

A Free Man Looks at History

E. Haldeman-Julius

1. Realism in History

Free thought is established firmly on a groundwork of historical knowledge. If we take history broadly, to include science and all that is known in every branch of the world's evolutionary past, it is suggestive what a force of liberation this study may be. It must, of course, be history of a fully realistic description. What passes popularly for history is vague, misleading, often the product of deliberate falsification, and in many respects worse than worthless. This kind of history which is composed so largely of legends, preachments, and a superficial picture of events cannot stand for a reliable moment in the face of real scholarship. It is not compatible, that is to say, with a true understanding of the past.

The difficulty is that so few are able to make scholarly comparisons. They cling to misconceptions which have been the subject of complete debunking among historians of the first order; false notions and garbled versions which have been repeated glibly by popular soothsayers, entertainers and politicians although their incorrectness is readily ascertainable by the student; incomplete statements of fact which, even when true as far as they go, omit vital material which leads to a very different conclusion regarding the significance of events.

It is amazing how little indebted to facts are many generally held views of men. It is amazing, yet natural too when one reflects that most men barely touch the outlines of knowledge here and there, that they seldom have a peep at the real, primary, downright stuff

of history, that they get their ideas from men who are poorly informed or who, knowing better, are desirous of making out a partial case. In short, we know that the interests of obscurantism in history are very great. With the knowledge and the facilities of communicating knowledge which are present in the world, there is one thing vitally lacking—namely, an ideal devotion to knowledge, a supreme and generally effective determination that all men should know the truth, and that there shall be no suppression or misinterpretation of facts for the sake of bolstering favorite opinions. Surely enough, one may say reassuringly, enlightenment spreads and the field of error, even of popular error, is diminished. Yet in view of what is known about history there is a surprising general ignorance; at any rate, it seems ridiculous that some egregious fallacies should persist when the truth is not really in dispute nor hard to ascertain. It is ridiculous when one knows better; but if one doesn't know better, a false account of history may be convincing enough, and especially satisfactory when it agrees with a man's prejudices.

And there is no mystery or accident about the dissemination of untrue history. We can understand, for instance, how powerfully the motive of patriotism operates to distort the vital record of a nation's life. Politicians are notoriously far removed from any sound principle of love for the truth, and such men continually take liberties with history in a spirit of partisanship. And a jealous nationalism encourages only a flattering view of a country's past politics, wars, ideology, and social conditions. It is denounced as unpatriotic for a historian to tell the truth, if what he tells may reach a wide audience and provide material for uncomfortable public controversy.

It can be said that not one man in a hundred in any country has a correct, enlightened understand-

ing of his country's history. He may in the most superficial way be familiar with the chronological order of events. He knows in a general way that certain things happened, certain rulers held power, certain changes vaguely understood have taken place in historic time. But of the real forces of history he has no adequate comprehension. His view is partisan, patriotic, and idealistic. He is given an exaggerated idea of the virtues of his country, the loftiness of its ideals and customs, the deceptively portrayed background and motivation of its social life, its cultural life, its political life, military adventures—adventures which are made to appear glorious and righteous, regardless of the intrigues and struggles for power that prompted such violence.

It is not that the truth is hidden. It can easily be known if one cares to look for it. It is of course not spread forth fairly in the full, ready view of all men. It is not printed in the newspapers, nor in popular works, nor in common school histories. It is familiar, however, to the student who has read the works of the most careful and able historians and who has, above all, gone to original sources.

Not long ago we had in this country a tempest of patriotic resentment over a biography of George Washington which showed him as a human being rather than an impossible image of bloodless perfection. It really made Washington more interesting. But as it was contrary to the legendary picture of "the Father of His Country," there was a scandalized outcry and, plainly asserted, the notion that history should be faithful to certain "ideals" rather than faithful to the actual record. Few Americans have any broadly correct and useful knowledge of the political, social, and cultured origins of their country, of its Revolution and the formation of its government, of the leading characters of that important and polemically obscured period. Yet

if they were to read only the unquestioned documents left by the chief actors—by Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Paine and others—they would have a quite different idea of "the Spirit of '76" and of the principles and problems with which "the founding fathers" were concerned. Patriotic history falsifies the patriots' own story.

There has been such misrepresentation of every important period of history: especially of the most important periods; when great changes and critical issues have been to the fore. How many Americans have a sound grasp of the economic factors that went to the making of that tremendous crisis, the Civil War? How generally known is the skeptical attitude of the leading American Revolutionists? It is still declared, directly contrary to the historical facts, that the American government was Christian in its origin. The truth is that Thomas Paine's ideas on religion were held by the leading American patriots of the time, and that the "Spirit of '76" was decidedly more inspired by the fashionably current rationalism of the age than by Christianity.

One readily understands, of course, why the beginnings of the Republic are placed in such a false light. The propaganda of Christianity is responsible for a good deal of falsehood. Preachers and befrienders of the church do not want the truth known. Again, the object of patriotism is to convey an impossibly pure, lofty, idealistic view of the origin of our government—to make it appear perfect and inspired—and this leads to a neglect of the basic materialistic factors. It is foolishly taken to be a shameful fact that economic reasons were involved in the struggle for American liberty—when they are, after all, just the reasons we should expect to have the greatest force. So the whole struggle is politely elevated to the plane of "ideals": the truth that ideals have a mate-

rial basis is stirred over: and facts are distorted to suit the idealistic picture. There is, finally, the tendency of any ruling class to play down a country's revolutionary past. It becomes treasonable to repeat the sentiments of the patriots who fought to establish the new government. It is embarrassing to say much about Thomas Jefferson's ideas on tyrants—not simply monarchical tyrants but any tyrants, the spirit of tyranny itself.

Great historical struggles against absurd powers, oppressive principles, illiberal systems of thought are not fairly discussed by the upholders of contemporary conservatism, who benefit from the special privileges and the unjust powers and the illiberal traditions that still obtain in the world. It is not easy to reconcile an admiration for the past champions of freedom with an apology for the present enemies of freedom. So there is a vast amount of misrepresentation and sophistry, great men and great issues of the past are presented in a false light, and the heroes of historical enlightenment and revolutionism are made to appear tamely as models of orthodoxy or to serve as lurid warnings of disreputable character and tendency.

It is very clear that the free-thinking man who is fully and soundly committed to the principles of progress and liberty, will have an outlook upon history quite different from that of the man who has a motive of defense for current anti-liberal systems. The free man does not attempt to square history with narrow conception of religion or patriotism or class rule. He has no sympathy with obscurantism, which would make him wish to ignore certain facts and lessons of history. He has indeed the greatest regard for those personalities and those influences in history which have acted for the culture, the enlightenment, the liberation of mankind. He defends himself, however, from the uncompliment-

ary charge of bias. He insists that one should judge systems, governments, ideas by their results. And he does not hesitate to express his approval of intelligent, progressive forces, which have developed the brightest and most attractive and most excellently efficient features of civilization. On this question of bias, whether one is willing to declare oneself in favor of freedom or oppression, in favor of enlightenment or obscurantism, I think no one will flatly array himself against the free-thinking man: not in so many words, although it may be plain enough that his position is unfriendly to freedom.

It is, first and last, important that we should know the truth. We should know what are the lessons of history with respect to freedom, culture, progress—what really are the forces that have made history and in what direction they have tended. And this knowledge can be obtained only by studying the record of the past with a perfectly free mind, without illusions cultivated for partisan or apologetic ends, without preconceptions in defense of which we should be disposed to ignore the plainest facts.

This realistic view of history liberates us at once, for example, from any mystical interpretation of human events. The notion of a divine will or intelligence guiding the course of history is crude, preposterous, and entirely untenable. It is of course so very childish that very little reflection, very little knowledge of history, should be enough to disabuse any mind of the notion of Providence. We find that the events of history come about humanly and naturally. Man's institutions, his ideas, his ways of living have evolved. Nor has there been a steady, consistent, wise evolution as if by way of carrying out some divine plan. The record of man is replete with blunders, the following of false trails, the defeats of the best possibilities of life, of setbacks, be-

trays, tragedies of ignorance and cruelty.

As in the evolution of life to the human level—a blind, infinitely sordid and painful development, terribly exacting in its price—so in the story of human life to the present level of civilization, we see no evidence of any finger of God or any beneficently guiding spirit. We have indeed more reason to be depressed by the dark aspects of history and to see, clearly enough, that man has been at the mercy of very materialistic factors which he did not understand: that he has been the victim of his ignorance and that he has stupidly, disastrously floundered in the darkness of his own fears, passions, prejudices and conflicting interests; and that, if we were to take any mystical view, we should have to conclude that man had been the sport and plaything of malicious fates.

But mysticism is at once meaningless and superfluous. We see history as an intelligible drama. Things do not happen causelessly. There is no record of miracles. Individually and socially, men are explained by their surroundings, by the time in which they live, by the concrete factors with which they must deal and the degree of culture they bring to the struggle. No mythical devil is needed to explain the sad consequences of man's ignorance nor any mythical god to account for his growth in knowledge and civilization. (For that matter, the religious agencies which have talked most about gods have been significantly opposed to culture and the great ideas that have helped the race forward have been impious.) We do not always find man behaving wisely but we observe him behaving naturally according to his opportunities, his limitations, and his necessities. And slowly there have evolved better ideas of justice, of government, of social relations and a more intelligent conception of the world.

We are no longer seriously in

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The End of the World

Joseph McCabe

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Ernest Renan, the second person of the great French literary Trinity, of which the Father is Voltaire and the Holy Ghost Anatole France, used to beg his contemporaries not to be in too great a hurry to reach the truth as it might prove to be disappointing. He was himself a man of mighty scholarship and no dogmas. He just raised questions and made suggestions. He destroyed the divinity of Christ for half the world by saying that there was "something divine" about him. The old legends and allegories were clearly beneath the notice of a scholar, but Renan was not the man to put sound principles and maps of life in their place. Don't talk to me, he said about the urgent need of this faith-bereft humanity, for "humanity will always draw from its own heart as many illusions as it requires to fulfill its duties and accomplish its destiny."

No, he was not going to set up a philosophy for humanists. But in late life, when he had passed sixty, he began to glance at what people called the greatest of their problems, the ethical problem. What precisely everybody was so serious about Renan was not sure. He was an instinctively sound man in his behavior. Dr. Barry, who was sacrilegiously employed to write the life of Renan in a certain literary series, repeats the stale claim that skeptics live on the capital they accumulated when they were in the Church. Renan, he says, was "a philosopher on half-pay." The truth is that he was simply a very comfortable man. He had no need to steal, no inclination to kill, no reason to covet his neighbor's wife. However, it seemed that other people were very concerned about this moral business, and Renan decided to look into it: or, rather, to look round it and say charmingly ironical things about it. In his "Abbe of Jouarre" he

imagines a group in prison under the shadow of the guillotine during the Revolution. It is the end of the world tomorrow for them, so they decide to make the most of their last hour. Even the nun tastes the forbidden fruit, in case there should be none growing in the valleys of Paradise. And the meaning of the allegory is given in this sentence. "I often imagine that if mankind knew for certain that the world would come to an end in two or three days love would break out on all sides with a sort of frenzy: for that which restrains love is the limit put upon it by the need of keeping society intact." Let us not discuss the suggestion of fact. We might conclude that the frenzy is now on and it would drop to zero, in a panic of mysticism and uncertainty, if Gabriel sent a blast of his horn over the planet. The point is that Renan, the mocker at positive creeds and philosophies, was really telling the creed-mongers and philosophers a truth that they were, and are, very unwilling to learn: that moral law is just social law or an illusion.

Of course the moralists were outraged. The only extenuating feature that any British or American critic could find in the thing was that it was typically Gallic. Matthew Arnold was the spiritual director of respectable skeptics in those days, and he had to advise on this blasphemy. "Even," he said in one of his American Lectures, "though a gifted man like M. Renan may be so carried away by the tide of opinion in France, where he lives, as to say that Nature cares nothing about chastity, and to see with amused indulgence the worship of the great goddess Lubricity, let us stand fast and say that her worship is against nature—human nature—and that it is ruin." How Renan must have smiled that ironic smile of his! After all the high-sounding, soul-moving words the apostle of transcendental morality slips into Renan's own position: it "means ruin," it is social law. Indeed, Arnold did not slip unconsciously into that phrase. He probably had a suspicion that something more substantial than graceful tributes to Chastity and frowns at Lubricity was needed to

make an impression on critical folk.

Another Positivist, just as skeptical as Arnold and Renan, but, like Arnold, very much concerned to show that the profound thinker respects moral law whether he is religious or no, said much the same thing. "Ever and always, for eighteen hundred years, as soon as the wings of the Christian virtues droop or are broken, public and private morals decline"; and the great historian then reproduces the usual uncritical references to Rome, and the Renaissance, and the Revolution, and all the rest. Renan, whom they regarded as so superficial that they must forgive him this "aberration of the moral instinct," as one of his most intimate friends called the book, was nearer the truth than all these profound folk and their august moralities. The only law we know is the law we ourselves collectively make or sanction.

However, I do not propose for the moment to discuss this. In the series of volumes called the Key to Love and Sex which I am now writing for the Haldeman-Julius Publications I am attempting to work out, coldly and quite objectively, the relation of moral law to sexual conduct. It will shock many of my friends, and I want here to tell them the truth about the end of the world and see if it will not make them a little less oracular. Just now in England there is an orgy of moral dogmatism. The police have confiscated books and manuscripts, and a very imposing deputation has implored the authorities to be more zealous in the good work. In case any reflection of this reaches America, let me tell you the real meaning.

It certainly does not mean that there is any return to medieval ways of thinking, but it is directly connected with something with which you would never dream of connecting it: the approaching General Election. Joynson-Hicks, popularly known (and vituperated) as Jix, who rules our Department of the Interior, feels that his chances are running out. He is an Anthony Comstock without the bile: a Churchman who is going to oblige his friends the

bishops as much as an abuse of his powers permits. And it is quite safe in either England or America to abuse your political powers in the interests of morality. Bishops and Baptist preachers are drawn up in battle array ready to swoop upon any bold politician who will dare to question the grandmothers' last-hour proceedings of Jix. So everybody agrees. Cicely Hamilton has recently written that there is far too much about sex in our literature, and it has got to stop. Miss Pankhurst writes this morning that she and the shade of her mother shed tears at the way in which women-novelists abuse the liberty which she and her mother won for them. Ramsay MacDonald addresses clerical gatherings, and the press congratulates the police on keeping out of virtuous England "the flood of obscene literature" which, Jix says, those abandoned nations, France and Germany, are ever trying to pour into it.

The results will probably not be very serious, but it means a further delay in the formulation of a sound and sensible philosophy of life. And what I should like to point out to all these dogmatic oracles is that there is so much rebellion against them in our time, not because the end of the world is near, but precisely because it is so far off. They like to represent that they are "profound" and that I am superficial. Well, I am going to be profound this time and take you down to the foundations of the universe. I mean the real and known foundations. What Jesus said by the shores of Galilee does not cut much ice with most of us today; especially as he never said it. And as to the man who talks about virtue in the language of the ancient Stoics, who talks like Matthew Arnold about Nature (with a capital N) and its eternal law, one would advise him to do a little serious reading instead of repeating what other writers have borrowed from other writers. The Law of Nature of the Stoic was a myth. Although the Stoic was a materialist he believed that there was a mind in nature—here he paid the intellectual penalty of neglecting science—on the ground that its

order could only thus be explained, and he then easily concluded that in the human mind the laws of this cosmic mind would be perceived. The foundation of this Law of Nature, which Emerson audaciously compared to the granite on which New York is built, is a pile of toy-balloons. In any case the early and genuine Stoics never discovered that their Law of Nature forbade a man to make love to his stenographer. (Oh, yes, there were.)

So let us be really profound and begin at the very foundations. We are fairly sure today what is the source of the energy of our sun. If you want full details, see the first and second volumes of the Key to Culture. To those who have read them let me recall that the disintegration of radioactive metals has revealed to us a source of intense energy: that if these metals were massed in billions of tons, not in minute grains as we have them in radium salts, the total output of energy would be exactly what we find in the case of the stars: and that we have very positive reasons to know that the great body of the sun, beneath the thin layer of gases and ordinary metals, is a mass of heavier metals in a state of unimaginable condensation. Atoms do not simply break up. They are, in a sense, ground up, broken up into their elements, by the terrific pressure. And the mathematician, to whom the physical astronomer gives the weight of the sun and the actual energy it radiates away every hour, can deduce from these, in very round numbers, the time it will take to consume the sun's supply of energy so far that the output of heat and light will be too feeble to prevent the final freezing of this planet. To me this seems much more profound than Immanuel Kant's virginal reflections on the puritanical sentiment which his mother had given him and which he discovered to be a categorical imperative for the whole universe.

Yes, but what have radioactive metals to do with morals? Let me remind you that it is not so much morals that I am considering as moral dogmatism, or dogmatism generally. Still you do

not see the connection? Let me tell you then that our mathematicians generally conclude that this globe will remain habitable for about another two hundred million years. Barring accident, of course. There are plenty of cosmic accidents. Several times a year a needle-point of light appears on the black velvet canopy of the sky where no star, or only a very faint star, had been seen before. We are not sure what has happened. The pent-up energies in the interior of the star may have, so to say, blown the lid off the caldron and the devil's brew been spilt over millions of miles of space. Another star may have approached within a few hundreds of millions of miles and raised a tidal wave of a few billion tons of white-hot matter. A star, traveling at fifty miles or so per second, may have entered one of the great clouds of dust that lie across certain regions of space, and the friction would in time raise it to the required temperature. We don't know yet. But what we do know is that the ancient Persian idea of a destruction of this globe of ours by fire is a picture of a boy's bonfire compared with what actually happens, every few months, when one of those new stars is announced. Within a day or two that star has, perhaps, risen from 5,000° C. to 25,000° C. A mighty flame has spread over a vast space larger than our solar system, and if there were any globes with living inhabitants in the district they were annihilated like snowflakes that fall on a hot plate.

Do not let me alarm you. Our little bus, Terra, has run merrily for about two billion years, so it is likely to last our time. But I am a great stickler for accuracy, and when I see predictions that it is going to run on for two hundred million years, with its human passengers, I have to add: barring accident. There really is no cosmic traffic cop keeping order in the streets of space. There is no "perfect order and regularity" in the universe. However, the globes sort themselves out very fairly, on the whole, on dynamic principles, and we have no reason to suspect that our particular bus is due for an accident.

Patience. Don't keep asking me what all this stuff has to do with morals. You will presently get accustomed to my preposterous way of writing articles. Someone once defined an after-dinner speech as a discourse round a given point at any distance from that point. But that is not my model. I merely want to be profound: to begin at the foundations and not overlook anything on the way up.

Well, the earth is going to remain habitable for another hundred or two hundred million years, and men are going to remain on it and increase in wisdom during that time. There will, of course, be periods of reaction. We are just entering one. We emancipated people get so lazy that we allow a minority of musty fanatics to rule us. Anybody would think, from all this talk about floods of obscene literature and increasing sensuality and other horrible symptoms, that it was the pious majority who were doing nothing and a wicked minority were allowed to get up orgies which will wreck civilization and put us back in barbarism. What drive we do still talk in the year 1929! Nobody is going to be converted by this sort of thing. But our hundred thousand parsons see their occupation threatened, and they want to raise the temperature of their followers and get a few puritanical laws passed. Every blue law that is passed is worth a hundred million dollars to the Churches. So they make assiduous use of the Jixes and other dear old ladies.

With all this crafty and cold-blooded calculation I have here no concern. What interests me is the genuine moral dogmatism of the man or woman who does not find it commercially profitable. It is a good thing to be concrete, and I will take a highly cultured and well-known American skeptic—who does not read this paper. He was reared in skepticism, so it is no use suggesting that he is living on moral capital accumulated in religious years. Yet he would subscribe very emphatically to every slogan of this new purity campaign. He utterly disbelieves in God and immortality

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The Moving Finger Writes

Informal Comment on Developments of the Week Lloyd E. Smith

We're Off!

You have already observed that this is the first issue of this weekly periodical under its new name: THE AMERICAN FREEMAN. Proper felicitations are in order. It is hoped that the A. F. will get better. We offer a toast to its bright future—rather dry toast, in these prohibition days. But, anyhow, we can imagine it—we editors and writers and readers are supposed to have good imaginations. A health! Skool!

If I were Briggs I'd be drawing a cartoon on "How It Feels to Be the First Issue of a New Paper." Not to mention how it feels to be the Assistant Editor of such a new paper.

We are doing one thing that many readers will be cheered by, and that is, with this issue, single wrapping the paper—as the procedure is called. That is, every copy is being mailed in its own separate wrapper. This eliminates the address label on any part of the paper itself. Readers have complained—and justly—because of obliteration of some of the text by this yellow address label.

The type remains the same. A slightly different make-up is inaugurated. The division of the page across the middle is somewhat European in appearance—or so I am told. The idea is to start at least two major contributions or departments on the first page—continuing them to the other pages whenever necessary. This does cause a break in the continuity, but I think it will be justified by certain advantages.

For the present the newspaper style—four pages each week—will be maintained. Some day—but that's pretty far ahead, so why speculate?

In this issue, to start things off, you have Joseph McCabe, H. M. Le Chatelier, Isaac Goldberg, and the Editor himself, E. Halde-man-Julius. John Langdon-Davies is still lecturing, so we cannot expect much from him in the way of manuscript until he gets back to England. We had hoped to have him in the first issue, too—one reason for delaying the first issue so long. For the time being, we have substituted M. Le Chatelier who has some pertinent things to say about certain aspects of becoming mentally superior.

Joseph McCabe and Isaac Goldberg will contribute regularly. Probably John Langdon-Davies will join the regulars soon. Then there will be, from time to time, Clement Wood, Samuel Marx, and others.

Harry Elmer Barnes, famous liberal educator, may also appear in THE AMERICAN FREEMAN at intervals.

We have some other ideas. Ideas are plentiful enough, indeed—but the necessary support is not always forthcoming. You can do your part by seeing to it that the light of THE AMERICAN FREEMAN is not kept under any bushel! As the traditional circulation manager is so fond of saying—and dreaming!—if only each reader could secure one other reader (reader being a euphemism for subscriber), we would double the circulation in no time! Even Rudyard Kipling realized the importance of IP and wrote a poem about it.

Straight Thinking

Some people are entertained by apparent witticisms, seeming bits of cleverness, that really are neither witty nor clever. They are amused, however, because they think in spasmodic jerks, like a

flivver running on two cylinders. Straight thinking would show them the absurdities in which they take such childlike delight. Clear-headed consideration of many a puny poser would relegate it to the limbo of abortive attempts to be cerebral—where it belongs!

Take that hoary query: Which came first the hen or the egg? Even today this question is popped into conversations, with a vague idea that its rhetorical scorn will put to flight all and sundry supporters of the theory of evolution. If you cannot immediately give answer, proving conclusively that the hen or the egg came first, you are regarded as routed. Really, though, the question is much more damaging to the case of the fundamentalist. He assumes that hen and egg have always been hen and egg, and always will be, and to postulate this he must presume an infinity of hens and eggs. To him, then, neither came first—neither began at all—unless Jehovah created them simultaneously.

But a straightforward glance at the question is sanative. If you have advanced intellectually to the point where you throw out any idea of a special creation, such a question is readily reduced to absurdity. Since the hen evolved, her egg evolved together with it. The progenitors of birds, in the evolutionary process, were reptiles. Earlier, the hen's egg was more like a reptile's egg. Possibly it was soft-shelled (I am merely supposing—I don't know the details). Before that, eons before that, both adult and egg were more simple, and quite different from the hen and her egg of today. But always parent and offspring, adult and reproduction of that adult, have gone together. Going back to the most simple forms—to such an uncomplicated creature as the amoeba—there was no adult and no egg at all. The adult simply lived for a time and then suddenly divided into two.

Then each of those two, barring accident, lived and sooner or later divided into two each. So was the race propagated, and the creature lived on in a kind of sporadic immortality. As the creature became more complex, sex developed, reproduction evolved, and the eternal circle of hen-and-egg appeared. So the question is really not a poser—it is just ridiculous.

Pass to some of the parlor questions which are sometimes offered as contributions to the life of the party. They are called brainteasers, but perhaps braintwisters would be a better name for them. They are presumably intended to test the clarity of your perceptive powers. But they presuppose, always, a certain lack of perceptive powers as well—that is, you are not expected to be too perceiving.

For example, here is one: If five cats can catch five mice in five minutes, how many cats will it take to catch one hundred mice in one hundred minutes? The usual answer given spontaneously, is one hundred cats. However, you are supposed to be clever enough to reason like this: The original five cats are catching mice at the rate of one per minute. Therefore, those same five cats will catch one hundred mice in one hundred minutes. For, at the end of each five minutes, they will toss aside the five just caught, and turn their attention to the next five mice.

You see the absurdity. You are forced to assume that the one hundred mice are lined up, awaiting execution by the five cats. You must assume also that none of the five felines will pause to taste of any mouse until all are caught and properly dispatched. And you must assume that the handicaps, such as there are, put in the way of catching each mouse are the same for all the mice, so that the cats can maintain the pace. This fast approaches nonsense! Because I say that the problem

of the cats and the mice is a ridiculous problem, you may accuse me of being incapable of enjoying such harmless fun. I can laugh at it as readily as anyone—I am merely using the example to illustrate my point, for it seems to have occurred to few people that the problem is fundamentally absurd.

Take one in arithmetic, which is more subtle. A man is supposed—for the sake of the problem—to have \$50 in the savings bank. He draws out \$19, leaving \$31; then he draws out \$15, leaving \$16; then \$12, leaving \$4; then \$4, leaving nothing. But he seems to have \$1 still coming to him, for if you add up what he drew out and what he had left, there is a dollar difference, thus:

Table with 2 columns: Draws Out, Has Left. Rows show calculations: \$19, \$15, \$4, \$50 vs \$31, \$16, 4, \$51.

You've seen the problem, no doubt. You perhaps see the fallacy, too. It is not an arithmetical truism that the sum of what is taken away equals the sum of the remainders. Try other figures, and see for yourself. By this sort of computation you could show that the man has \$15, or much more, still coming to him. Let him draw out \$1, leaving 49, then another \$1, leaving 48—already the sum of the remainders is \$97!

I think Mr. Ripley, of "Believe It or Not!" fame, presented this cute figure-juggling in one of his daily newspaper cartoons. Somewhat makeshift, I should think—for certainly that is one notion he can't prove! Arithmetical sophistry is the kindest name one could call it, when it is presented in what is supposed to be a fact feature. As a parlor stunt it is as preposterous as most parlor games are. Several of Ripley's pronouncements, which are so

startling to the believer in the constant regularities of human life, are almost, if not quite, in this class of mental trickery. I may cut loose one of these days and consider some of them in this light. Meanwhile, he puts on a good show, and there are no hard feelings between us!

Passing to more important questions, the habit of straight thinking will prevent much grief in the mental jousts we are all called upon to engage in. Philosophers and logicians have fine names for the processes of thinking and arguing. They present syllogisms, and premises, and propositions. They label some errors of thinking begging the question. But whether you know these names or not, or whether you remember them after you have studied the art or science of thinking, matters little. Begging the question can be perceived, by straight thinking, by someone who does not know what it is called. He can see, that is to say, that the reasoning is false.

For example, a preacher says: If you do not believe in immortality, what makes this life worth while? He is begging the question by his use of the words "this life." They suggest that if "this life" can be spoken of, there must be other lives—at least one other—so that there can be this life and that life. Agnostics and such should avoid the expression "this life." So far as we know life is unique—it is just life, not "this life," or "earthly life," or "life here and now," or any other suggestion that life is not all.

Dilemmas were popular with the ancients. They may arise even today. A famous one is about the student of law who promised to pay his teacher when he won his first case. But the student was lazy; he sought no cases. The teacher sued for his money.

The student argued: If the teacher wins the decision of the

court, I lose the case, and therefore, according to our agreement, I am not to pay him. But if the court decides against him I don't have to pay either—so, either way, I do not pay.

The teacher argued: If the court says I must be paid, I win. If the court awards the case to the student then, this being his first case, and since he wins it, he must pay me according to our agreement. Either way, I must be paid.

Therein lies the dilemma. It is not sound reasoning, of course. Straight thinking can clear it up. The fallacy is in the twisting of words to make an apparent logical conclusion. The merits of this particular case, however, demand that the teacher be paid. First, because the agreement with the student, that he should pay when he won his first case, has in it the inherent agreement that the student will practice his law. Failing to seek cases really nullifies the original agreement. Second since the case is brought into court, both parties are bound to abide by the decision of the court, all attempts at sophistical argument notwithstanding. It is here a question of justice, not of verbal gymnastics. Third, and finally, the student and the teacher are looking at the question from different points of view—to reach an adjustment, they must adopt a third point of view on which they can stand in agreement. That is, the student says that if the court decides against him, he can waive the decision on the grounds of a previous agreement (which is now null and void); but the teacher says that, if the court decides against the student, the decision must stand. Again, if the court decides the other way, the student says that the decision must stand, and the teacher says that it must not. I say the thing is black—you say it is white—we never will agree!

On Mental Superiority

What Makes One Rise Above the Average Henry M. LeChatelier

(Translated by Ralph E. Oesper.)

Every school gains renown not only through the scientific achievements of its professors, but also because of the industrial successes of its former students. Schools have been a potent factor in the development of an intellectual elite, the class responsible for the progress of civilization in any country. If Europe is superior to Africa, the sole cause lies in the possession of leaders. The blacks of savage countries may be good manual laborers, but they lack a select class to direct them, either as governing officials, as officers in warfare, as scholars, as engineers or as organizers of their industries. The formation of an intellectual superior class should be the dominant preoccupation of any country that expects to cut a figure in world affairs.

The geologist, de Lapparent, in a didactic statement declared that every terrain is, of necessity, divided into three strata: the upper, the middle and the lower. The intellectuals likewise may be placed on three levels: the men of genius, whose fame and influence extend throughout the world for many centuries; the great men, whose renown, however great at a given time, is finally eclipsed by that of their successors, and lastly, the lower elite, who temporarily exert a useful influence within rather narrow boundaries, but never attain far-reaching notability. Each of these three categories of intellectual superiors renders about the same value of service to humanity; the men of genius are certainly the greatest benefactors, but they also occur most seldom. In algebraic terms, the product of the number in each class multiplied by each individual's usefulness gives a constant.

In a talk to the students of an American university Carnegie said, "I am speaking only to those of you who are ambitious to become millionaires; the others do not interest me." The present speaker wishes to emphasize a parallel thought: "I am speaking only to those of you who have an ambition to raise yourselves above the average, and I believe this will include all of you." It would surely be folly for any one to deliberately set out to become a genius, because this goal can only be

reached through certain exceptional qualities, but we all can and should strive to be numbered among the elite, to use this term in its proper sense. With the exception of certain afflicted individuals, fortunately not numerous, all of us from birth have the requisite qualities. The rest is dependent on will power and on the method of developing and applying our natural endowments.

Let us examine together, using the experimental method, the conditions attendant upon the recruitment of the intellectual elite. For this purpose we need not distinguish the levels of attainment, for they do not differ in nature, but only in degree. We can then cite as examples great men with whose lives you are more familiar, and from these we may draw conclusions applicable to the formation of the ordinary elite. What qualities are essential and how may these be developed?

Activity

The most striking characteristic of great men is their zeal for work. None of them observed the eight-hour day, no matter what the field of their activities. We may cite as examples great statesmen, such as Napoleon or Louis XIV; great writers, such as Victor Hugo or Lamartine; great artists, such as Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci; great scientists, such as Lavoisier or Pasteur; great manufacturers, such as Bessemer or Siemens. In truth, they often employed the most varied ruses to protect their working periods from interruption. Napoleon assembled his ministerial council during the soirees at the Tuileries, leaving the reception of the guests to the Empress Josephine. Buffon took refuge in his country house and there peacefully wrote his natural history. Descartes secreted himself in a little Dutch village when he desired to cultivate his philosophical meditations. The labor expended by celebrated men is sometimes greatly underestimated. Powers of extemporaneous speaking far beyond reality are often ascribed to great orators. As a matter of fact, the most successful of them write out their addresses in full before delivering them. Mistaken notions as to this have originated from false claims. Emile Zola pretended that his voluminous literary output required only three hours' daily toil. Perhaps he did not actually keep the pen in his hand longer than that, but the final wording comprises only a small part of literary production. Françoise Sarcey, while discussing the art of lecturing, very judiciously analyzed the importance of preliminary work. He said: The title of a lecture should be

chosen a month in advance of the delivery; then the subject matter should be considered for two weeks during every free moment, especially while strolling about. By degrees, new and interesting points of view will appear spontaneously; these should be classified either in the memory or jotted down systematically. During the third week, the material thus accumulated should be gone over mentally, the less important points rejected or suppressed, the others rearranged in their logical order and the connecting thoughts brought to light. At last, during the fourth week, the final wording is committed to paper and this requires no great effort.

Great men have not only labored much, but their efforts have been confined to a few specialties, thus increasing the intensity of their work. In hydrostatics a force is concentrated on a piston of small area in order to produce great pressures. Saint Claire Deville devoted half of his career to the study of dissociation. Brethelot worked fifteen years on organic synthesis, fifteen years on thermochemistry and fifteen years on agricultural chemistry. Many scientists owe their fame to studies made in a single field as instanced by Pasteur in microbiology, Fresnel with the theory of light, Ampere and the laws of electro-dynamics. The same holds true in industrial applications and as examples we have Vicat and hydraulic cements or Fournayron and the turbine.

This concentration of effort cannot be recommended too highly to young investigators, for they frequently exhibit an opposite tendency and allow themselves to be enticed from one thing to another by topics which appeal to them. Only men of exceptional endowments, like Leonardo da Vinci or Lavoisier, can successfully distribute their efforts without paralyzing their creative powers. Some scholars carry this specialization of their endeavors to excess and pride themselves on the extent to which they disregard the obligations of daily life. Many stories in this vein are related of Ampere and of Henri Poincare. The following actual occurrence illustrates the same point. I was invited to dine with an illustrious foreigner and on arriving at the hotel I was told by my host that his wife was ill and consequently she could not dine with us. He said, "Under these conditions will you be kind enough to order the dinner, for since I have never studied this subject, I know nothing about such matters."

It is not sufficient to work hard, but is also essential to work efficiently, i. e., time must not be wasted on useless projects. A plan of attack should be formulated in advance of starting the actual work or writing, so that

there need be no hesitation. Attempts to do two things at the same time are usually fruitless, and it should be a matter of principle not to stop working until something definite has been achieved. Learn to persevere and do not hesitate to adhere to a decision made after proper reflection. It is this spirit of organization, this convergence of efforts that is so highly manifested by great political leaders such as Louvois, Napoleon, Cavour, Mussolini.

Much gain may accrue by organizing the vague, spontaneous thoughts which the mind cannot suppress, even though they appear to have little value. We are always thinking about something, and this involuntary thought is much less fatiguing than mental effort consciously directed toward definite production. This preparatory reflection is sometimes erroneously regarded as being quite distinct from the real work, but this opinion is quite wrong, for preliminary thought is an essential forerunner of all creative achievement. In fact, it is just as indispensable as the final effort and the latter will certainly be of little avail if the way has not been properly prepared. If the mind could be trained not to think useless thoughts, the productive capacity would be enormously enhanced. When Newton was asked how he had discovered the laws of universal attraction, he replied: "By always thinking about them." This may be the dominant reason for the superiority of great men, but we really know very little about this fugitive thinking, whose manifestations are not external. In fact, the originators of such mental processes are sometimes not conscious of their operation, or, as we say, we are here dealing with the subconscious. Henri Poincare claimed that he thought during sleep, and on waking would find at hand the solution of problems which had baffled him the day before. However, this is not a commendable practice, for it is opposed to the rest which each night's sleep should bring.

How may a zeal for work be developed? Is it a natural gift or is it a result of education? The greatest stimulant of activity is habit, which proverbially becomes second nature. After leading an active life, it is not possible to stop work without suffering. Idleness due to retirement rapidly kills many men who previously had enjoyed excellent health. After the habit of working is once formed, a man will work for the mere joy of working just as we walk for the pleasure of the exercise. It has become a necessity. However, this habit is not easily

acquired. Temperament plays some part. Certain children, from birth on, exhibit more will power, have more acute faculties of attention, are more persevering, all of which are essential to the accomplishment of a protracted task. Yet these predispositions are, in general, developed only to a slight degree and play only a minor part in the differentiation of individuals. Other factors seem to be of greater importance.

The example of the home and of companions exercises a preponderant influence. A child who all his life has seen an industrious father will merely through imitation be led to accept the law of the obligation to work. Pascal, Lavoisier, Pasteur were raised in families in which honor was paid to industry. Whether the latter is intellectual or manual matters little. Very few, or perhaps no great men, have come from the families of the idle rich.

A second very potent factor is ambition, that is the desire to acquire riches or honors. Men not favored by the fortunes of birth sometimes struggle with extreme energy to make a place for themselves. A striking instance of the power of ambition is found in the career of Senator Leopold Goirand, who died recently. He published some essays on education which reveal curious points in his psychological makeup. At the age of fifteen, he conceived the dual ambition to become very rich and to attain a powerful political position. He succeeded in both endeavors. For twenty years he forced himself to be content with six hours of sleep each night in order to lengthen his working day. Each morning on arising he spent two hours acquiring general culture, the rest of the day was devoted to his business, and finally the evenings were passed in attendance on social affairs, for the latter are extremely useful in the prosecution of a career. Not until his physician warned him that he was no longer fit to continue this program did he consent to sleep eight hours nightly. Many similar examples may be cited.

In Bessemer's autobiography, which is a veritable romance, he tells of his superhuman efforts, as a young man, to earn enough money to marry. While Cavour was striving to create the Italian kingdom, he allowed himself only five hours' sleep each night so that he might have time for the stupendous task whose realization had been the dream of his whole life. He took over the direction of four ministries at one time. A third stimulus, more noble than those already discussed, is the attraction inherent in the fruits of labor, i. e., the joy of

knowledge and the pleasure of performance. The passion for knowledge or for success in a chosen field often arouses men who by temperament or habit might have been inclined to loaf. A pertinent example is Mallard, one of the scientific glories of France. Like many others who graduated from the Ecole Polytechnique at the top of the class he seemed to be destined for a standardized, peaceful career in the governmental service. As engineer at Gueret and then as professor at Saint Etienne he divided his activity between long journeys and everyday affairs, attending to his ministrative duties and his teaching. At the age of forty he was appointed professor of mineralogy in the School of Mines in Paris, and consequently because of his teaching duties he found himself obliged to study this

science. He became deeply interested in one of its branches, crystallography, and for twenty years, until his death, all his efforts were concentrated in this field. He succeeded in working out original demonstrations of the laws of crystallography and he created a new chapter in this field, the theory of crystalline groupings.

[To be continued next week]

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In the World of Books

Weekly Reviews and Other Literary Ruminations
Isaac Goldberg

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Ludwig's Goethe

GOETHE. The History of a Man. By Emil Ludwig. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$5.

This is doubtless the best popular biography of Goethe that has been written; or, at any rate, that has found its way into English. Whether it is the best biography of the great German, I am not so sure. Nor, for that matter, is it at the moment important. The student of Goethe goes to sources, and Ludwig is not a

source. In the original, the biography was twice as long; it will be twice as long, since Goethe to Germans is a fountain of perennial commentary, and they can stand much more than we can endure in the way of detail. Taking "Goethe" first of all as a piece of writing, then, we find it among the best things that Ludwig has done.

Let us get the proper attitude toward the German biographer. He is not, in my opinion, an original thinker. He builds upon the labors and the investigations of others. He is a skilled craftsman; he knows what to do with the material at hand; he constructs a handsome edifice. To one who is about to enter the vast domain that is Goethe, his book makes a most admirable introduction. Ludwig, then, like Maurois, is a guide to the perplexed. (That phrase, by the way, occurs to me because it is the title of a famous work by Maimonides.)

Goethe is one of the so-called universal men of history. He blended the arts and the sciences, in which he was equally proficient, into a rounded life that was neither ascetic nor wanton. Yes, much may be made of his peculiar relations with women—of his strange technique of approach and flight; Ludwig certainly does not lose any opportunity to place upon the scene the Eternal Feminine—*das ewig Weibliche*—that Goethe sang in "Faust." The eternal feminine led him ever upward and on. That is half the story of all men, artists or artisans. Yet Goethe was essentially, as I say, neither the ascetic nor the libertine. He may not have achieved perfect balance; who wishes to? His nature was dynamic within the philosophic repose that he achieved.

Ludwig rightly and humanly relates his work to his experiences. Books, plays, pictures—

these do not grow out of spiritual vacuum; they are, when a real man writes them, spun out of his very life as is the web of the spider. And like the spider's web they may be things of fragile beauty, shot through with sunshine and shadow; but they are also instruments of necessity, fashioned to trap flies that the spider may live. What else, by half, is the beauty of the flower? What else, by half, is the beauty of woman?

I recall, as I write, a phrase out of an earlier life of Goethe, by George Henry Lewes, one time partner of George Eliot. "The whole man thinks. . . ." It is more than twenty years since I came upon the sentence, in my high school days. It was one of those flashes of illumination that alters one's outlook for the rest of one's days. It crystallized in a moment, what I had begun as a young man to feel: the totality,

the roundness, the dynamic balance of a full life. It prepared me for the discovery of Havelock Ellis, which I was shortly to make; for he is, in this sense, Goethean. For myself, I soon added a complementary phrase: "The whole man feels." In other words, it is stupid—though often useful, when properly done—to conceive of mankind's activity in terms of boxed-off compartments. As Goethe lived, so Ludwig has strived to depict him: in the round, not only tri-dimensionally but cross-sectionally.

It is not important that such a man should be moral; he must be read. Besides, morality is one of those compartments of which I have just been speaking. By itself it means only a rubric in a sermon. Ludwig treats the man, not the pedestaled impossibility. You will recall that even his life of Christ, a book that was thoughtlessly condemned in too

many quarters, was entitled *The Son—not of God—but of Man*. It is better so. Nobility lies, not in spurning the good red earth, but in building stately mansions upon its solid foundation. "Goethe" is exactly what its sub-title announces: "The History of a Man." Of a great man—one of the immortals.

Mark Twain—Outside of the Ordeal

The name of this posthumous manuscript is "1601." It purports to be a freestone conversation between Queen Elizabeth and her notable attendants, among them Walter Raleigh and William Shaxpur; the latter you may recognize as the author of certain undying plays that are taught in school in a manner to ensure their speedy death. If the manuscript be authentic—I have just read it in one of a few printed reproductions—it is by that same Mark

Twain whose wife did so hate to have him swear, deleting too naughty words from his ebullient texts and restoring them to a measure of Puritanic repressiveness. Let's not be silly. I don't believe that an oath here and there would have added to the artistic value of Twain's labors. Nor would it have hurt them. But cuss words and very human Anglo-Saxon vocabularies of four letters will, like murder, out. And in "1601" they out most murderously. The plot is short; the conversation is distressingly funny; unfortunately, not a line is reproducible. It is, as some indignant ladies and gentlemen would suggest, on the level of a smoking-room anecdote; but—a smoking-room anecdote written by a Mark Twain. Sorry to tease you, boys, but a cruel law clamps its unsympathetic lid upon the ambitious linotype and forbids me to proceed any further.

A Free Man Looks at History

E. Haldeman-Julius

Continued from page one

doubt about the main lines of historical development. History, like other branches of study, has been subjected to scientific principles. We know essentially, and in most cases with an extensive minuteness of detail, what sort of life went on in different ages and places. We know what men thought, how they were governed, how they made their livelihood, what various advantages and handicaps they had, the social, geographical and cultural setting in which their action was staged. The facts are carefully checked and they fit reasonably together to form a convincing picture.

It is foolish nowadays to repeat the old saying that history is a fiction agreed upon: modern scholarship has placed history upon a firm, immense, critical basis of knowledge. It is a full, exact, intelligible story: it is a natural story, in which there appears no excuse for the gropings and esoteric speculations of the mystic. There may be obscurities and disputed points but there is not, correctly speaking, any mystery. And the broad truth is known, especially about the notable civilizations concerning which we have pretty full records, and about the main tendencies and factors of the evolution of human society.

It is not really a very pleasant story. It has dark, cruel, and idiotic aspects. It is repeatedly a tale of fine opportunities lost through ignorance, hopes of progress destroyed through unreasoning passions and through catastrophes which man had not the intelligence to foresee or prevent, civilization until modern times insecure and temporary, confined to small areas of the earth, and not including a free, literate, substantially civilized majority of the race. No more stupid and grim joke could be imagined than the reading of divine intelligence into this story of human folly, struggle, alternate victory and defeat and, finally, with the aid of science and a sustaining, spreading materialism the steady trend of progress that we know today.

History, in fact, conveys the sternest, most gigantic lesson in realism. Here, in the actual record of man's life, we have all the elements of essential debunking. It delivers the death blow to the most attractive and imposing myths. It forces upon one at every turn a critical view of human institutions and ideas. It most impressively shows us what forces have made for the betterment of the race and what forces have been reactionary, degrading, and opposed to the truest interests of mankind. It furnishes us the evolutionary perspective by the light of which alone we can discuss adequately the subjects which are vital to our welfare. We cannot have an intelligent grasp of history and still cling to a romantic, sentimental way of thinking.

Certainly the free man, by his view of history, is strengthened and clarified in his open, critical, studious habit of mind. He who knows the record of human folly and injustice, the origin of beliefs and their course of evolution, the clash of opposing principles in history, the true picture of past times can be no other than a free-

thinking man. He occupies the safe ground of an evolutionary viewpoint. He has the great advantage that he is free from errors which are historically discredited. He lives intellectually on the enlightened plane of modernism.

2. Some Lessons of History

Undoubtedly the pessimist can draw the most discouraging conclusions from history. In a tale by Anatole France, history is compressed into an epigram: "Men were born, they suffered, and they died." Add that they were born into an ill-managed world, that they suffered enormously from the injustice of their fellow men, and that they died generally without having had a glimpse of significant life—died, too, victims of human oppression and ignorance—and you have a view of history that is supported by ample material on every page of the record.

History is covered with blood and tears and the stains of wretchedness and folly. The great majority of men who have lived on this earth have been no better than slaves and beasts of burden. They have been heaped endlessly as sacrifices in insane wars. They have lived in squalor and fear. They have—or a few of them have—made tragically futile attempts to better their lot: but revolutions have been succeeded by reactions, bright moments comparatively have been followed by long dark stretches, and it could be said for the greater part that right was on the scaffold and wrong was on the throne. As I have said, he who tries to sentimentalize in optimistic style about history can only do so by ignoring the facts. Men have had little to thank a god or nature or their fellow men for. They have not been the beneficiaries of a special kind care—quite otherwise.

But of course the sensitive modern looks at history more critically than the average man regarded it in the past. On the whole, men have submitted to what they thought they could not help. In simple ways, they have derived some satisfaction from their animal-like existence. Set one of us down in almost any age of the past and we should be inexpressibly more discontented than was the case with those actually living at the time and having no conception of modern life to dwell upon in contrast with their own lot. That, of course, does not make the wretchedness of history look any brighter. Nor is it admissible as an apology for the ills and injustice that have darkened the human story. It is when he considers modern civilization—the progress of the past hundred years—that the optimist can draw his most encouraging conclusions. We have a right to be hopeful about the future, although that need not make us hug illusions about the past.

All that we can do about the past is to know it in truth and thoughtfully seek its lessons. If, let us say, man has been the victim of vast and terrific bunk and if this bunkistic victimization of mankind still has its reverberations in our own day, we must assert with all our power the sober, impressive view of history which the facts justify. False ideas have betrayed men. Their ignorance has betrayed them. Not knowing better, men have worshiped and bowed to the vicious influences that have marred their lives. And while we should not in any childish spirit bewail the fact that conditions in the past have been far from ideal—and while we cannot in a sense judge, in an absolute moral way, the evils of history as if men, say, in

the tenth century are to be blamed for not having been more intelligent and humane—we should at least realize, with the benefit of a modern point of view, what sort of past the race has. We should not be deceived by the glamour of fine illusions. We should certainly not express pride at the gilded tyrannies of the past. We should not speak, for example, of an Age of Faith as if it had been an idyllic, precious period from whose blessedness man has unfortunately fallen. We should speak plainly and call it the age of ignorance and warn men against those influences of the present day which would, in some sort or another, idealize that lower state of man. We should not talk incorrectly about the civilizing effect of things which have in fact been obstacles to human progress.

It is still possible, for instance, to hear in our day talk about the benefits of war to civilization, about the moral qualities of war, and about the virtue of maintaining those hostile divisions and aims of men that inspire war. Beyond doubt the sentiment for peace is immense and growing in the modern world. Men more definitely think about the abolition of war as a possibility than they did a century ago. But there is still a great deal of nonsense that is seriously uttered in defense of war. Or, if war itself is not defended, we have a glorification of the sentiment of patriotism (without the truth being told about what sordidly, calculatingly lies behind this sentiment in the minds of a few who arouse it) and much jealous, inaccurate stuff about the pride and destiny of separate nations and, generally, an encouragement of prejudices and suspicions and fears that lead to war. Past wars are grandiloquently lied about and the "reasons" for war in the modern world are given a specious dignity and appearance of necessity. Pacifism is held up to mockery. The plain truth, without any frills or excuses, that war has been a terrible curse of civilization and an interruption of the creative life of man—that war is monstrous, unintelligent, anti-social—that only in peaceful ways can man find security and happiness: this plain truth is shamefully obscured and concealed beneath treacherous rhetoric on every hand. Men are encouraged in a thrilled pride because their ancestors were warriors. They emulate where they should pity or abhor. History for many people still appears as a record of the grandeur of battles and the pomp of rulers. They do not think of history critically in terms of civilization or its opposite, in humane values, in soundly progressive interests.

The masses have been the victims, the unconsidered pawns, in the game of war. They have been too easily inflamed with a spirit of patriotism and loyalty in contradiction of their own welfare. For back of war has been the desire for power or plunder on the part of rulers or ruling classes. This is an outstanding fact in the tragedy of history—the fact of unjust rule against the interests of mankind at large. The best interests of nations, of civilization, of progress have been time and again sacrificed to the narrow ambition or greed of men controlling the organized forces of the State. The critical student of history can have no illusions about the righteousness or the wisdom of governments among men. He sees all too clearly the exclusive, selfish motives at work. It is clear that no man nor group can be safely trusted with very great power. Even if one considers government a necessary evil, one cannot help

seeing that it has on the whole been maintained by a system of force and intrigue which is violative of fairness and reason.

It is natural that the free-thinking man, in looking at history, should find his sympathies consistently drawn to the victims, and still more intelligently to the challengers, of authority and misrule. Back of the pride of empire and the dashing appearance of conquerors and statesmen he perceives the debunked and pessimistic realities of all this glory. It is apparent too that older civilizations were insecure because they represented chiefly the good fortune and power of a ruling few, of a favored minority of men, while in the masses there was no sound civilized basis of life. It is of the greatest and most powerful importance that in the modern world the benefits of civilization are widespread and that the fall of a central power or the shifting of prestige and authority does not, as once it did, threaten the whole social structure. For when the masses of men were impoverished and illiterate, it was clear that their social world—the hold upon civilization of such a society which flourished importantly only at the top—was very vulnerable.

As we see it clearly today, civilization can be safely entrenched and progressive only when it is diffused as a solid reality among the masses. We do not today have an ideal civilization but we do have a civilization that is world-wide and that takes in significantly the common life. Culturally the common life is not on a high plane. But it is literate; it is, broadly speaking, enlightened and efficient—immensely so in comparison with past times; it has the knowledge and the power and the material equipment for survival. One cannot imagine mankind slipping helplessly into another Dark Age, with the very memory of civilization lost to the world.

The evils of government in the modern world are serious enough. Unjust privileges flourish. The full opportunities of civilization are not fairly open to all men. But we learn plainly from history that this is the greatest advantage of our world—the diffusion of knowledge and power. And it is wisdom to continually increase this advantage, to insist upon the value of democracy in its social and materialistic aspects—or, instead of democracy, let us say a free and self-conscious and energetic common life—and to condemn, with sound history as well as feelings of humanity for our justification, every appearance of tyranny and effort of obscurantism.

And this recognition of the essential basis of civilization includes the historic importance of the growth of free thought and culture. Civilization is produced by, as it is proved, by, the spread of enlightenment. In judging, therefore, the factors that have been hostile to progress one forcibly realizes that a chief, deadly factor has been man's victimization by religious folly and bigotry. Here the free man encounters a kind of bunk that still inconspicuously persists—namely, the bunkistic notion that religion has been a great civilizing influence. It is incongruous because it is so entirely contrary to our modern knowledge of the role of religion in history and because too it persists by the side of a decline in actual religious beliefs. There is a great deal of discussion of religion today, but the note of skepticism runs through it all, and even believers are obviously on the defensive; while it seems

that it is not this or that belief of religion which is thought to be so preciously worth saving, but a general belief in the usefulness or attractiveness of religion.

But not only is it plain to the thoughtful mind that there is no usefulness, no need, as there is no reality of religion in life. Historically the case is far worse. By his follies of superstition, his sanity-warping concern with fears and visions of another life, man has neglected the business of this life and been prevented from rising earlier to the conception of progress which he now has. His religion has distorted his attitude toward every relation of life. It has worked as a tyranny of the mind, extending itself to every evil possibility of social tyranny. It was particularly disastrous that religion should have been such a terrible power for centuries after the passing of ancient civilization, not simply holding mankind back from progress but keeping it on a far lower level than life had formerly occupied.

One who studies history without prejudice cannot avoid the conclusion that the overwhelming effect of religion has been antagonistic to the highest, efficient purposes of civilization. Far from religion having been responsible for the greatness of modern civilization, it has warred to the last ditch against the agencies that have really created this civilization. It was bitterly opposed to the liberation of man, socially, intellectually, in every way. It threw every obstacle both of actual force and of prejudice in the path that scientific study and mastery of life which—it is a truism—represents the most wonderful civilizing triumph of mankind.

Another truth that history enforces, in this and other connections, is that man has had to make his own world—his social world—in his own image. Nature has been indifferent to him—from the facts one would say that it had been hostile if one could ascribe to it a consciousness. Illusions, religious or otherwise, have not changed the essential facts of life. This world is all man knows or has and how poorly, under the sway of religion and tyranny and all manner of false codes and idealisms, he has managed it until, finally, in science he has found the real means of emancipation. It was an emancipation that would not have been conceivable so long as religion actually held men's minds in bondage. Everything worth while in life, actual or prospective, demanded freedom for its realization: first and last, freedom and the will to think, to investigate, to know, and to apply our scientifically directed energies to the real problems of this life. That freedom was plainly incompatible with the supremacy of a religious habit of mind; with the old forms of political, social tyranny; with the narrow, slavish manner of life in which men formerly were cramped and blinded. Only as he became free could man do great things. Freedom, knowledge, civilized power—these are essentially anti-religious in their origin and their effects.

It is not, of course, true that religion explains all the sufferings and mistakes of the race. It must, however, bear an enormous share of responsibility. There has been no greater weight of bunk that has crushingly oppressed the struggling children of earth. Like all forms of bunk, it has to face the verdict of history.

3. The Case for Rationalism

What is important to know, in a word, is that the historic case for rationalism is strong and complete. At every point, when we turn inquiringly to the record of

man's past errors and difficulties and struggles, we learn that what is modernly called "debunking" is the right, useful attitude. It is bunk that has interfered always, in various forms subtle and crude, with the better, saner aims of life. It is debunking that has struck the chains from men, has stimulated them to intelligent efforts, has brightened the face of our human world. It is by the use of his reason, sensibly and directly applied to the true needs of society, that man has advanced so far and has thrown off so many handicaps by which, unfortunately, he let himself be held too long.

What is really the viewpoint of those who seek to falsify history and flout reason for the sake of bunk? What is the opposite attitude from that of the free-thinking man? It is that certain beliefs are somehow sacred and authoritative in a dogmatic way and shall not be placed under the light of criticism. It is urged that for emotional or traditional or opportunistic reasons (a deceptive opportunism, however) men shall agree that certain opinions are right, shall defend those opinions passionately, and shall regard skepticism or knowledge as an enemy when it calls in question the validity of such conventionally cherished notions.

And this position cannot stand in any halfway plausible light by the side of the facts of history. It is clear that the widespread prevalence of certain beliefs does not argue their truthfulness; and, moreover, that this disposition to believe on dogmatic grounds or, really, on no grounds at all—this credulity in defiance or indifference to reason—has repeatedly and terribly led mankind astray. The long tale of terror in history could not have been possible had it not been for this credulity and subservience of the masses of men. Ignorance has been man's chief enemy, the necessary support of all evils that have afflicted the race. And it is uncompromisingly against ignorance, against loose thinking, against an unrealistic view of life that rationalism is active.

The rationalist is decidedly a

spokesman for freedom, because he knows, historically, that it is through freedom the race has prospered and advanced. It is, he sees, not simply a question of the right of freedom but also the utility of freedom. Liberated, man learns and achieves. Rationalism is an approach to life by means of knowledge and distinguished from blind, empty faith—and history shows that it is this approach which has been rewarded by positive gains for humanity. Faith oppresses; it deceives; it prevents full living. That, historically, has been the effect of faith. Times of progress are times of new ideas, new and bold attempts, a challenging of old ways and beliefs.

The skeptical attitude is emphasized by rationalists, by free-thinking men, and certainly history reveals the immense importance, the plain progressive necessity, of the skeptical attitude. For we should not have this modern civilization had men not come at last to question skeptically the right of tyrants to have authority over them; the foundations of the faith which had so long been blindly accepted; the meaning and use of the forces in the natural world, inquiry concerning which involved a challenge to the dogmas which unscientifically prevailed and were held to be sacred.

We know that science has been a skeptical, revolutionary, world-changing force. It has set mankind upon a broader, more wonderful path of historic achievement. But in preparing the way for science there was necessarily a strong attitude of rationalism, of liberalism, of humanism. It is precisely the rationalistic, realistic tendency that has inspired the realization of all the wonders of the modern world.

Looking at history, the free man is interested in the truth first and last and always. And, with sound knowledge as his guide, he identifies as good or bad those influences which have worked for or against betterment in human affairs. He has only one partiality, and that is partiality for the enlargement of wisdom and happiness in this real, this inexorably short, this not-to-be-wasted life.

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