

The Cult of Mediocrity

Deirdre Porter

THE CULT of mediocrity (the quality of being of a low degree of excellence) seems each day to enfold within its ranks a greater number of the members of society. What is it that draws so many to this state of cultural laxity? Its components are of all classes and professions—the careless shoe-shine boy to the impatient explorer in cosmic research, the not overly-diligent student to the harried housewife. Certainly, then, it is not a particular trade of men, but rather a broad cross-section of humanity that is attracted to mediocrity. The attraction? Perhaps it is nothing more than the relaxation it offers from the general pressures exerted in the crushing drive for gain. This relaxation seemingly is the greatest attraction, for who is there that does not yearn often to fling all else aside and take a leisurely walk along a country lane or across a grassy meadow? Indeed everyone does, but rather than resort to it as an end, one should be able to take from his "walk," whatever type of experience it be, the fortitude that will enable him to return to his task with renewed vigor. His "walk" should be the source of strength rather than the receptacle of uncompleted efforts.

As well as this relief from pressures, mediocrity seems to offer a satisfaction of the desire for inner security. This security, some believe, is found in a person's becoming simply one among many. Here there is no need for him even to attempt to shine: he can drift easily along in the wake of others. But is this not a false security? What is to occur when suddenly the individual is just that—an individual? His crowd of mediocre associates cannot always be at his side when he is called to stand. And even should they be able to, what sort of an inner satisfaction can he have?

And again, mediocrity often becomes the refuge of those individuals with great aspirations, who are thwarted and discouraged at every turn. This type, perhaps, is the saddest of all. In the murky catacombs of wasted time and effort stands the aging, stoop-shouldered man. He might have been a scientific genius; he might have been a brilliant statesman; he might have been. Here among his own and others' shattered visions he waits, idling with the head and hands that might have wrought such a golden dream as earthly brotherhood and peace.

And we? We shake our heads in momentary remorse—and follow.