

New Cult: Forest Temple of Hard Work and Rough Food.

E. C. Bowyer

Journalist E. C. Bowyer spent a week visiting Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau France, five months after it opened. He begins with an account of the Study House and the student's spartan daily life. Bowyer interviews his guide, A. R. Orage and describes the various stages of instruction at the Institute, the participation of children, the practice of movements, and the occasional feasts enjoyed by everyone. Returning to London, Bowyer interviewed P. D. Ouspensky. His reports were serialised on front pages of the *Daily News* (London) 15-19 February, 1923. The word 'cult' did not then have a pejorative connotation.

J.W.D.

Famous Disciples

In the following article a Special Correspondent of the *Daily News* reveals some of the leading facts relating to a remarkable new cult which has attracted to itself many Englishmen and Englishwomen bearing well-known and even famous names. The leader of the movement is Gurdjieff, an Eastern philosopher-mystic, and the article describes the "Study House" in the historic Forest of Fontainebleau, some 40 miles from Paris, where his disciples follow a course of hard work and harder fare.

Daily News Editor

The Study House: Music, Light, Colour and Perfume.

From Our Special Correspondent, E. C. Bowyer.

FONTAINEBLEAU,
Tuesday.

"For some of us the building is a temple; for others a theatre. Some of us meditate; others dream, and many worship, but we all learn." It was so my Russian friend spoke of the "Study-House" built by the extraordinary community I had come to visit, and centre of all their activities. I found the Study-House deep in the beautiful forest of Fontainebleau and met some of the men and women—doctors, artists, writers, and thinkers—who have made it their retreat. Their dress is coarse and their lives are strenuous, but all are intent upon the harmonious development of personality on its three sides in accordance with the philosophy of Gurdjieff, their leader.

From Pen To Spade.

In a quiet lane near Avon I had met A. R. Orage, until recently editor of the *New Age*, and now a member of the colony. He was in rough corduroys and wore no collar, and a first glance at his hands told at once that he had changed the pen for the spade. The Study-House may be spoken of first. Imagine a plain, square building, to hold, perhaps, 300 people. In the centre a fountain, illuminated by constantly changing coloured lights, and making pleasant music; the floor carpeted with costly Eastern rugs. Around the walls are divans, with here and there an alcove with rich tapestries. The windows are painted over with Arabic designs, and soft light comes from hidden electric globes. Some sweet perfume pervades the whole interior. Here it is that Gurdjieff, the Master, talks in the evening with his students, who recline around him, and here, too, take place the extraordinary dancing demonstrations, of which I will speak in a further article. The members of the colony live at the Priory near by, and it was in showing me about that Mr. Orage talked to me of the two men whose influence has called the settlement into being—Gurdjieff and his disciple Ouspensky.

A Bridge Seeker.

"Ouspensky was a Russian novelist and a mathematician, who was also a mystic," he told me. "He sought for many years a bridge between Western Rationalism and Eastern Mysticism." "After studying philosophies of the West he went for a year to India, but returned unsatisfied to Moscow, where he first met Gurdjieff, and found in him what he had been looking for all his life—a teacher who could solve his problems." "Gurdjieff, who is of Greek origin, after years of studying in Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan, discovered in Thibet 15 years ago a school of thought which completed his own system, and then went back to Russia to undertake his work for mankind." "Man, according to Gurdjieff, is three-fold—body, mind, and emotion. In most Western peoples mind is overdeveloped, with a corresponding underdevelopment of the emotional and the physical senses." "His first object is development of the body and the emotions, and from this point of view has been thought out the training of the students and the planning of the settlement." Gurdjieff's students—that is, those who have placed themselves unreservedly in his hands—lead Spartan lives. Mr. Orage told me that he has worked harder than a navy since he joined the community. This work is intended to develop the body, as he believes that "great thought" put into an unhealthy body becomes corrupt. The students sleep in rooms bare of all but the utmost necessities, and their meals are extremely frugal. The lunch which I shared today consisted simply of Russian soup, bread, and large draughts of "buza"—a fermented cow's milk similar to "kouminn". This is eaten round a common table with iron spoons.

Rough Fare.

Literary men, barristers, doctors, and other cultured people, in the roughest attire, today ate a meal which an English working man would scorn. Most of the work is farm work. The colonists have cows, goats, sheep, pigs, and chickens to care for, and kitchen gardens are to be cultivated on the 45 acres surrounding the building. The women students, of whom there are several, are dressed in very plain, but orthodox, costumes, and they, too, work here during the day before attending the Study House in the evening. A Russian Princess is there, and other students are a French danseuse and the two daughters of a Russian baron.

A Healing Side.

There is a healing side to the work, and this is under the care of Dr. Stjoernal, at one time director of a large electro-massage institute in Finland. It was here that Miss Katherine Mansfield, the novelist, spent her last days, "which," Mr. Orage told me, "were probably among the happiest times of her life." Mr. Middleton Murry, her husband, was with her here when she died. He is intensely interested in the work and is a constant attendant at Ouspensky's London lectures.

Well-Known Names.

Others who are deeply interested are J.D. Beresford, Algernon Blackwood, and J.W.N. Sullivan. Some of them, I hear, are thinking of coming over, but, of course, it means complete severance from one's normal life. Lady Rothermere has also been here, but her interests are so wide that she found it impossible actually to become a student. Dr. Maurice Nicoll, the well-known psycho-analyst, has visited the settlement and at the present moment Dr. Young, a Harley-street specialist, is here.

Feasts and Fasts: Psychic Examination and Music.

Fontainebleau, Thursday.

The Company of the Harmonious Development, members of the interesting community which I described yesterday, may be divided into three categories. At the moment the majority of the students are in the first and most important group—those who have placed themselves in the hands of the "master," Gurdjieff, and obey his instructions implicitly in their progress towards perfection. The other two categories, broadly speaking, consist of interested visitors and those who desire to follow only a partial training.

Two Stages.

Students in the first group pass through two stages—one a general and the second an individual instruction. On entering the settlement each is subject to a medical examination of a particularly thorough kind, including physiological, psychological, and psychic characteristics. He or she is kept under strict medical supervision during the period of general instruction, and the "historometrical record" of the individual is often not complete until nearly the end of this period, which lasts about 12 months. I was given one of these records, which are extremely detailed. Much importance is attached, for example, to the size, shape, and general condition of the "mouth cavity." This system is rendered necessary by the nature of the instruction given by M. Gurdjieff, who, believing in the value of many Eastern methods, while rejecting others, may enjoin upon an advanced student a fast of as much as three weeks. About a month ago he asked for volunteers for a fast. Fifteen students responded and went without food for a period, under medical care, while continuing to perform their usual heavy manual labour.

Will Cultivation.

M. Gurdjieff's methods are catholic. He uses Eastern and Western ideas without the least prejudice in favour of one or the other. "If a thing is good, I use it," he says. "If it is bad, I do not use it. The words 'like' and 'dislike' mean nothing to me when considering such matters." Thus, while he instructs many of his pupils to practise concentration and the cultivation of the will, the medical annexe now nearing completion is being fitted with the most up-to-date electrical equipment. If he thinks fit, students may receive instruction in Western culture and arts, sciences, languages, and handicrafts. Married quarters are provided in the settlement, and I saw several children happily busy in the garden, for Gurdjieff recognizes a truth often forgotten in more orthodox schools—"children really love work." And the youngsters, who at the same time receive instruction in ordinary subjects on a system laid down by the Master, are allowed to work as hard as they like in the grounds. They are constantly under medical supervision, however, like other students here, and skilled doctors are constantly on the watch against signs of over-exertion.

Musical Exercises.

Music forms an important part in the life of the settlement, and M. Gurdjieff has evolved a system of exercises containing over 6,000 different movements. These must all be performed to music, most of which has been composed by him, with the assistance of Professor De Hartmann, a musician who is a member of the colony. The elementary exercises are designed to give physical results only, but as the student progresses they become symbolic. M. Gurdjieff does not wish to keep his pupils with him when they have reached a certain stage of development. After the period of general

instruction, during the early part of which the pupil may never be in personal contact with the Master, comes the individual teaching, and rapid progress is then usually made towards a point at which the pupil may leave Gurdjieff, and pursue a further course through life unaided. Gurdjieff's hospitality is Eastern in its lavishness. For one day each student is treated as a visitor to the settlement, and is entertained by the Master. The next, he commences the arduous life of preparation which I have outlined.

Wonderful Feasts.

This life, however, is occasionally interrupted by wonderful feasts in the "Study-House," at which students are the guests of their chief. Such a banquet was held on Jan. 12—the Russian New Year. Lack of means, it would appear, is no bar to the genuine aspirant, and in some cases students are admitted without payment.

The New Cult: Aesthetic Aids to Meditation.

Perfumes that Vary Every Hour.

FONTAINEBLEAU, Friday.

Late last night for the first time I saw Gurdjieff. It was after midnight, and I found him in the "Study-House", where, to the sound of strange music, he was directing the rhythmic exercises being carried out by a score of his men and women students. I had gone first to the Priory. Here I found that the long day of toil prescribed by the regime was not yet ended, and members of the company were still hard at work carrying out necessary household duties. But it was to see the Master I had come. The man who stepped forward to meet me as I entered the Study-House is of medium height, well-proportioned and looking about 50. His features are unmistakably Eastern, and their expression when in repose is mild and placable, while his eyes would be remarkable anywhere for their brilliance. He was wearing a black sheepskin cap, with ordinary Western clothes.

The Dancers.

He made me welcome with a grave politeness that triumphed over his slight knowledge of English—usually he speaks Russian and employs an interpreter. After inviting me to watch the exercises which had stopped for the moment, he turned back towards the waiting students and the music recommenced. Around the walls of the Study-House students reclined on the divans and watched their fellows—men and women—on the slightly-raised stage at one end of the hall. The illuminated fountain threw up a head of glowing water which fell back with a pleasant murmur into the carved basin and filled the interior with a faint odour of attar of roses. It is impossible to

describe intelligibly the movements of the dancers. They were entirely unlike any Western physical exercises as far as I know them, and differ from what are usually accepted as characteristic of Eastern dance movements in that they were extremely vigorous. I understand that each series of movements was designed by the Master, and that to the initiate many of them express symbolically varying phases of thought and emotion.

Gentle Distraction.

The Study-House is not yet complete, gorgeous as is the interior. Gurdjieff told me that he is having built a special organ, unique in Europe, with the octaves in quarter tones. Much also remains to be done to other parts of the House. Soon the fountain will diffuse a different perfume for every hour, and other fountains are yet to be installed. By his elaborate combination of appeals to the senses Gurdjieff believes he is providing so many aids to meditation. "The senses should be gently distracted," he said, "and then the mind itself untrammelled by the senses is free to work. Only by such means can it be brought into the way of harmonious development together with the body and with the emotions. It is indispensable to develop new faculties which are not given to man in life and cannot be developed by him, in himself, by the usual methods."

New Life Cult: "The Master" On His Forest School. Essence.

"The True Source of Love."

FONTAINEBLEAU, Sunday.

If I tried to picture to myself the effect produced on the mind of the reader by my description of this remarkable colony at Fontainebleau, brought together by a common desire to realise an ideal of perfected consciousness and living, I should judge that he would be saying that it is all picturesque and interesting to a point, but that not enough has been told him of the teaching of the Prophet who may be called its spring of inspiration. I had desired from the first to talk to M. Gurdjieff himself, but after three days it was only at midnight on Thursday that I was able to see him, and then under circumstances, already described, which gave no opportunity for what I wanted. In the very early hours of this Sunday morning, after his work with his pupils in the Study-House was over, he invited me to his room at the Priory, and talked to me at length.

Why Dissatisfied?

Even so, I cannot report an interview, for M. Gurdjieff insisted that what I might write should be the outcome of my conversations with two members of his immediate surroundings to whom he later recommended me. Since I had been coming here the

question had been forcing itself upon me as to what it was in the experience of all these people which had made them dissatisfied with normal life and the normal type, of which they themselves presumably had been examples. I remember that I once put the question to Mr. Orage, and this is what he replied: "There are men in London who are already as 'clever' as it is possible for men to be under ordinary conditions and who are asking themselves whether this is the ultima thule—whether they have reached the final limits of their evolution."

"Something More."

"We believe that there is something more, and so we are here." I repeated my question now. What is it that is wrong in ordinary life, and what is it that M. Gurdjieff desires to correct? "First of all," came the reply, "it is necessary to distinguish between 'essence' due to heredity and 'personality' which accrues as the result of environment, education, and such causes.

Undeveloped "Essence."

"Every man is aware of the deficiencies in his undeveloped 'essence', but because he cannot realise that everybody else is in like case he shows a bold front to the world, and leaves behind his 'personality', which is not himself at all. "At the present time the West does not sufficiently discern the differences between these two characteristics of men, and makes no efforts at all to educate the 'essence.' Hence, in the adult, 'personality' is fully grown, while the 'essence' remains infantile, and it is this disproportion that we think is the first place to correct." "For example?" I asked.

Where Love Springs From.

"Love springs from 'essence' and not 'personality.' It may be that a child will not love its parents while showing affection for other people. That we can correct, not with force or in any artificial way, but really so that the child will love them in the deepest meaning of the word. Indeed, we educate children on new methods so as to develop the two principles side by side, but from the outset forming a complete individual. The adult 'essence' is educated and brought up to the level arrived at already by the 'personality.' When this is achieved the two can work together, and it is then that actual progress towards the attainment of wisdom commences, and the harmoniously developed man takes the place of a one-sided, distorted entity."

The Institute claims very high powers for members who have become so 'harmonised,' and I was assured that among its present instructors are men who are proficient at any and every trade and handicraft, starting from the simplest and proceeding to the highest type of 'work'—sculpture, painting, philosophy, and the sciences. "Has the ideal of such harmony ever been attained?" I asked. "Yes, many times," was the answer; "but not many times in Europe. The men who have realised it

belong almost entirely to the East, and it is still true that the West has an entirely erroneous conception of progress in Eastern lands. This is the result of using only mechanical and material standards. It is only by deliberate self-training that harmony is attained."

Not All Immortal.

"Immortality," he added, "is not necessarily a blessing bestowed on everybody. If a man has a soul, then he lives forever, but not every man is born with a soul. He may acquire one during life on earth, if he so desires, and will submit to the necessary training. But it is quite possible to live happily and to die without possessing a soul. Relatively few men and women enjoy that luxury."

“Not a Cult”

West Kensington.

P. D. Ouspensky, a middle-aged, much-traveled and learned Russian who lives at West Kensington, is the chief missionary for Gurdjieff's strange academy in the Forest of Fontainebleau which has been described in the *Daily News*. Among well-known people deeply interested in the school are Mr. Algernon Blackwood, Mr. J. D. Beresford, Mr. A. R. Orage, Mr. J. W. N. Sullivan, Mr. Middleton Murry, Dr. Maurice Nichol, and Lady Rothermere. By his lectures and books, Mr. Ouspensky hopes to attract a number of other distinguished students, but at present he is only attempting to appeal to a very limited circle.

"I don't like to see the word *cult* applied to the movement," he told a *Daily News* interviewer yesterday, "because that is apt to give an entirely wrong impression. We are not trying to found a church or a sect, but simply to promote a method of education and study. Man, we say, is a much more complicated machine than is generally supposed. Therefore, man must learn to know himself a little better. Little by little he must rediscover those faculties and forces that lie buried in the depths of his nature; and so, by understanding himself, he will at last understand the universe. Gurdjieff and I have reached our present stage of knowledge by long and hard work in many lands. It has been much like what is going on at the present moment in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor."

Petrified Knowledge.

"Long ages ago there existed great civilisations and profound knowledge, traditions of which still exist. What remains of the knowledge has often become petrified, so that it is now mere superstition embodied in apparently unmeaning ritual. As at the tomb of Tutankhamen, mountains of rubbish have to be cleared away before the treasure is revealed; but we know now that the treasure is there. As a first step it is necessary to realise that man's mind has become dulled. You must improve your

instrument. The human Faculty of Knowing must be enlarged. That is why ordinary science and art have reached a point at which they can go no further. Progress into the regions beyond involves a perfect harmony of mind and body such as can only be secured by careful training under the right conditions. Hence the institute in the Forest of Fontainebleau, where each action of the body is brought into relation with some desired activity of the mind.”

Not Work For Work’s Sake.

In this connection Mr. Ouspensky was particularly anxious to make it clear that the hard manual labour described in the articles by a *Daily News* Special Correspondent has nothing to do with a Tolstoyan love of work for work’s sake. It has to be infinitely associated at the Fontainebleau Institute with certain ideas and is merely one—often a brief—stage in the education of the student. In the same way, the dancing which forms an important part of the curriculum is intended to develop particular mental faculties, each dance being an exercise associated with a mental problem. According to Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, the dances of the Dervishes, which they have closely studied on the spot, are of this nature, though the Dervishes themselves have lost almost all knowledge of their true significance.

Kindred Spirits.

Before meeting Gurdjieff at Moscow in 1915, Mr. Ouspensky had made a special study of the psychology of art during travels in Central Asia, Egypt, and India, and had also specialised in certain branches of higher mathematics. In Gurdjieff he found a kindred spirit who had gone farther on the same road, and the two enthusiasts joined forces, traveling and teaching in Russia as they were driven hither and thither by the tide of war or famine. After some years of this wandering life they found themselves in Constantinople, and from there drifted across Europe till they pitched their camp in the famous forest near Paris. “My book, telling of our discoveries so far as they have gone, should be out this summer,” Mr. Ouspensky stated. “I am thinking of calling it *Fragments of an Ancient Teaching*. In the meantime I am lecturing before small private classes, which is as much as my command of English permits.”

New Lines of Thought.

“When students have once got over the initial difficulty of thinking along new lines and grasping the meaning of the terms employed—which may sometimes take a good many weeks—they make steady progress in quickness of perception and understanding, even without taking a course at the Institute. The difficulty on our side is to translate our discoveries into modern forms, but I hope that there, too, progress is being made.”

