Smith*

WHEN ALDOUS HUXLEY was at M.I.T. in the fall of 1960, giving lectures which drew listeners so heavily that they jammed traffic all the way across the Charles River into Boston, I once spoke of those crowds as a tribute. "It's because I've been around so long," he replied. "I've become like Queen Anne's Cottage. If I live to be a hundred I shall be like Stonehenge."

He didn't live to be a hundred, and the world is the loser.

Most obviously, it has lost an encyclopedic intelligence. That adjective is overworked these days, but in his case it comes close to being exact. Indeed, when a leading journal felt that an encyclopedia—the Fourteenth Edition of the *Britannica*—itself needed to be brought under review, no one was surprised when Huxley was asked to do the job.

More impressive than the range of the man's mind, however, was its sympathy and interest. Few major intelligences since William James have been as open. Huxley's regard for mysticism was well known by dint of being so nearly notorious. What some overlooked was his equal interest in the workaday world and its exigencies: peace, the population explosion, and conservation of our natural resources. To those who, greedy for transcendence, deprecated the mundane, he counseled that "we must make the best of *both* worlds." To their opposites, the positivists, his word was, "All right, one world at a time; but not half a world!"

Accepting the fact that "truth lies at the bottom of a very muddy well," he descended: to ESP and LSD, to 'sight without glasses' and Vedanta. But never as martyred hero; there wasn't a grain of "Invictus" in him. If he lost his reputation, it was not for his omnivorous interests but because he wasn't content simply to do what he could do well. His competence bored him. So the master of words moved on to what eludes them, remarking over his shoulder that "language is a device for taking the mystery out of reality." Not needing triumph or adulation, he could bypass them for truth.

He could because he had so little egoism. A supreme unpretentiousness characterized him to the end. "It's a bit embarrassing," he

said, "to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than 'Try to be a little kinder.'" If, as he had earlier remarked, the central technique for man to learn is "the art of obtaining freedom from the fundamental human disability of egoism," Huxley achieved that freedom.

But this wasn't his supreme achievement, for his personal problem was never pride so much as pessimism—"tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this pretty pace from day to day." His final victory, therefore, lay not in emerging selfless but in winning through to equanimity, to evenness of spirit and a generalized good-cheer. Thereby the line he used to close his best novel becomes the appropriate epitaph for his own life-story: "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Said this time without sarcasm.

---

SOME REMEMBRANCES OF ALDOUS HUXLEY

*Alan Watts*

I KNEW ALDOUS HUXLEY personally only after his so-called "mystical period" had begun, and had not by then read much of his earlier work of the *Point Counter Point* and *Chrome Yellow* period. I encountered him first through *Ends and Means*, *Brave New World*, and then *Grey Eminence*.

It was just after he had written the latter that I got in touch with him for the first time, and was wholly enchanted by the breadth and intricacy of his interests. He was a marvelous conversationalist. Every time I met him I felt charged in some way, as if a whole new world of ideas had been opened up to me. He was an entrancing talker. I well remember the day when we were having lunch at the Tokyo Restaurant in San Francisco, and his conversation reduced everyone at the neighboring tables to silence because they wanted to listen in.

When I first knew Aldous Huxley, he was in the beginning of the period in which he became interested in mystical experience and the transformation of consciousness. At that time I felt that he was following a type of mystical philosophy that rejected the material universe as a degraded mode of consciousness. It was about then that D. S. Savage wrote a critique of Huxley's work,