

## Ford and Ideas

A MAN with ideas is one who has stopped to think. In that sense Henry Ford, who does not stop to think, whose mind operates by a swifter and different process, is not a man of ideas. In a previous article I suggested that his will worked by methods and toward ends supplied by a kind of uncanny intuition rather than by reasoning, and that he finds his path very little by thinking things out and almost entirely by brilliant guesses through and across them. This faculty for taking long jumps and successful cross-cuts brought him, from the beginning, gifts which placed him beyond that necessity of learning which impedes ordinary mortals—who for lack of a natural compass within themselves, must go arduously reasoning through life. Reason, if often the ally of will, can be no less its deadliest enemy. An enemy which from within himself has not attacked Henry Ford, and whose attacks through the minds of others he has successfully resisted. To this resistance, combined with an undivided will and a chronic, at times violent confidence in his own sixth-sense judgment, he owes most of his success. For a long time this success was the fruit of one idea, one purpose, that of making “a cheap car for the multitude,” but gradually other ideas were born, or grew, or were captured. Some of them have sunk into the background, into the past, but many of them are still roosting in his mind, and a miscellaneous collection they are, sound, brilliant, idealistic, prejudiced, erratic, inspiring at once pity and respect for the mind that harbors them, hope and fear for those things or men which that mind rules now, or may come to rule.

Ford's ideas about the conduct of industry are based on his own success, and of course biased by it. If one finds in them an excess of impatience and more emphasis on possibilities than regard for present conditions, this is only natural in a man who has done with enormous success so many things which other men told him he was crazy to attempt. Where others have relied on outside aid for financing, Ford's business has grown independently of banks because he has always turned a huge share of the profits back into the business. Where other manufacturers have followed the general trend of prices, and held on tight in a depression, Ford made a big slash in the price of his cars when business was at its worst. The numerous price cuts, while so kind to the consumer, have always resulted in larger profits. They were “just my way of being selfish,” says Ford; “greed is nearsightedness.” The rules for his own success he applies mercilessly to others: if a concern cannot supply him with parts at a certain price without cutting wages, it is their fault; a well-run

business, to his mind, can always pay good wages. If a man cannot make his business pay, he should quit. “Anything that will not work,” he says, “should be broken.” As he entered a virgin field, in which the saturation point is so far away that he has never had to fear or oppose competition, of course he is impatient with the common acceptance of the business cycle. One of the most interesting experiments possible would be to place Henry Ford in control of some old established industry, one completely entangled in the network of basic production. He has bought a railroad, to be sure, but that was “because it interfered with our plans,” and coal mines. Could that mind which has been applied to the building up of a new industry break up and reorganize an old one? How would the creator of the Highland Park factory cut the price of coal lower and lower every year?

What Ford has to say about money springs from his own experience, an experience limited by his independence of money. About money he has held the most elementary notions. At one time he was anxious to withdraw several millions from a bank, and hoard them himself in gold, and only with some difficulty was the network of the credit system explained to him. One of his associates once remarked that “if Henry told me he had found a way to run his cars on water, I'd believe him; and if I told him that all the pennies in his bank had turned to gold, he'd believe me.” Ford is not often ready to believe others, but when he does, his credulity is intense. The obverse of credulity is suspicion, and he is deeply suspicious of our financial system, in which he has never become involved, but which has brushed him menacingly more than once. And so to him money seems a curse imposed upon business, non-producing stockholders appear as downright parasites, and the gold-standard as a “class-advantage.” He would like to see paper issued against our natural resources, and can be set down pretty definitely as a soft-money man. “Money is simple,” he says, and its function as the master rather than the servant of industry is thoroughly bad. The resentment is sound, but the understanding incomplete.

Before Henry Ford found opportunity to follow his mechanical bent, he had to work on the farm, and he hated it. The inefficiency of the farm, and the drudgery of the farm, have been constantly on his mind. The wide sale of his tractors lies as close to his heart as any of his enterprises. People who do not work on farms sentimentalize about them,

\* This and some other quotations are from *My Life and Work* by Henry Ford, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther. (Doubleday, Page & Co.)

and have been shocked at Henry Ford's blasting criticism. "What would you do about the farm?" Allan Benson asked him (see his book, *The New Henry Ford*). "The first thing to do is to tear down all the fences," he answered. "But what about the animals overrunning the crops?" "There wouldn't be any animals," said Ford. We all remember his startling announcement, some years ago, that "the cow must go." Much earlier than that, when he was driving his first car about Detroit, he remarked that "the horse was doomed." With such slow animals, consuming even when they are not at work, Ford has no patience. The hope for the farm is machines, and electricity, and production on a larger scale: he would like to see it "industrialized." Just as he has cut down the number of men and hours required to make an automobile, so, he believes, can he cut down the number of men and hours necessary to raise a crop. The farm, in his opinion, is about five percent efficient, and all that is now produced there in a year could be produced in a total of twenty-five days. What about the rest of the time? His answer is ready: have a sufficient number of industries near by in which the farmers can work when the crops have been planted or harvested. There won't be any stock to feed and water, so the farmer won't have to go home every day.

There are many cases where one would like to give Ford the power to put his ideas into practice. The farm is one case, and farmers agree with him and would make him President on that plank alone. In the realm of general ideas, on the other hand, one strikes a very different Henry Ford, obstinate, sincere as ever, but pathetically floundering in strange waters. He has found out by now, I suspect, that there are some waters in which he had better not try to swim. On the land of his own experience he is safe, but he often does not know when he has left it and begun to wade. The most famous example is, of course, the Peace Ship. Mme. Rosika Schwimmer's, far from impractical hope of getting the neutrals together in an effort to bring peace nearer, he converted into a pathetic, highminded, innocent crusade which made some people intensely sorry for him, but most people merely laugh. One must go back several months before the sailing of the *Oscar II* to understand his high pitch of feeling on the subject of the war. He had inserted in all the newspapers an advertisement condemning preparedness. He had said that "a professional soldier who makes a living out of killing is a murderer," and that he "would spend every cent he had in the world, if it was necessary, to end the war." He was ready to do anything, he believed he could do something, and this profound belief and his own ignorance led to the chartering of the Peace Ship. Others around him were at an equal pitch of enthusiasm. As the ship sailed, from among the thousands who saw it off one man went insane, and jumped into the water,

saying that he'd "swim behind to ward off torpedoes." Factions developed on board, Henry Ford was taken ill, and came back almost as soon as he had landed. When war was declared, the Ford plant filled government orders as patriotically as any other.

As simple as Ford's attempted remedy for the war was his explanation of it. "Take away the capitalist," he said some months before the Peace Ship, "and you sweep war from the earth." Later—this was still before he sailed—he narrowed the term "capitalist" down to the "Jewish International Bankers." The beginnings of his anti-Jewish prejudice predate the Peace Ship, but this prejudice was greatly strengthened on the voyage. There are many theories for this prejudice. The most current, and the wildest, is that Mme. Schwimmer being a Jewess, and also responsible for the Peace Ship, he enlarged his resentment at her to include the whole race. By another explanation it was "three wise men" who met Ford at Christiansand and implanted in his head the notion of the world-wide Jewish Menace. At all events, an idea already in his mind was further strengthened until it blossomed into the grotesque rehash of Russian fabrications printed in the *Dearborn Independent*. Henry Ford, of course, wrote none of this. His own ideas on the subject were brief, emphatic, and in such a form he has frequently repeated them. Those around him have hastened to make a difference between the "Jewish International Bankers" and other Jews not so employed, pointing out that since Mr. Ford has many Jews working for him, and a Jewish architect, and many Jewish friends, he has no prejudice against Jews as such. But in talking to Mr. Ford it is obvious that, being of a simpler construction of mind, divisions of a subject do not come easily to him, and that when he says, "the Jews are the scavengers of the world," he means what he says, and no more, because that is the full extent of his thought on the matter. From a hunch it has grown into an explanation with many applications, and hardened into a cherished obsession.

Such an idea, like many of Ford's ideas, survives only by the saving virtue of ignorance. An obstinate, wilful ignorance, because when Ford has to learn something, he does. He doesn't often have to learn, he can usually feel what is the right thing to do instead. He will not tolerate experts, who, he says, are only good for telling you what can't be done. Since from ignorance proceeds so much of his strength, why should he care for knowledge of what has already happened—for history? When he said that "History was bunk," he was quite right, as far as he was concerned. Under cross-questions at the Mount Clemens trial he felt no shame at all; he was profoundly bored, and rather inattentive. When asked for dates he didn't know them, when asked about "government" he replied, "it's a long subject," and he in-

sisted that for all these questions he "could find a man in five minutes to answer them." When some one after the examination tried to get him to understand what a poor showing he had made, he wanted to know what difference it made whether the street they were walking on was sixty feet wide, or sixty-five. The fun that was poked at him could not break down his confidence in himself, his indifference to facts and histories, ignorance of which had somehow not prevented his being worth a billion dollars. Attempts to coach him in the a-b-c of American history found him a poor pupil. He has not allowed his son Edsel to go to college. He doesn't care whether his employees are "graduates of Sing Sing or of Harvard." He is indefatigable in technical research which will result in cheaper, lighter, better materials for the Ford car, but scientific research, or research in general into the inner works of a world he knows to be all wrong, has not interested him in the slightest. A man who is convinced that he has a private key to Utopia cannot be interested in founding a college of locksmiths.

Such are some of the mental traits and ideas that Henry Ford would bring to the White

House. A museum of ideas, rather than a scheme, ranging from undiluted idealism through sound practical sense all the way down to the most obstinate prejudice and ignorance. Between many of the ideas there are no connections whatever, and Henry Ford's world is spotted with great black areas of terra incognita which his mind has never even touched. But on almost any one of these territories he is prepared to set foot at once, and he may at any moment surprise the public with a pat theory or explanation of something which has crossed his field of vision the moment before. In a sense nobody knows what ideas he would bring with him to Washington, nor which ones he would leave behind, nor what new ones would sprout there overnight.

Henry Ford in the White House—it is a terrible and fascinating possibility. On the basis of what he has said in public, or what he has been overheard to say, it is not safe to make presidential guesses. We must get much nearer the man himself. This I hope to do in a later article.

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(To be concluded)

## Mussolini's First Year

TO understand the significance of Italian Fascismo, along with the reasons for its success, one must study this great fact of Italian history with the criteria of Italian history, and not with Anglo-Saxon or American formulae which are less likely to prove illuminating. A people does not live, does not, in other words, make a history for itself over a period of ten centuries, without bearing the characteristic impression of that history in all its acts.

It is not to be denied that Italians have found the past year a time of greater tranquillity, of less social unrest than they had known for some time. Labor conflict and economic warfare of all kinds have diminished in intensity. Strikes have been avoided. Public service has been functioning as it has never functioned since 1914. It may be, as some people assert, that these improvements would have taken place even without Fascismo; it may well be that independently of Fascista pressure the Italian people was already headed toward the restoration of public order and away from the Bolshevism which had caught its fancy in the years 1919 and 1920. This much is certain, however: nearly everybody *believes* that the cause of these changes was Fascismo; and, in politics, appearances have all the force of realities. On any Italian train one can hear passengers saying that, thanks to Mussolini, they are sure of reaching their destinations and are not likely to be dumped out half way.

In the country, farmers will tell you how grateful they are that free contracting has been restored and that their calculations are in no danger of being upset by absurd price fixing imposed by howling mobs or by local governments playing to the grandstand. In the cities, manufacturers and business men are happy because they have lowered wage-scales to a workable level, without being pestered with strikes; if the Fascisti have given them trouble in other respects, they feel, on the whole, that the country is more normal and better managed, that business has a sounder underpinning, than was the case during the years 1919-1922.

These blessings, it is said, have been paid for with loss of liberty. This is true; but it is important for Americans to remember how the word liberty is understood in Italy. Here is a sign: "Keep off the grass: don't pick the flowers." To an American this means that he should keep off the grass and refrain from picking the flowers. If the sign seems obnoxious to him, he will seek legal means for having it removed. To the Italian, "liberty" means his right to walk on the grass, pick the flowers, tear the bushes up, and throw the sign away. An American asserts his liberty by changing the law; an Italian asserts his liberty by breaking the law and assailing the concept of law itself.

Many of the people who are now protesting against Fascismo in the name of liberty are the very ones who for years had been interfering with the