

PAUL J. BRAISTED

Sensei and Friend

The desire to pay tribute to Suzuki Daisetz—*Sensei* and friend—is irresistible even when one knows the futility of words. What he was—and *is*—is eloquent beyond the need for language. Like a star, a flower, a wild bird—there he is!—and to describe him and his influence in words is somehow to reduce the grandeur of a great affirmation. One word after another to characterize him comes to mind but slips away unused. One idea, however, returns again and again—perhaps we may speak of him as a modern renaissance man—in a rather special sense.

There is a legend told by Walter Pater in his *Renaissance*: “When the shipload of sacred earth from the soil of Jerusalem was mingled with the common clay in the *Compo Santo* at Pisa, a new flower grew up from it unlike any flower men had seen before—the anemone with its concentric rings of strangely blended colors still to be found by those who search long enough for it in the long grass of Maremma.” So it was when this Japanese Zen scholar steeped himself in the literature and spiritual experience of China and then of Meister Eckhart and the Western world—a new flowering of insight appeared, a joy and a delight to many in both East and West. To the very end of his pilgrimage here—when he was investigating some quite new areas of human experience—he was fully open to and receptive of all experiences, all knowledge, of all times. He brought ancient treasures of Asia and the West into new currency. His was the boundless excitement of discovery of the deepest inner reality, wherever found, and the eager report of the news to his contemporaries. Who has heard him and not known the freshness and charm of these insights? Little in the experience of men escaped his

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notice. From the days long gone when he was interpreter for the Indian seer Rabindranath Tagore, on his first visit to Japan, to his own eager response into the meaning of Dag Hammarskjold's *Markings*, he was a voice—a call from reality to reality—from the inner worldless reality of his heart to its counterpart in others. So in countless ways, in repeated manuscripts, he sought to name the nameless, and there were many who understood! Always he was absorbing experience and knowledge and restating it along with the fresh understandings that came to him. As the years passed the mature and mellow outlook always with a spontaneous and unfettered gaiety was experienced as an exciting kind of wisdom by those who knew him.

His writings will long be examined by philosophers and critics of different cultural backgrounds. Of course his writings on Zen masters of China and Japan, on Eckhart and others in the West, can not be expected always to satisfy scholars. If or when his interpretations transcend the bounds of reason and of strict logic, it is not because he does not know that he is doing so; rather it is further evidence of his desire to make an authentic Zen communication. He was indeed a flower "that does not talk," a new flower that, not speaking, has been found eloquent! And so it comes about that those who had the rare privilege of his friendship accounted him both *Sensei* and friend. For them he still speaks—or still *Is*!

His thoughts were more often expressed in English than in his native tongue, although to the very end he was translating Chinese Zen classics into Japanese and English. In his many books in English Western men will long seek his wisdom and insights and follow his light in their several ways, and it is to be hoped that this wisdom will soon find its way more fully into the Japanese language. In this way his countrymen too may come to share his spirit in a fuller way, as we in the West have come to know and value it.