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THE
LESSONS
OF
HISTORY

by

Will and Ariel Durant

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Preface

This postlude needs little preface. After finishing *The Story of Civilization* to 1789, we reread the ten volumes with a view to issuing a revised edition that would correct many errors of omission, fact, or print. In that process we made note of events and comments that might illuminate present affairs, future probabilities, the nature of man, and the conduct of states. (The references, in the text, to various volumes of the *Story* are offered not as authorities but as instances or elucidations so come upon.) We tried to defer our conclusions until we had completed our survey of the narrative, but doubtless our preformed opinions influenced our selection of illustrative material. The following essay is the result. It repeats many ideas that we, or others before us, have already expressed; our aim is not originality but inclusiveness; we offer a survey of human experience, not a personal revelation.

Here, as so often in the past, we must gratefully acknowledge the help and counsel given us by our daughter Ethel.

WILL AND ARIEL DURANT

I. Hesitations

As his studies come to a close the historian faces the challenge: Of what use have your studies been? Have you found in your work only the amusement of recounting the rise and fall of nations and ideas, and retelling “sad stories of the death of kings”? Have you learned more about human nature than the man in the street can learn without so much as opening a book? Have you derived from history any illumination of our present condition, any guidance for our judgments and policies, any guard against the rebuffs of surprise or the vicissitudes of change? Have you found such regularities in the sequence of past events that you can predict the future actions of mankind or the fate of states? Is it possible that, after all, “history has no sense,”¹ that it teaches us nothing, and that the immense past was only the weary rehearsal of the mistakes that the future is destined to make on a larger stage and scale?

At times we feel so, and a multitude of doubts assail our enterprise. To begin with, do we really know what the past was, what actually happened, or is history “a fable” not quite “agreed upon”? Our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, and perhaps distorted by our own patriotic or religious partisanship. “Most history is guessing, and the rest is prejudice.”² Even the historian who thinks to rise above partiality for his country, race, creed, or class betrays his secret predilection in his choice of materials, and in the nuances of his adjectives. “The historian always oversimplifies, and hastily selects a manageable minority of facts and faces out of a crowd of souls and events whose multitudinous complexity he can never quite embrace or comprehend.”³ — Again, our conclusions from the past to the future are made more hazardous than ever by the acceleration of change. In 1909 Charles Péguy thought that “the world changed less since Jesus Christ than in the last thirty years”;⁴ and perhaps some young doctor of philosophy in physics would now add that his science has changed more since 1909 than in all recorded time before. Every year—sometimes, in war, every month—some new invention, method, or situation compels a fresh adjustment of behavior and ideas. — Furthermore, an element of chance, perhaps of freedom, seems to enter into the conduct of metals and men. We are no longer confident that atoms, much less organisms, will respond in the future as we think they have responded in the past. The electrons, like Cowper’s God, move in mysterious ways their wonders to perform, and some quirk of character or circumstance may upset national equations, as when Alexander drank himself to death and let his new empire fall apart (323 B.C.), or as when Frederick the Great was saved from disaster by the accession of a Czar infatuated with Prussian ways (1762).

Obviously historiography cannot be a science. It can only be an industry, an art,

and a philosophy—an industry by ferreting out the facts, an art by establishing a meaningful order in the chaos of materials, a philosophy by seeking perspective and enlightenment. “The present is the past rolled up for action, and the past is the present unrolled for understanding”⁵—or so we believe and hope. In philosophy we try to see the part in the light of the whole; in the “philosophy of history” we try to see this moment in the light of the past. We know that in both cases this is a counsel of perfection; total perspective is an optical illusion. We do not know the whole of man’s history; there were probably many civilizations before the Sumerian or the Egyptian; we have just begun to dig! We must operate with partial knowledge, and be provisionally content with probabilities; in history, as in science and politics, relativity rules, and all formulas should be suspect. “History smiles at all attempts to force its flow into theoretical patterns or logical grooves; it plays havoc with our generalizations, breaks all our rules; history is baroque.”⁶ Perhaps, within these limits, we can learn enough from history to bear reality patiently, and to respect one another’s delusions.

Since man is a moment in astronomic time, a transient guest of the earth, a spore of his species, a scion of his race, a composite of body, character, and mind, a member of a family and a community, a believer or doubter of a faith, a unit in an economy, perhaps a citizen in a state or a soldier in an army, we may ask under the corresponding heads—astronomy, geology, geography, biology, ethnology, psychology, morality, religion, economics, politics, and war—what history has to say about the nature, conduct, and prospects of man. It is a precarious enterprise, and only a fool would try to compress a hundred centuries into a hundred pages of hazardous conclusions. We proceed.

II. History and the Earth

Let us define history, in its troublesome duplexity, as the events or record of the past. Human history is a brief spot in space, and its first lesson is modesty. At any moment a comet may come too close to the earth and set our little globe turning topsy-turvy in a hectic course, or choke its men and fleas with fumes or heat; or a fragment of the smiling sun may slip off tangentially—as some think our planet did a few astronomic moments ago—and fall upon us in a wild embrace ending all grief and pain. We accept these possibilities in our stride, and retort to the cosmos in the words of Pascal: “When the universe has crushed him man will still be nobler than that which kills him, because he knows that he is dying, and of its victory the universe knows nothing.”⁷

History is subject to geology. Every day the sea encroaches somewhere upon the land, or the land upon the sea; cities disappear under the water, and sunken cathedrals ring their melancholy bells. Mountains rise and fall in the rhythm of emergence and erosion; rivers swell and flood, or dry up, or change their course; valleys become deserts, and isthmuses become straits. To the geologic eye all the surface of the earth is a fluid form, and man moves upon it as insecurely as Peter walking on the waves to Christ.

Climate no longer controls us as severely as Montesquieu and Buckle supposed, but it limits us. Man’s ingenuity often overcomes geological handicaps: he can irrigate deserts and air-condition the Sahara; he can level or surmount mountains and terrace the hills with vines; he can build a floating city to cross the ocean, or gigantic birds to navigate the sky. But a tornado can ruin in an hour the city that took a century to build; an iceberg can overturn or bisect the floating palace and send a thousand merrymakers gurgling to the Great Certainty. Let rain become too rare, and civilization disappears under sand, as in Central Asia; let it fall too furiously, and civilization will be choked with jungle, as in Central America. Let the thermal average rise by twenty degrees in our thriving zones, and we should probably relapse into lethargic savagery. In a semitropical climate a nation of half a billion souls may breed like ants, but enervating heat may subject it to repeated conquest by warriors from more stimulating habitats. Generations of men establish a growing mastery over the earth, but they are destined to become fossils in its soil.

Geography is the matrix of history, its nourishing mother and disciplining home. Its rivers, lakes, oases, and oceans draw settlers to their shores, for water is the life of organisms and towns, and offers inexpensive roads for transport and trade. Egypt was “the gift of the Nile,” and Mesopotamia built successive civilizations “between the rivers” and along their effluent canals. India was the daughter of the Indus, the

Brahmaputra and the Ganges; China owed its life and sorrows to the great rivers that (like ourselves) often wandered from their proper beds and fertilized the neighborhood with their overflow. Italy adorned the valleys of the Tiber, the Arno, and the Po. Austria grew along the Danube, Germany along the Elbe and the Rhine, France along the Rhone, the Loire, and the Seine. Petra and Palmyra were nourished by oases in the desert.

When the Greeks grew too numerous for their boundaries, they founded colonies along the Mediterranean (“like frogs around a pond,” said Plato⁸) and along the Euxine, or Black, Sea. For two thousand years—from the battle of Salamis (480 B.C.) to the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588)—the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean were the rival seats of the white man’s ascendancy. But in and after 1492 the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama invited men to brave the oceans; the sovereignty of the Mediterranean was challenged; Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Venice declined; the Renaissance began to fade; the Atlantic nations rose, and finally spread their suzerainty over half the world. “Westward the course of empire takes its way,” wrote George Berkeley about 1730. Will it continue across the Pacific, exporting European and American industrial and commercial techniques to China, as formerly to Japan? Will Oriental fertility, working with the latest Occidental technology, bring the decline of the West?

The development of the airplane will again alter the map of civilization. Trade routes will follow less and less the rivers and seas; men and goods will be flown more and more directly to their goal. Countries like England and France will lose the commercial advantage of abundant coast lines conveniently indented; countries like Russia, China, and Brazil, which were hampered by the excess of their land mass over their coasts, will cancel part of that handicap by taking to the air. Coastal cities will derive less of their wealth from the clumsy business of transferring goods from ship to train or from train to ship. When sea power finally gives place to air power in transport and war, we shall have seen one of the basic revolutions in history.

The influence of geographic factors diminishes as technology grows. The character and contour of a terrain may offer opportunities for agriculture, mining, or trade, but only the imagination and initiative of leaders, and the hardy industry of followers, can transform the possibilities into fact; and only a similar combination (as in Israel today) can make a culture take form over a thousand natural obstacles. Man, not the earth, makes civilization.

III. Biology and History

History is a fragment of biology: the life of man is a portion of the vicissitudes of organisms on land and sea. Sometimes, wandering alone in the woods on a summer day, we hear or see the movement of a hundred species of flying, leaping, creeping, crawling, burrowing things. The startled animals scurry away at our coming; the birds scatter; the fish disperse in the brook. Suddenly we perceive to what a perilous minority we belong on this impartial planet, and for a moment we feel, as these varied denizens clearly do, that we are passing interlopers in their natural habitat. Then all the chronicles and achievements of man fall humbly into the history and perspective of polymorphous life; all our economic competition, our strife for mates, our hunger and love and grief and war, are akin to the seeking, mating, striving, and suffering that hide under these fallen trees or leaves, or in the waters, or on the boughs.

Therefore the laws of biology are the fundamental lessons of history. We are subject to the processes and trials of evolution, to the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest to survive. If some of us seem to escape the strife or the trials it is because our group protects us; but that group itself must meet the tests of survival.

So the first biological lesson of history is that life is competition. Competition is not only the life of trade, it is the trade of life—peaceful when food abounds, violent when the mouths outrun the food. Animals eat one another without qualm; civilized men consume one another by due process of law. Co-operation is real, and increases with social development, but mostly because it is a tool and form of competition; we co-operate in our group—our family, community, club, church, party, “race,” or nation—in order to strengthen our group in its competition with other groups. Competing groups have the qualities of competing individuals: acquisitiveness, pugnacity, partisanship, pride. Our states, being ourselves multiplied, are what we are; they write our natures in bolder type, and do our good and evil on an elephantine scale. We are acquisitive, greedy, and pugnacious because our blood remembers millenniums through which our forebears had to chase and fight and kill in order to survive, and had to eat to their gastric capacity for fear they should not soon capture another feast. War is a nation’s way of eating. It promotes co-operation because it is the ultimate form of competition. Until our states become members of a large and effectively protective group they will continue to act like individuals and families in the hunting stage.

The second biological lesson of history is that life is selection. In the competition for food or mates or power some organisms succeed and some fail. In the struggle for existence some individuals are better equipped than others to meet the tests of survival. Since Nature (here meaning total reality and its processes) has not read very

carefully the American Declaration of Independence or the French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man, we are all born unfree and unequal: subject to our physical and psychological heredity, and to the customs and traditions of our group; diversely endowed in health and strength, in mental capacity and qualities of character. Nature loves difference as the necessary material of selection and evolution; identical twins differ in a hundred ways, and no two peas are alike.

Inequality is not only natural and inborn, it grows with the complexity of civilization. Hereditary inequalities breed social and artificial inequalities; every invention or discovery is made or seized by the exceptional individual, and makes the strong stronger, the weak relatively weaker, than before. Economic development specializes functions, differentiates abilities, and makes men unequally valuable to their group. If we knew our fellow men thoroughly we could select thirty per cent of them whose combined ability would equal that of all the rest. Life and history do precisely that, with a sublime injustice reminiscent of Calvin's God.

Nature smiles at the union of freedom and equality in our utopias. For freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies. Leave men free, and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically, as in England and America in the nineteenth century under *laissez-faire*. To check the growth of inequality, liberty must be sacrificed, as in Russia after 1917. Even when repressed, inequality grows; only the man who is below the average in economic ability desires equality; those who are conscious of superior ability desire freedom; and in the end superior ability has its way. Utopias of equality are biologically doomed, and the best that the amiable philosopher can hope for is an approximate equality of legal justice and educational opportunity. A society in which all potential abilities are allowed to develop and function will have a survival advantage in the competition of groups. This competition becomes more severe as the destruction of distance intensifies the confrontation of states.

The third biological lesson of history is that life must breed. Nature has no use for organisms, variations, or groups that cannot reproduce abundantly. She has a passion for quantity as prerequisite to the selection of quality; she likes large litters, and relishes the struggle that picks the surviving few; doubtless she looks on approvingly at the upstream race of a thousand sperms to fertilize one ovum. She is more interested in the species than in the individual, and makes little difference between civilization and barbarism. She does not care that a high birth rate has usually accompanied a culturally low civilization, and a low birth rate a civilization culturally high; and she (here meaning Nature as the process of birth, variation, competition, selection, and survival) sees to it that a nation with a low birth rate shall be periodically chastened by some more virile and fertile group. Gaul survived against the Germans through the help of Roman legions in Caesar's days, and through the help of British and American legions in our time. When Rome fell the Franks rushed in from Germany and made Gaul France; if England and America should fall, France, whose population remained almost stationary through the nineteenth century, might again be overrun.

If the human brood is too numerous for the food supply, Nature has three agents for restoring the balance: famine, pestilence, and war. In a famous *Essay on Population*

(1798) Thomas Malthus explained that without these periodic checks the birth rate would so far exceed the death rate that the multiplication of mouths would nullify any increase in the production of food. Though he was a clergyman and a man of good will, Malthus pointed out that the issuance of relief funds or supplies to the poor encouraged them to marry early and breed improvidently, making the problem worse. In a second edition (1803) he advised abstention from coitus except for reproduction, but he refused to approve other methods of birth control. Having little hope of acceptance for this counsel of sanctity, he predicted that the balance between mouths and food would be maintained in the future, as in the past, by famine, pestilence, and war.

The advances of agricultural and contraceptive technology in the nineteenth century apparently refuted Malthus: in England, the United States, Germany, and France the food supply kept pace with births, and the rising standard of living deferred the age of marriage and lowered the size of the family. The multiplication of consumers was also a multiplication of producers: new “hands” developed new lands to raise more food. The recent spectacle of Canada and the United States exporting millions of bushels of wheat while avoiding famine and pestilence at home seemed to provide a living answer to Malthus. If existing agricultural knowledge were everywhere applied, the planet could feed twice its present population.

Malthus would answer, of course, that this solution merely postpones the calamity. There is a limit to the fertility of the soil; every advance in agricultural technology is sooner or later canceled by the excess of births over deaths; and meanwhile medicine, sanitation, and charity nullify selection by keeping the unfit alive to multiply their like. To which hope replies: the advances of industry, urbanization, education, and standards of living, in countries that now endanger the world by their fertility, will probably have the same effect there, in reducing the birth rate, as they have had in Europe and North America. Until that equilibrium of production and reproduction comes it will be a counsel of humanity to disseminate the knowledge and means of contraception. Ideally parentage should be a privilege of health, not a by-product of sexual agitation.

Is there any evidence that birth control is dysgenic—that it lowers the intellectual level of the nation practicing it? Presumably it has been used more by the intelligent than by the simple, and the labors of educators are apparently canceled in each generation by the fertility of the uninformed. But much of what we call intelligence is the result of individual education, opportunity, and experience; and there is no evidence that such intellectual acquirements are transmitted in the genes. Even the children of Ph.D.s must be educated and go through their adolescent measles of errors, dogmas, and isms; nor can we say how much potential ability and genius lurk in the chromosomes of the harassed and handicapped poor. Biologically, physical vitality may be, at birth, of greater value than intellectual pedigree; Nietzsche thought that the best blood in Germany was in peasant veins; philosophers are not the fittest material from which to breed the race.

Family limitation played some part in the history of Greece and Rome. It is amusing to find Julius Caesar offering (59 B.C.) rewards to Romans who had many

children, and forbidding childless women to ride in litters or wear jewelry. Augustus renewed this campaign some forty years later, with like futility. Birth control continued to spread in the upper classes while immigrant stocks from the Germanic North and the Greek or Semitic East replenished and altered the population of Italy.⁹ Very probably this ethnic change reduced the ability or willingness of the inhabitants to resist governmental incompetence and external attack.

In the United States the lower birth rate of the Anglo-Saxons has lessened their economic and political power; and the higher birth rate of Roman Catholic families suggests that by the year 2000 the Roman Catholic Church will be the dominant force in national as well as in municipal or state governments. A similar process is helping to restore Catholicism in France, Switzerland, and Germany; the lands of Voltaire, Calvin, and Luther may soon return to the papal fold. So the birth rate, like war, may determine the fate of theologies; just as the defeat of the Moslems at Tours (732) kept France and Spain from replacing the Bible with the Koran, so the superior organization, discipline, morality, fidelity, and fertility of Catholics may cancel the Protestant Reformation and the French Enlightenment. There is no humorist like history.

IV. Race and History

There are some two billion colored people on the earth, and some nine hundred million whites. However, many palefaces were delighted when Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, in an *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55), announced that the species man is composed of distinct races inherently different (like individuals) in physical structure, mental capacity, and qualities of character; and that one race, the “Aryan,” was by nature superior to all the rest.

Everything great, noble, or fruitful in the works of man on this planet, in science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting point, is the development of a single germ;... it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in all the civilized countries of the universe.... History shows that all civilization derives from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it.¹⁰

Environmental advantages (argued Gobineau) cannot explain the rise of civilization, for the same kind of environment (e.g., soil-fertilizing rivers) that watered the civilizations of Egypt and the Near East produced no civilization among the Indians of North America, though they lived on fertile soil along magnificent streams. Nor do institutions make a civilization, for this has risen under a diversity, even a contrariety, of institutions, as in monarchical Egypt and “democratic” Athens. The rise, success, decline, and fall of a civilization depend upon the inherent quality of the race. The degeneration of a civilization is what the word itself indicates—a falling away from the genus, stock, or race. “Peoples degenerate only in consequence of the various mixtures of blood which they undergo.”¹¹ Usually this comes through intermarriage of the vigorous race with those whom it has conquered. Hence the superiority of the whites in the United States and Canada (who did not intermarry with the Indians) to the whites in Latin America (who did). Only those who are themselves the product of such enfeebling mixtures talk of the equality of races, or think that “all men are brothers.”¹² All strong characters and peoples are race conscious, and are instinctively averse to marriage outside their own racial group.

In 1899 Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an Englishman who had made Germany his home, published *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*), which narrowed the creative race from Aryans to Teutons: “True history begins from the moment when the German with mighty hand seizes the inheritance of antiquity.” Dante’s face struck Chamberlain as characteristically

German; he thought he heard unmistakably German accents in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians; and though he was not quite sure that Christ was a German, he was confident that "whoever maintains that Christ was a Jew is either ignorant or dishonest."¹³ German writers were too polite to contradict their guest: Treitschke and Bernhardi admitted that the Germans were the greatest of modern peoples; Wagner put the theory to music; Alfred Rosenberg made German blood and soil the inspiring "myth of the twentieth century"; and Adolf Hitler, on this basis, roused the Germans to slaughter a people and to undertake the conquest of Europe.

An American, Madison Grant, in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), confined the achievements of civilization to that branch of the Aryans which he called "Nordics"—Scandinavians, Scythians, Baltic Germans, Englishmen, and Anglo-Saxon Americans. Cooled to hardness by northern winters, one or another tribe of these fair-haired, blue-eyed "blond beasts" swept down through Russia and the Balkans into the lazy and lethargic South in a series of conquests marking the dawn of recorded history. According to Grant the "Sacaes" (Scythians?) invaded India, developed Sanskrit as an "Indo-European" language, and established the caste system to prevent their deterioration through intermarriage with dark native stocks. The Cimmerians poured over the Caucasus into Persia, the Phrygians into Asia Minor, the Achaeans and Dorians into Greece and Crete, the Umbrians and Oscans into Italy. Everywhere the Nordics were adventurers, warriors, disciplinarians; they made subjects or slaves of the temperamental, unstable, and indolent "Mediterranean" peoples of the South, and they intermarried with the intermediate quiet and acquiescent "Alpine" stocks to produce the Athenians of the Periclean apogee and the Romans of the Republic. The Dorians intermarried least, and became the Spartans, a martial Nordic caste ruling "Mediterranean" helots. Intermarriage weakened and softened the Nordic stock in Attica, and led to the defeat of Athens by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, and the subjugation of Greece by the purer Nordics of Macedonia and Republican Rome.

In another inundation of Nordics—from Scandinavia and northern Germany—Goths and Vandals conquered Imperial Rome; Angles and Saxons conquered England and gave it a new name; Franks conquered Gaul and gave it their name. Still later, the Nordic Normans conquered France, England, and Sicily. The Nordic Lombards followed their long beards into Italy, intermarried, and vitalized Milan and Florence into a Renaissance. Nordic Varangians conquered Russia, and ruled it till 1917. Nordic Englishmen colonized America and Australia, conquered India, and set their sentinels in every major Asiatic port.

In our time (Grant mourned) this Nordic race is abandoning its mastery. It lost its footing in France in 1789; as Camille Desmoulins told his café audience, the Revolution was a revolt of the indigenous Gauls ("Alpines") against the Teutonic Franks who had subjugated them under Clovis and Charlemagne. The Crusades, the Thirty Years' War, the Napoleonic Wars, the First World War depleted the Nordic stock and left it too thin to resist the higher birth rate of Alpine and Mediterranean peoples in Europe and America. By the year 2000, Grant predicted, the Nordics will have fallen from power, and with their fall Western civilization will disappear in a

new barbarism welling up everywhere from within and from without. He wisely conceded that the Mediterranean “race,” while inferior in bodily stamina to both the Nordics and the Alpines, has proved superior in intellectual and artistic attainments; to it must go the credit for the classic flowering of Greece and Rome; however, it may have owed much to intermarriage with Nordic blood.

Some weaknesses in the race theory are obvious. A Chinese scholar would remind us that his people created the most enduring civilization in history—statesmen, inventors, artists, poets, scientists, philosophers, saints from 2000 B.C. to our own time. A Mexican scholar could point to the lordly structures of Mayan, Aztec, and Incan cultures in pre-Columbian America. A Hindu scholar, while acknowledging “Aryan” infiltration into north India some sixteen hundred years before Christ, would recall that the black Dravidic peoples of south India produced great builders and poets of their own; the temples of Madras, Madura, and Trichinopoly are among the most impressive structures on earth. Even more startling is the towering shrine of the Khmers at Angkor Wat. History is color-blind, and can develop a civilization (in any favorable environment) under almost any skin.

Difficulties remain even if the race theory is confined to the white man. The Semites would recall the civilizations of Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, Palestine, Phoenicia, Carthage, and Islam. The Jews gave the Bible and Christianity to Europe, and much of the Koran to Mohammed. The Mohammedans could list the rulers, artists, poets, scientists, and philosophers who conquered and adorned a substantial portion of the white man’s world from Baghdad to Cordova while Western Europe groped through the Dark Ages (c. 565–c. 1095).

The ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, and Rome were evidently the product of geographical opportunity and economic and political development rather than of racial constitution, and much of their civilization had an Oriental source.¹⁴ Greece took its arts and letters from Asia Minor, Crete, Phoenicia, and Egypt. In the second millennium B.C. Greek culture was “Mycenaean,” partly derived from Crete, which had probably learned from Asia Minor. When the “Nordic” Dorians came down through the Balkans, toward 1100 B.C., they destroyed much of this proto-Greek culture; and only after an interval of several centuries did the historic Greek civilization emerge in the Sparta of “Lycurgus,” the Miletus of Thales, the Ephesus of Heracleitus, the Lesbos of Sappho, the Athens of Solon. From the sixth century B.C. onward the Greeks spread their culture along the Mediterranean at Durazzo, Taranto, Crotona, Reggio Calabria, Syracuse, Naples, Nice, Monaco, Marseilles, Málaga. From the Greek cities of south Italy, and from the probably Asiatic culture of Etruria, came the civilization of ancient Rome; from Rome came the civilization of Western Europe; from Western Europe came the civilization of North and South America. In the third and following centuries of our era various Celtic, Teutonic, or Asiatic tribes laid Italy waste and destroyed the classic cultures. The South creates the civilizations, the North conquers them, ruins them, borrows from them, spreads them: this is one summary of history.

Attempts to relate civilization to race by measuring the relation of brain to face or weight have shed little light on the problem. If the Negroes of Africa have produced

no great civilization it is probably because climatic and geographical conditions frustrated them; would any of the white “races” have done better in those environments? It is remarkable how many American Negroes have risen to high places in the professions, arts, and letters in the last one hundred years despite a thousand social obstacles.

The role of race in history is rather preliminary than creative. Varied stocks, entering some locality from diverse directions at divers times, mingle their blood, traditions, and ways with one another or with the existing population, like two diverse pools of genes coming together in sexual reproduction. Such an ethnic mixture may in the course of centuries produce a new type, even a new people; so Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Normans fused to produce Englishmen. When the new type takes form its cultural expressions are unique, and constitute a new civilization—a new physiognomy, character, language, literature, religion, morality, and art. It is not the race that makes the civilization, it is the civilization that makes the people: circumstances geographical, economic, and political create a culture, and the culture creates a human type. The Englishman does not so much make English civilization as it makes him; if he carries it wherever he goes, and dresses for dinner in Timbuktu, it is not that he is creating his civilization there anew, but that he acknowledges even there its mastery over his soul. In the long run such differences of tradition or type yield to the influence of the environment. Northern peoples take on the characteristics of southern peoples after living for generations in the tropics, and the grandchildren of peoples coming up from the leisurely South fall into the quicker tempo of movement and mind which they find in the North.

Viewed from this point, American civilization is still in the stage of racial mixture. Between 1700 and 1848 white Americans north of Florida were mainly Anglo-Saxon, and their literature was a flowering of old England on New England’s soil. After 1848 the doors of America were opened to all white stocks; a fresh racial fusion began, which will hardly be complete for centuries to come. When, out of this mixture, a new homogeneous type is formed, America may have its own language (as different from English as Spanish is from Italian), its indigenous literature, its characteristic arts; already these are visibly or raucously on their way.

“Racial” antipathies have some roots in ethnic origin, but they are also generated, perhaps predominantly, by differences of acquired culture—of language, dress, habits, morals, or religion. There is no cure for such antipathies except a broadened education. A knowledge of history may teach us that civilization is a co-operative product, that nearly all peoples have contributed to it; it is our common heritage and debt; and the civilized soul will reveal itself in treating every man or woman, however lowly, as a representative of one of these creative and contributory groups.

V. Character and History

Society is founded not on the ideals but on the nature of man, and the constitution of man rewrites the constitutions of states. But what is the constitution of man?

We may define human nature as the fundamental tendencies and feelings of mankind. The most basic tendencies we shall call instincts, though we recognize that much doubt has been cast upon their inborn quality. We might describe human nature through the “Table of Character Elements” given on the following page. In this analysis human beings are normally equipped by “nature” (here meaning heredity) with six positive and six negative instincts, whose function it is to preserve the individual, the family, the group, or the species. In positive personalities the positive tendencies predominate, but most individuals are armed with both sets of instincts—to meet or to avoid (according to mood or circumstance) the basic challenges or opportunities of life. Each instinct generates habits and is accompanied by feelings. Their totality is the nature of man.

But how far has human nature changed in the course of history? Theoretically there must have been some change; natural selection has presumably operated upon psychological as well as upon physiological variations. Nevertheless, known history shows little alteration in the conduct of mankind. The Greeks of Plato’s time behaved very much like the French of modern centuries; and the Romans behaved like the English. Means and instrumentalities change; motives and ends remain the same: to act or rest, to acquire or give, to fight or retreat, to seek association or privacy, to mate or reject, to offer or resent parental care. Nor does human nature alter as between classes: by and large the poor have the same impulses as the rich, with only less opportunity or skill to implement them. Nothing is clearer in history than the adoption by successful rebels of the methods they were accustomed to condemn in the forces they deposed.

TABLE OF CHARACTER ELEMENTS

	INSTINCTS	HABITS	FEELINGS
Positive	<i>Action</i>	<i>Play</i> <i>Work</i> <i>Curiosity</i> <i>Manipulation</i> <i>Thought</i> <i>Innovation</i> <i>Art</i>	<i>Buoyancy</i> <i>Energy</i> <i>Eagerness</i> <i>Wonder</i> <i>Absorption</i> <i>Resolution</i> <i>Aesthetic feeling</i>

Negative	<i>Sleep</i>	<i>Rest</i> <i>Sloth</i> <i>Indifference</i> <i>Hesitation</i> <i>Dreaming</i> <i>Imitation</i> <i>Disorder</i>	<i>Fatigue</i> <i>Inertia</i> <i>Boredom</i> <i>Doubt</i> <i>Vacuity</i> <i>Acceptance</i> <i>Confusion</i>
Positive	<i>Fight</i>	<i>Approach</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Pugnacity</i> <i>Mastery</i>	<i>Courage</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Anger</i> <i>Pride</i>
Negative	<i>Flight</i>	<i>Retreat</i> <i>Co-operation</i> <i>Timidity</i> <i>Submission</i>	<i>Anxiety</i> <i>Friendliness</i> <i>Fear</i> <i>Humility</i>
Positive	<i>Acquisition</i>	<i>Eating</i> <i>Hoarding</i> <i>Property</i>	<i>Hunger</i> <i>Greed</i> <i>Possessiveness</i>
Negative	<i>Avoidance</i>	<i>Rejection</i> <i>Spending</i> <i>Poverty</i>	<i>Disgust</i> <i>Prodigality</i> <i>Insecurity</i>
Positive	<i>Association</i>	<i>Communication</i> <i>Seeking approval</i> <i>Generosity</i>	<i>Sociability</i> <i>Vanity</i> <i>Kindliness</i>
Negative	<i>Privacy</i>	<i>Solitude</i> <i>Fearing disapproval</i> <i>Selfishness</i>	<i>Secretiveness</i> <i>Shyness</i> <i>Hostility</i>
Positive	<i>Mating</i>	<i>Sexual activity</i> <i>Courtship</i>	<i>Sexual imagination</i> <i>Sexual love</i>
Negative	<i>Refusal</i>	<i>Sexual perversion</i> <i>Blushing</i>	<i>Sexual neurosis</i> <i>Modesty</i>
Positive	<i>Parental care</i>	<i>Homemaking</i>	<i>Parental love</i>
Negative	<i>Filial dependence</i>	<i>Filial rebellion</i>	<i>Filial resentment</i>

Evolution in man during recorded time has been social rather than biological: it has proceeded not by heritable variations in the species, but mostly by economic, political, intellectual, and moral innovation transmitted to individuals and generations by imitation, custom, or education. Custom and tradition within a group correspond to type and heredity in the species, and to instincts in the individual; they are ready adjustments to typical and frequently repeated situations. New situations, however, do arise, requiring novel, unstereotyped responses; hence development, in the higher organisms, requires a capacity for experiment and innovation—the social correlates of variation and mutation. Social evolution is an interplay of custom with origination.

Here the initiative individual—the “great man,” the “hero,” the “genius”—regains his place as a formative force in history. He is not quite the god that Carlyle described; he grows out of his time and land, and is the product and symbol of events as well as their agent and voice; without some situation requiring a new response his new ideas would be untimely and impracticable. When he is a hero of action, the

demands of his position and the exaltation of crisis develop and inflate him to such magnitude and powers as would in normal times have remained potential and untapped. But he is not merely an effect. Events take place through him as well as around him; his ideas and decisions enter vitally into the course of history. At times his eloquence, like Churchill's, may be worth a thousand regiments; his foresight in strategy and tactics, like Napoleon's, may win battles and campaigns and establish states. If he is a prophet like Mohammed, wise in the means of inspiring men, his words may raise a poor and disadvantaged people to unpremeditated ambitions and surprising power. A Pasteur, a Morse, an Edison, a Ford, a Wright, a Marx, a Lenin, a Mao Tse-tung are effects of numberless causes, and causes of endless effects.

In our table of character elements imitation is opposed to innovation, but in vital ways it co-operates with it. As submissive natures unite with masterful individuals to make the order and operation of a society, so the imitative majority follows the innovating minority, and this follows the originative individual, in adapting new responses to the demands of environment or survival. History in the large is the conflict of minorities; the majority applauds the victor and supplies the human material of social experiment.

Intellect is therefore a vital force in history, but it can also be a dissolvent and destructive power. Out of every hundred new ideas ninety-nine or more will probably be inferior to the traditional responses which they propose to replace. No one man, however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group.

So the conservative who resists change is as valuable as the radical who proposes it—perhaps as much more valuable as roots are more vital than grafts. It is good that new ideas should be heard, for the sake of the few that can be used; but it is also good that new ideas should be compelled to go through the mill of objection, opposition, and contumely; this is the trial heat which innovations must survive before being allowed to enter the human race. It is good that the old should resist the young, and that the young should prod the old; out of this tension, as out of the strife of the sexes and the classes, comes a creative tensile strength, a stimulated development, a secret and basic unity and movement of the whole.