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HARVARD UNIVERSITY - CAMBRIDGE

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THE SOCIAL AGE

During the war Mr. Lloyd-George said to me "I will give a handsome prize to any imaginative American who will invent for me a new word to take the place of that overworked and unsatisfactory expression 'cooperation'." His search has borne no fruit and our language is still unable simply to express the thought of coordination of effort on the part of millions of human beings.

In like manner it is impossible adequately in few words to give name to the age in which we live. Every era of human history is worthy of characterization, even though our historical terminology is based too largely on the names of men and of places, rather than on great trends of civilization.

To ask ourselves what is the trend of today may provoke disagreement and discussion, but it may serve to bring out new thoughts and perhaps enrich the English language. At least we may agree that the past fifty years

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have brought such unusual and far-reaching changes in the conditions of life and the mental outlook of the world population that future generations will recognize this period as worthy at least of a name.

May I take as a premise in a bfire review that the line of progress in the graph of the evolution of civilization is ever upward? Not perhaps the little curves which show the advancement of any one particular art or science or social effort, but rather the broad mark which represents the sum of human endeavor and knowledge.

We are too inclined to think of well recorded history in terms of ups and downs, of rises and falls of empires, of glories and disasters.

For example, Greece. It brings to mind a flash of a fleeting century; we see the age of Pericles, glories of creative art and creative thought. Then what? Three or four hundred years of political confusion -- an unsatisfactory gap in history until Rome swims into our view. On the surface we classify this period as retrogression, and assume that the line on the chart has dipped or at least stood still. We are wrong: for we forget that Alexanders

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were at work disseminating the art and the learning of one small peninsula over all of the Eastern Mediterranean and the nearer Asia. Whole populations and nations, representing a diversity of races, were absorbing during these centuries the gifts of Greece, and rightly regarded the process as what we call today progress.

Out of that very influence, the source of it in part forgotten, arose another impressive beacon, the glory of the Rome of the Caesars. We are so inculcated with the tale of the decline and fall of the Roman City and of the ensuing wrongly named Dark Ages that we miss wholly the continuance of general upward drift. Rome in the days of her glory evolved law and orderly government and a great advance in material things, but the largest distribution of her civilization occurred after her own decline. This was, of course, true in Northern Africa, in the Balkan Peninsula and especially in the Empire of Constantine.

The same thought holds true I think in the field of Europe. It is dramatic to think of the Goth and the Hun as savages destroying an old civilization by fire and sword,

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but the France and Germany and Spain of Caesar were essentially vast primeval unsettled areas with little in them to destroy except a few scattered tribes. The successive invasions brought population to these areas, and though Rome herself fell, her gifts to mankind permeated the newly settled regions and made possible the modern Europe.

If these centuries had been so wholly dark a Charlemagne would have been impossible. He did not rise from a wholly barbaric state of society, rather was he the product of the definite evolution of a newly opened territory which had successfully solved the problems of the melting pot of incoming races. Again progress.

There followed the centuries which saw the establishment of the feudal organization, with its definite class system, the formation of communities, the Crusades, the importance of the influence of the church in civic and social affairs.

Again, because there is no focal point built around a contemporaneous group of immortal writers, artists and teachers or a predominant city, the tendency is to minimize human advancement during the five centuries preceding the

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so-called revival of learning. Yet this is the period of the youth of Western civilization, the day of the founding of cathedrals, of universities, of dynasties, the final settling of the land, the establishing of property rights, and the birth of modern law.

From and because of this careful process of harrowing and fertilizing, came the Renaissance, a mere continuance of the progress, not the unexpected birth of a parentless new day. It witnessed a new emphasis on science and art and literature, and, more important, the beginning of a public consciousness which, confined at first to the field of religion, laid the foundation for the later extension to the realm of government.

In other words, I like to think of those two centuries between the death of the three Kings, Charles V, Francis I and Henry VIII, and the beginning of the Revolution in America and France, as another disseminating era, vital as the seed bed of modern political structure.

For while during this time concentration of power succeeded the far wider distribution under the feudal organization, the very destruction of feudalism meant that for at

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least ninety per cent of the population a new relationship to government had to be evolved. The result was the definite acceptance of representative or constitutional government by the greater part of the Western world.

We are down to modern times, to the speeding up of events and trends because, primarily, of the strudes of invention, especially in the field of communication. The nineteenth century began to destroy the old handicaps of distance and our day is finishing the task. We look on a world picture, not a gallery of national representations. The civilization trend covers all continents, not Europe alone.

This was one of two important contributions of the nineteenth century, and the other was the founding of general education. It is not broadly realized that up to fifty years ago education was confined to a small fraction of the inhabitants of what we recognized as the more highly civilized nations. The great masses of men and women were outside the pale, swayed by emotions and physical needs, rather than by reason springing from knowledge. A century ago illiteracy

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was the lot of the majority, not as it is today of the comparative few. The first step, within the memory of our own fathers, was the acceptance of the new principle of comparative education in the ultimate steps toward learning.

If we analyze further the contribution toward human progress during the nineteenth century, we gain further proof that we cannot single out individual highspots through the passing of the centuries and give them democratic labels. The metamorphosis is constant and always in the same direction - a comparison to a pendulum is fallacious. As a result of invention and education, the two great impulses of the nineteenth century, the ground was prepared for the days in which we now live. For example, the development of machinery, driven by other than man or animal power, laid the foundation for industrial life and greatly stimulated the growth of urban communities. The evolution of the railway and the telegraph were succeeded in the latter years by the motor driven vehicle, the airplane and the radio. The entrance of science into the field of agriculture has meant that in spite of the doubling of the world's population during the

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past one hundred years, a population which has remained almost without increase, has been able to provide the necessary food for the vast urban accession. During the latter years also the record of elementary education has logically been followed by the second step -- the extension of college and post-graduate training which goes on apace today. This is not a mere record of the fact that there is so much more to learn today than fifty years ago; it is due in at least equal measure to the breaking down of the class or caste system of the past. Where half a century ago the education of the children of the farmer, of the mechanic or of the mere worker ended, with good luck in the grade school, the high school is today the rule and the college is more and more becoming the rule.

When, however, we ask ourselves what is the outstanding trend of this year of grace and its immediate predecessors and successors, we can take as our criteria merely physical aspects of change; we can call this the Age of Universal Education even more than we can call it the Age of Industrialism or the Age of Science or the Age of Communication. These are facts, definite milestones, markers on

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the chart but not the line of the course itself.

We must look more deeply and, in the final analysis, it is to the social structure itself that we must turn. In other words, we must attach importance to physical and material changes in the lives of the world population only in so far as some of these changes affect existing conditions.

Fifty years ago we humans were still divided by an individually existing class consciousness. Popular government had come to greater or less degree to most nations, but the influences of the old regime were still potent in every nation. It is not so long ago that our own Harvard catalogue listed the young gentlemen in our halls as thus above those below the salt; as those with Esquire after their names and those with a mere prefix of Mister. At an even later period the results of a young men who married out of his class were permanently serious. As for the lot of our grandmothers, it was, in comparison with that of our daughters, the acme of artificial seclusion and artificial barriers. When, for instance, did bathtubs and running water first enter the homes of the classes then called "upper"? How long ago was

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it considered a mark of what they then called respectability to own a horse and carriage? Our own fathers and mothers can remember the day!

It is difficult, as I have before suggested, to find a phrase to describe the fundamentals of the present trend. We cannot call this a socialistic age, or a communistic age, for the terms are preempted by special groups; we cannot call it the democratic age for that connotes affairs of government - and in any event the Republicans have held the center of the stage for ten years.

While I must use it as a temporary expedient, as the word "cooperate" was used during the World War, I incline to the phrase "The Age of Social Consciousness" as most fitting the trend of our own day. It best describes the change in the social relationships.

This broad current falls into two main channels. First, the very definite breaking down of the remnants of hereditary caste, and the placing of men and women on a closer comparable and competitive basis. The Kansas farmer and the New York mechanic send their sons and their daughters to college; there is a motor car for one out of every four of the inhabitants of the United States; proper sanitation,

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excellent transportation, electric light, music, art, books by the million, the news of the day, the clothing, ready made food -- all these are literally at the command of the majority of our citizens. The luxuries of the past generation are become the necessities of the present; in creature comforts, the making easy of daily household, we have gained more in fifty years than in the previous five centuries.

In the vocations of life, also the conditions surrounding work - clerical and manual - are shown a steady rise to shorter hours and more healthful surroundings; and in the field of avocations, the most noteworthy change has been the discovery of recreational sports and outdoor play for the benefit of the city-dwelling men, women and children. The point of emphasis is that in all of this what used to be the privileges of the few has come to be the accepted heritage of the many.

A century and a half ago our forefathers spoke in theoretical terms of equality, meaning thereby more particularly the equality of right. Much later came the ideal of the equality of opportunity, and it has been only in these latter years that we have seen, at least in part, its realization.

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In this aspect the social consciousness of this age makes constant strides. In all material particulars the changes and importance are weighed in their relationship to the good of the community; and even though there be glaring instances of individual or group selfishness, dishonesty in high places, and, of late, a tendency towards the concentration of material power into the hands of the few, yet, nevertheless, the term "My Neighbor" is made to apply far more to fellow men and women, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, than it did in the days gone by when "My Neighbor" meant one's personal friends and associates and the members of one's own sect.

In the other stream modern social consciousness has entered a wholly new phase. We have evolved community obligations undreamed of one hundred years ago. The State, the church and associations of private citizens have undertaken the definite care of the sick, the crippled and the mentally deficient. We are reaching far into more difficult problems, such as the effect of the intermingling of races and the necessity for increasing populations in given areas of the world's surface and of limiting the increase in other races.

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We are investigating and stamping out the causes of disease and we are eliminating duplication and waste in production. More and more we are proving that modern conditions require the world instead of the merely national point of view.

In this same catalogue falls the strides made in the past decade toward the ultimate avoidance of armed conflict. It is based just as much on the better understood economics of mankind as it is on the spiritual outlook.

The goal of the social consciousness of our today is a worthy goal. It conforms I think more truly to the teachings of religion than any objective of previous centuries. That it has its pitfalls and dangers is undeniable; that it may lead to a complexity of life which will drive mankind to a revolt in favor of a simpler existence is possible; that the same complexities may demand so much over-organization, enormously increased power over human beings will be narrowed into the hands of a new type of oligarchy is a danger of the future; that the strain of our daily doings may so weaken our material and physical fibre that so-called less civilized races may replace the present dominant nations is also a potentiality for our grandchildren's day. Nevertheless, this age of social consciousness is with us now. We are married to it for better or worse;

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we are a part of it and whatever may be our doubts or fears, we can do no good to our fellow men by sitting idly by or to seek to dam the current with a brick. Rather is it our privilege to help direct the ultimate course. In so doing we can be guided by two lessons of the past: first, the recorded history of the human race, showing the causes and effects of the influences behind that upward growth of civilization; secondly, simpler moralities which have been true of all the centuries.

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