

...But there it was. The old *Mahayana* question now made real and practical. How to apply the now-available potentialities of the accelerated cortex ?

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S LAST MESSAGE to the planet contains the answer to this question in the form of the utopian novel, *Island*.

This book, published in 1962, is the climax of the 69-year voyage of discovery. It is a great book. It will become a greater book.

Like all great books it is misunderstood in its time because it is so far in front of its time. It's too much to take. Too much. *Island* is a continent, a hemisphere, a galaxy of a book.

At the most superficial level it's a science-fiction tale with heroes and villains in a fantasy land. It's a satire as well—of western civilization and its follies. So far, the book can be dealt with.

But it's much more. It's a utopian tract. Huxley's final statement about how to make the best of both worlds. Of individual freedom and social responsibility. Of East and West. Of left and right cerebral hemispheres. Of action and quietism. Of *Tantra* and *Arhat*. Of verbal and non-verbal. Of work and play. Of mind and meta-mind. Of technique and nature. Of body and spirit. Of religion and the secular.

It's a manual on education. A handbook on psychotherapy and mind control. A solution to the horrors of the bi-parent family, the monstrous father-mother pressure cooker.

Too much, indeed, for one book ; but there's more.

Island is a treatise on living, on the living of each moment.

And most important and staggering, the book is a treatise on dying.

The easy intellectual rejection of this wealth of practical, how- to-do-it information is to call it fantasy. Adolescent daydreams about how things could be, in a society imagined and run by gentle, secluded scholars.

But here is the terrible beauty of Huxley's science-fiction- satirical-utopian manual on how to live and how to live with others and how to die and how to die with others: it's all based on facts. *Island* is a popular presentation of empirical facts—anthropological, psychological, psychedelic, sociological. Every method, every social sequence described in *Island* is based on data. Huxley's utopian ideas can work because they have worked. It's all been done—not in a fantasied future but yesterday.

It has been tried and done by Huxley himself, and by his "Palanese" wife Laura Archera Huxley, who presented many of these intensely practical down-to-earth ideas in her book, *You Are Not The Target*. It's a mistake to think of him as a detached novelist observing and commenting on the scene. Huxley was a tall, slightly stooped Calypso singer—intensely topical—strolling near-sightedly through the crowds, singing funny stilted verses in an English accent, singing about the events in which he is participating. He didn't just figure it out—he experienced much of it himself.

Huxley's explorations with psychedelic drugs are an example of his engagement. His willingness to get involved. Remember, every person who can read without moving his lips has heard about what the *Saturday Evening Post** calls "the dangerous magic of LSD." And despite the controversy, almost everyone knows what is involved—the mind-loss and the vision. Everyone has had to come to terms with the new development in his own fashion.

There are as many rational reasons for not taking LSD as there are facets to the human mind—moral, practical, medical, psychiatric, mental. The real reason—however it is expressed—is fear. Fear of losing what we have. Fear of going beyond where we are.

Aldous Huxley had spent years preparing himself for the fearful psychedelic voyage, and he made it without question when it presented itself. Why? Duty? Curiosity? Conviction? Courage? Faith in the process? Trust in his companions—divine or human? He did it, and the world will never forget it.

But the gamble of the mind was not the last act of faith and courage. Aldous Huxley went on to face death as he had faced the whirling enigma of the life process. He tells us about it with poetic sensitivity and concrete specificity in the fourteenth chapter:

Rounding a screen, he caught a glimpse ... of a high bed, of a dark emaciated face on the pillow, of arms that were no more than parchment-covered bones, of claw-like hands He looked at the face on the pillow . . . still, still with a serenity that might almost have been the frozen calm of death

"Lakshmi " Susila laid a hand on the old woman's wasted arm. '

"Lakshmi," she said again more loudly. The death-calm face remained impassive. "You mustn't go to sleep."

.... "Lakshmi !"

The face came to life.

"I wasn't really asleep," the old woman whispered. "It's just my being so weak. I seem to float away."

"But you've got to be here," said Susila. "You've got to know you're here. All the time." She slipped an additional pillow under the sick woman's shoulders and reached for a bottle of smelling salts that stood on the bed table . . . Then after another pause, "Oh, how wonderful," she whispered at last, "how wonderful!" Suddenly she winced and bit her lip.

Susila took the old woman's hand in both of hers. "Is the pain bad?" she asked.

"It would be bad," Lakshmi explained, "if it were really my pain. But somehow it isn't. The pain's here; but I'm somewhere else. It's like what you discover with the *moksha*-medicine. Nothing really belongs to you. Not even your pain."

.... "And now," Susila was saying, "think of that view from the Shiva temple. Think of those lights and shadows on the sea, those blue spaces between the clouds. Think of them, and then let go of your thinking. Let go of it, so that the not-Thought can come through. Things into Emptiness, Emptiness into Suchness. Suchness into things again, into your own mind. Remember what it says in the Sutra. 'Your own consciousness shining, void, inseparable from the great Body of Radiance, is subject neither to birth or death, but is the same as the immutable Light, Buddha Amitabha.' "

"The same as the light," Lakshmi repeated. "And yet it's all dark again."

"It's dark because you're trying too hard," said Susila. "Dark because you want it to be light. Remember what you used to tell me when I was a little girl. 'Lightly, child, lightly. You've got to learn to do everything lightly. Think lightly, act lightly, feel lightly. Yes, feel lightly, even though you're feeling deeply' Lightly, lightly— it was the best advice ever given me. Well, now I'm going to say the same thing to you, Lakshmi . . . Lightly, my darling, lightly. Even when it comes to dying. Nothing ponderous, or portentous, or emphatic. No rhetoric, no tremolos, no self-conscious persona putting on its celebrated imitation of Christ or Goethe or Little Nell. And, of course, no theology, no metaphysics. Just the fact of dying and the fact of the Clear Light. So throw away all your baggage and go forward. There are quicksands all about you, sucking at your feet, trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair. That's why you must walk so lightly. Lightly, my darling . . . Completely unencumbered."

... He looked again at the fleshless face on the pillow and saw that it was smiling.

"The Light," came the hoarse whisper, "the Clear Light. It's here— along with the pain,

in spite of the pain."

"And where are *you!*" Susila asked.

"Over there, in the corner." Lakshmi tried to point, but the raised hand faltered and fell back, inert, on the coverlet "I can see myself there. And she can see my body on the bed."

"Can she see the Light?"

"No. The Light's here, where my body is."

"She's drifted away again," said Susila. "Try to bring her back."

Dr. Robert slipped an arm under the emaciated body and lifted it into a sitting posture. The head drooped sideways onto his shoulder.

"My little love," he kept whispering. "My little love ..."

Her eyelids fluttered open for a moment. "Brighter," came the barely audible whisper, "brighter." And a smile of happiness intense almost to the point of elation transfigured her face.

Through his tears Dr. Robert smiled back at her. "So now you can let go, my darling." He stroked her gray hair. "Now you can let go. Let go," he insisted. "Let go of this poor old body. You don't need it any more. Let it fall away from you. Leave it lying here like a pile of worn-out clothes."

In the fleshless face the mouth had fallen cavernously open, and suddenly the breathing became stertorous.

"My love, my little love . . ." Dr. Robert held her more closely. "Let go now, let go. Leave it here, your old worn-out body, and go on. Go on, my darling, go on into the Light, into the peace, into the living peace of the Clear Light..."

Susila picked up one of the limp hands and kissed it, then turned . . .

"Time to go," she whispered ...