

The Problem of Loneliness by J.B. Lotz

What we have said about research and technology concerns itself with one dimension of the human soul, namely that of the powers of scientific reasoning and experiment. Let us now turn to the other dimensions alluded to by Heisenberg among which, evidently, must be reckoned travel, as referred to above. Perhaps here we shall find a genuine bond with nature, and the world.

Travel can, in fact, be a most fruitful and formative experience; one may return from far off lands and strange peoples enriched, refreshed by change and more mature in experience. Goethe experienced this on his travels in Italy and has expressed as much in his writings. But for this time is needed, and in earlier ages people allowed themselves the necessary time; how long they stayed, when they moved on, were dictated by the heart; people were able to create the circumstances in which nature and new surroundings could speak to the heart. The spirit was ready to receive the new impressions in full measure and to penetrate to their depths; and the spirit still possessed a capacity in depth for receiving and responding to these profound impressions. It developed a genuine dialogue in which what counted was not the *number* of new experiences but the depth of the inward impression.

Today, on the contrary, travel has become an empty activity; often there is scarcely any element of genuine desire for broadening of the experience, simply a meaningless itch for new sensations. True experience has a profound, refreshing, uplifting and maturing effect on man; sensation, on the contrary, sweeps over him and leaves him as superficial and empty as he was before. The hunger for new sensations even has a stultifying effect which deadens his faculties for more vital living.

Many people make no attempt to go beyond mere sensation because they do not open their hearts and minds to the grand dimensions of creation but narrow these riches to the proportions of their own outlook, circumscribed as it is by technological formulae. So when they travel they set out to amass pleasant experiences which will distract them from the stern reality of everyday living, keep them pleasantly busy and entertained, and at once titillate and satisfy cravings at the mere sense level. That there should be any deeply felt, inward effect, comes much less into the picture: often they are not in the least concerned about this.

To such people the modern industrialised travel business is not irksome; it is entirely made to measure for them. Destination and tempo of the trip are worked out by an outside expert travel agent: then one is whisked off with all the speed afforded by modern means of transport. The decisive factor is the determination to put as much distance behind one as possible in the shortest possible time. It is all one mad rush, no element of rest at all; all noisy activity, with no fruitful quiet. Because of this, everything loses its value and its possible worth is annihilated: things become "available objects of sightseeing for a travel company which has established the tourist industry there". Because no one can really assimilate so many impressions, one only listens with half an ear and does not really take anything in. Everything stays on the surface and

nothing satisfies the heart, which now becomes restless, rushing in a wild frenzy of activity from one experience to another in order to substitute sheer quantity for depth.

The result of all this is that people return from their travels world-heavy and blasé. They have seen everything, heard everything, done everything, but they were not ready for anything, and therefore gain nothing. Even things of wonderful beauty and amazing, heart-stirring splendour have been registered as everyday commonplaces. Nothing makes any impression any more on these people, nothing has any message for them, grips their imagination or rouses them to enthusiasm. The hardened traveller thinks that he has seen it all, and understands everything, precisely because he has really seen and understood nothing; the real nature of things, which lies in their secret depths and is not to be casually snatched in passing, like something lying by the roadside, escapes and is hidden from him. From this it becomes clear that he is stultified, that nothing is worth doing any more, with the result that emptiness, boredom, satiety and nausea creep over him. This kind of travel leads not to a more vital experience of human life but to a diminution of it: to an attitude which passes blindly by the riches of the world and its protective strength and leads to an isolation more terrifying than almost any other in human history.

' M. Heidegger, op. Cit (see footnote on page 29).