

# In Our Stars

*The World Fifty Years from Now*

by IRWIN EDMAN

## I

**I**T IS PRESUMPTUOUS in any era to be a prophet. But it could never have been more tempting than now when even the comatose and the secure (the two are often identical) feel the world undergoing a thoroughgoing transformation under their very eyes. One is not really tempted to predict what will happen a hundred years from now — that era will necessarily be too unimaginably different from the present to make such speculations profitable or convincing. If one is to imagine that far ahead one might as well frankly build a Utopia. Fifty years is about the proper range for prophecy if one is to indulge in that pastime at all. Barring unforeseen catastrophes or even foreseen ones such as internecine warfare the world fifty years from now is likely to exhibit tendencies already afoot. One has the logical right to believe that movements now dominant in industry, education, science, and social customs will not be altogether disconnected from those to come within half a century. Different as the Victorian period was from our own, it is easy now to read our present situation in the light of that recoverable past. The war had its clear origins in nineteenth century imperialism, the regimentation of modern life in mechanical industry and urban growth, the present adventures in the arts their precedents in nineteenth century poetry and painting and music.

It may, of course, be possible, even probable, that one altogether misreads even the present. Causes, movements, and growths that read in big letters at the moment may seem miniscular eventually in comparison with those at present neglected and obscure. We are but the immediate children of our time and our judgment is clouded by childish passions. But our speculations might have an interest melancholy or amusing to that brilliant

young historian, yet unborn, whose works some readers of this article may still be alive to read.

One must take one's chances. One can predict the movement of the stars only in the light of the available astronomical data, forecast the cosmic weather only in the light of what seem to be prevailing winds and movements of the clouds. It is educative to try to read those indications uninfluenced by wishes or one's accidental point of observation. But I realize that in trying to frame a guess as to the character of "civilization" fifty years from now, I shall have America in the forefront of my consciousness; my forecast will further be prejudiced by the fact that I am an intellectual by profession and by impulse a lover of the arts.

## II

**W**ITHOUT further apology, then, to turn to prognosis. There seem to me three tendencies or sets of symptoms on which any prognosis of life fifty years from now will have to be based. The first is an increasing tendency toward socialization in industry, education, and personal relations. The second is the dominance of a machine technique and of scientific method. The third is the breakdown of the traditional capitalist economy. I recognize these movements in some of their details with something like apprehension, though on the whole I think they augur well. But well or ill, I think they are the influences central and emphatic of our day, and that out of these roots the future will grow. Unless I miss my guess completely, American life fifty years from now will be largely these movements come to fruition. It is these three social hypotheses I am making, and making them, I shall omit to say I expect such and such *may*

happen and simply for the most part throughout this article, say such and such *will* happen. The reader will please to have the wisdom not to take my assertions too categorically and not to mistake brevity for dogma. I shall give as much argument for my predictions as there is room for. Except in Germany, an essay is not a two-volume book.

My first prediction is a negative one. I cannot share that belief in an imminent and absolute Communism now so popular among intellectuals in this country. I cannot see that there is a very likely prospect of an American civilization fifty years from now that will be modeled on Russian lines or be the philosophy of Karl Marx and Lenin realized on American soil. Long before that and much more likely, for better or worse, we shall have some form of highly concentrated industrial dictatorship and political fascism. I think even that would be temporary and over before the fifty-year period specified. I cannot speak with authority on this point and I do not see how even the authorities can. But it requires, I think, only a layman's reasonably alert perception of what is going on about him to foresee an increasing socialization first and basically of industry and not less of education, human relations, religion, perhaps under another name, and art. The days of rugged individualism are numbered, if indeed they are not already over. Thoreau and Emerson will seem even more remote and irrelevant then than they do to-day.

First as to matters obvious and external: It will seem absurd to hear old men tell of the days when men traveled on private railways, telephoned from commercially profitable telephones, bought coal and iron from private operators, deposited money in private banks, lived or lived principally upon privately gained or inherited private profits. I leave it to the economists to document or refute this prophecy. I know that not the least gifted among them would do the former. Fifty years from now there will have been so complete a socialization of industry, so thorough a restriction of individual profit and private production that the picture of our helter-skelter, devil-take-the-hindmost economy will be almost unrecoverable.

Everyone must center his attempt at prophecy upon those materials among which his imagination is most at home. I take the social-

ization of industry as an axiom and a point of departure. I shall rather choose to emphasize the fact that such a modification could not take place without deeply affecting the individual's life and character and his ideals of life and character as well. It is a common sentimentalism of the moralists to talk about character and the virtues atomically, as if the soul did not take its lineaments from the society in which it lived. One needs but the example of fifteen years of the Russian experiment to see how much the individual is what he is by virtue of the education and social pattern to which he is exposed. Personal ideals in a society economically committed to socialized consumption, management, and production will not be the same as in our present industrially anarchic commonwealths.

There are, it is true, certain elements of human nature that may be expected to remain recognizably the same. The subtle and specific alchemy of love and hate will operate as hitherto; lust and ambition will not have disappeared; sympathy and tenderness, pugnacity and jealousy, sensitiveness to praise and blame will still be present. But while human nature will remain, broadly speaking, the same, the elements in it most frequently and easily aroused will be different. The conservative, arguing for — or from — the changelessness of human nature, sees in acquisitiveness, for instance, an eternal trait of human character, and in economic competitiveness an eternal element of the human scene. But — one is here repeating Aristotle two thousand years late — moral ideas and practices are largely matters of habit, habits are influenced by current standards of praise and blame. The way in which human nature expresses itself is largely dependent on the social occasions and incitements present. Our economic individualism has not provided provocations to the more genial and co-operative virtues. The social scene has not been engaging or absorbing enough to prevent individuals from conceiving their own happiness (and seeking it) in fulfillments that separated them from their fellows. Even romantic love (see Browning's "Love among the Ruins") has partly conceived itself as the mutual dedication of two as over against the world. The family circle has been a snug little retreat of mutual help from the outrageous indifference or malignity

of strangers. Wealth has been conceived of in terms of personal aggrandizement and personal security; work has been for financial reward or for personal display.

I do not for a moment think that in fifty years the elements of individual happiness — or unhappiness — will have disappeared. It would be very odd if even under a complete Communism men and women ceased to fall in love with each other or if in no case a love endured for a lifetime. The enjoyment of ownership of intimate belongings will still be present, and the pride in individual craft or creation, other motives having grown less, will be stronger than ever. Parents will still care for their own children more than for those of others, and children feel closer to their own parents. But I strongly suspect, as well as in this instance hope, that the economic motives will have disappeared as the chief incentive to activity. I do not set this down out of any expectation of some miraculous "improvement" in human nature. The self will assert and express itself in other ways than economic, first because it will have to, and second because wealth, as in Russia, will have ceased to be a badge of distinction. The graduated income tax will have practically abolished major differences in wealth, and heavy, perhaps omnivorous inheritance taxes will have made the motives of massing riches to hand down to one's children inoperative. Distinction will, of course, still be sought and be possible, but not in the way of financial display.

Along with economic ambition I suspect economic fear will have been removed, for governmental unemployment, sickness, and old age insurance will then be as commonplace a public matter as is the postoffice to-day. With the removal of pecuniary ambition and fear, the society of fifty years from now will have removed many sources of public unrest and private neurosis. The fantastic luxury of the wealthier classes will be gone along with the slums and the macabre poverty of the industrial and mining areas. The noisy congestion of vast metropolitan cities will have given way to regional planning and garden cities. The flight of the factories from the towns is already beginning and there is already some evidence (with the saturation point of markets and consumption reached) that there may even be a flight from the factory. Skyscrapers (but

relatively few) will remain as monuments, striking and unbelievable, of a period that thought in terms of endless physical activity and perpetual material boom.

In that partly de-urbanized world, health both physical and psychical will be considerably better. The life span will have lengthened, partly because the strain and pressure of a competitive society and the manic depressive succession of booms and depressions will have been reduced or altogether obviated. Even cautious research experts think it not beyond the bounds of credibility that the ravages of cancer may be as rare as those of leprosy, and that old age will come later and be less uncomfortable than it is to-day. The typical old age diseases may not be abolished, but their pains may be reducible. Where the decay of the faculties or actual physical pain is unendurable, as also in the case of remaining incurable diseases, painless medical extinction may be as common and approved as anesthetics are to-day. We will be less careless about destroying life through war and speed, less sentimental about preserving it where it is worse than death. The campaign against infant mortality and death in childbirth is already so far along that within half a century it may be negligible. The fight for birth control will so long ago have been won that it will be hard to realize it had to be fought for at all in our day.

Granted the betterment in physical health, which present progress in medicine indicates, psychical well-being will have enormously improved. But better general physical health will not be the only reason. There will be social reasons as well. The technique of psychiatry will be as much advanced over that of our day as the psychiatry of the present is advanced over that of Mesmer or Charcot. Psychoanalysis will be looked back upon as one of the beginnings, brilliant, crude, and a little absurd, of the most beneficent of sciences, a curious cross between magic and science. But preventive psychiatry will be more important than the curative branch, and the need for both prevention and cure will be less. The mental diseases born out of empty wealthy leisure will be impossible any longer, assuming always a highly socialized control of work as well as of wealth.

The neuroses and breakdown born of sexual



maladjustment will be greatly reduced, partly because of the passing of now persisting tabus and the breakdown of the legally tight family relationships of the present. That there will be some sexual maladjustment and always a certain proportion of sexual abnormality I have no question. But such sexual maladjustment and perversion as are due to flight, to fear, to the desire for hysterical release from monotony, strain, or insecurity in economic life, will be no longer widely current. I foresee, of course, not the abolition of sex, but the obsessional concern with and discussion of it. Sexual relations will take their place as part of the natural order of experience. They will not be matters about which to become either frantic or distracted. We will, perhaps, have learned within fifty years to be about as sensible with respect to these things as the Scandinavians or the French in different ways are to-day. I have nothing but an intuition (though a strong one) for warrant in believing that sex will have become much less a theme for either poetry or analysis. Much of the romanticism and all of the hypochondria on the subject will be over.

At present an exploiting economy fathers crime upon poverty. There will be no more such children of such a union. Just as sexual abnormality, so, of course, social abnormality will persist in small measure. There will be institutions to deal with such isolated cases for their segregation and possible cure. One of these institutions will be located where Sing Sing Prison now is. But it will have and deserve a new name to rid it of its past sinister associations. Sterilization of the unfit, by that time fairly general, will also contribute to the reduction of candidates for cure in public psychiatric hospitals.

### III

**T**O TURN now to education, on the probable character of which this picture of the society of fifty years from now ultimately depends. Education will have changed, but along lines already familiar to us. The total panorama of formal schooling will look very different, however, and parts of the American educational scene as we now know it will have vanished entirely. There will be no such thing as a private school, college, or university; there will be no private educational founda-

tions. The funds taken over from those institutions by the state will not be the only instances of what we should at present be tempted to call expropriation.

The liberal college in its present form will have gone. There will be the elementary schools, the high schools, and the universities, and most of the high schools will be largely technical in character and not based on the present lingering assumption that they are for most students a preparation for college (where most students of high school never go.) There will be a good deal less waste motion in the lower schools and the first years of the university will much less resemble an advanced high school than it does at present. By the time the student arrives on the campus he will be at least as mature and well-informed as the French or German student nineteen or twenty years of age. There will be almost nothing left of present "college life" and a college education will not be a badge of "social" distinction. So-called cultural education will have diminished most in the way of numbers and official energies lavished upon it. University training will be largely technical and professional, and a formal study of the literary and classic traditions will be reserved on the whole to those giving promise of becoming scholars, experts, or creators in those fields. As higher education will be completely at public expense, there will be a greater and more rational ruthlessness in the exclusion of incompetents than some colleges to-day employ in the exclusion of Jews, as careful a search for candidates with distinguished abilities as is now in certain quarters spent on finding the athletically or the "socially" desirable.

I do not mean to predict that the cultural tradition will have disappeared. But the liberal arts curriculum, which for most students of the present generation constitutes a vacuous interruption of their extra-curricular life, will not be considered a general privilege or necessity. It will be open only to those who give special evidence of equipment for it and the possibility of turning such studies to social utility in the way of technical scholarship or creative production. I cannot imagine that a socialized state will keep youths from growing into men by endowing them to remain for four years "college boys." The "gentleman's college" will no longer exist.

But in the lower schools and in general popular education (including the press and radio) cultural interests, both contemporary and traditional, will be much more widespread than they are to-day. Adult education, now a novelty, will be a salubrious commonplace. Denmark, with its folk high schools all over the country, is a forecast of what our own future may be in this respect. All this is not by way of saying that the whole nation will be composed of artists and scientists. By definition the creative mind in any epoch must be very rare. But music, for example, will have become much more a familiar part of the life of the average man, and with drama, especially through perfected television, made more widely available for all, so will dramatic literature. Since literature will not any longer be the plaything of aesthetes or the merchandise of professionals, it will be more expressive of common human interests and will not be divided between commercialized vulgarity on the one hand and highbrow irrelevance on the other.

For life — and this is to me the most probable and most arresting feature of the period under consideration — will have become not simply superficially but in its deep-cutting effects upon human nature, profoundly communal. The family as we now know it will not completely have disappeared, though facility of divorce and the abandonment of the still prevailing fears and tabus will have rendered it a much less rigid, much less frequently life-long unit. Family life will be much less that of a cautious and conservative clan, held together as much by habit and by fear as by affection. Common nurseries for children and common dining rooms for their parents will be a familiar part of the social organization. Children will be closer to their parents, parents to their own children than to strangers, but there will be much less a sense of strangeness about other people's parents and other people's children. From early childhood and throughout the daily contacts of life the difference in psychological quality between private and public interest will seem much less impressive than it is to-day. At present private interests and relationships seem warm, close, and real, like being in love. Public interests have about them something abstract and remote. Save those concerned in huge industrial or political enterprises, public interests always

have about them something abstract and remote. Compare a friend, a house, a swim, or a concert with Power Control or the Future of Mankind. Fifty years from now we will have given through the ubiquity and comprehensiveness of our communal life a meaning to the New Testament teaching that all men are brothers. Where all living will be so much a matter of common sharing, social life will have begun to be touched by that poignancy and cutting edge that now attaches to only the most intimate of human relationships. Through the repeated teaching enforced by the details of daily experience, a constant sense of the common adventure of mankind will have become a fact, not a feeling.

#### IV

**J**UST AS there are certain dominant tendencies of growth and prospective fruition in our society, so there are certain notable evidences of decay and imminent death, which any prognosis must take into account. Among these most observers would count religion, especially in its present institutional forms. There are those who believe that not only the institutions but the impulses and ideologies of religion will have disappeared. They point to the fact that in Russia, among a people notably mystical and up to the recent past egregiously superstitious, there has grown up a whole generation to whom the ideas of God and immortality, the institutions of priest and church, are not only fantastic but pernicious. One need not go as far in time or in social situation as Russia. There is certainly plenty of evidence in the waning attendance upon churches as well as in the shifts and evasions toward which professional apologists resort, that religion, both in its ideas and institutional forms, is disappearing. The churches and the traditional Hebrew-Christian ideology, as we now know them, are doomed, I think, and within fifty years, to extinction. That has, I know, been said before this in history. But Hebrew-Christian ideas and institutions were never before economically as well as psychologically so irrelevant. But I am inclined strongly to question the death of those impulses of aspiration and adoration which were the origins of religions and lend such vitality to dying religions as they still possess for a few of their communicants. The religious impulse will find other

modes of expression, principally, I think, in a socialized art. There will be "Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things." There will be, as always, the need of expression; there will be the new emotions of human solidarity, the eternal emotions of human hope and human tragedy to express. More than ever there will be the need to utter those crises and crescendi of experience together. There will be poets and prophets in that society, too, and symbols and saints and legends expressive of what will then genuinely animate mankind. They will take the place of the forms and mummeries of a religion no longer believed in. Just what visions and what rituals will celebrate the aspirations of that more just, generous, and ordered society, I am not prepared even to suggest. One may undertake to play at social astrology, not at religious genius.

But there is no reason to believe that St. Francis is the last religious genius of all time, or that saints and prophets will not be born when the present capitalist economy has passed away.

I have sketched in outline the kind of world I think may be expected fifty years from now. I have not had space to go into detail, though in many cases I think one might even plausibly do that. The world I have sketched is not in all respects one I should choose to live in, for I suspect solitude and contemplation would be at a discount in it and, child of my age, I should miss its genialities and forget its cruelties. But it would be, I am convinced, a society less tragic in its incidence than the present one and the probability of its being what I have set down seems to me to lend a perspective of hope to the present troubled era.

## Give Us A Demagogue



by **MILTON S. MAYER**

**O**NE of the features of the 1932 Presidential campaign (there aren't many) has been the futile plea of the American people for a leader. While the Republicans whisper that Roosevelt is lame at the bottom and the Democrats hint that Hoover is lame at the top, the still, small voice of the electorate cries out for a demagogue — a roaring, snorting, fighting demagogue, and in vain.

It was none of your skulking demagogues, like Juggler Jack Garner, that the people wanted. The times are crucial, the nation is disgruntled and disordered: a Jackson was needed, or a Bryan, or a Teddy Roosevelt. Where was there lurking a champion of the great, dumb

herd? Some shining knight in the glorious armor of the ancient spell-binders could have snatched the Presidency from the demoralized major parties, as Jackson snatched it in 1828 and Lincoln in 1860. And wouldn't the voters have swarmed to his standard? Who wouldn't have jumped at the opportunity to elect some rougher, tougher, some lovelier, livelier character than Faltering Franklin or Herbert ("Don't Swap Horses") Hoover? Who wouldn't have given his kingdom for a war-horse?

The present dolorous epoch will always be remembered as the first time that history failed to repeat itself. Every past depression gave us a fire-eater, a politician who, right or wrong,