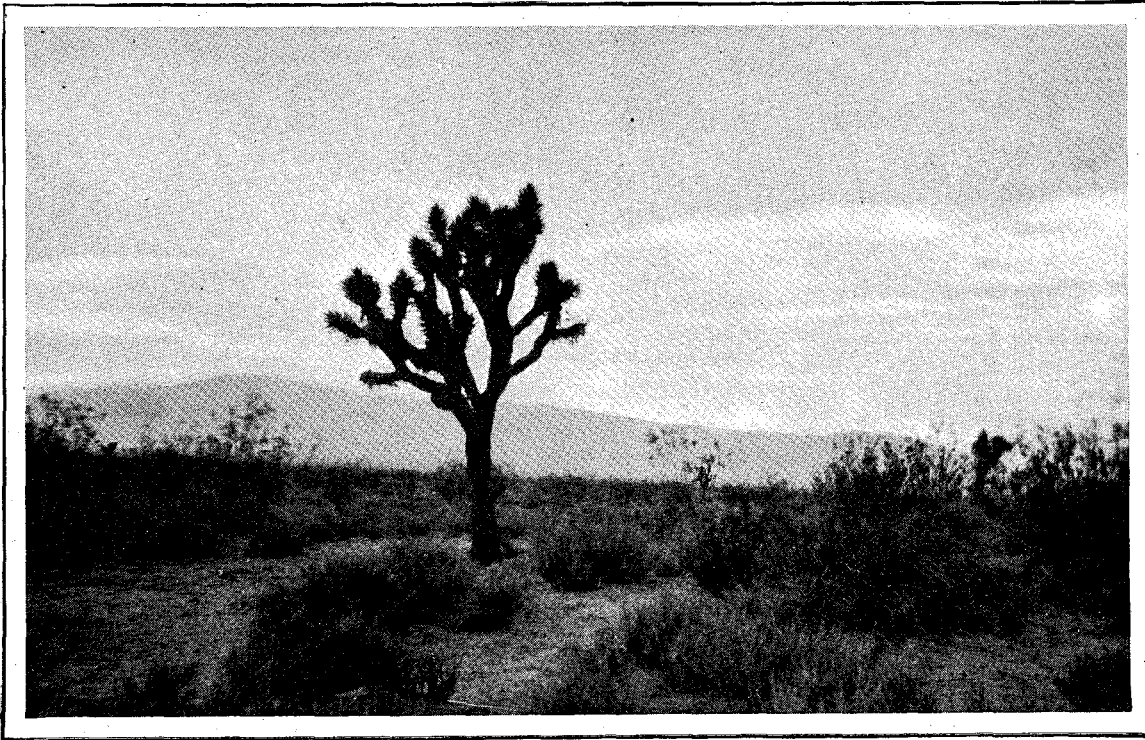
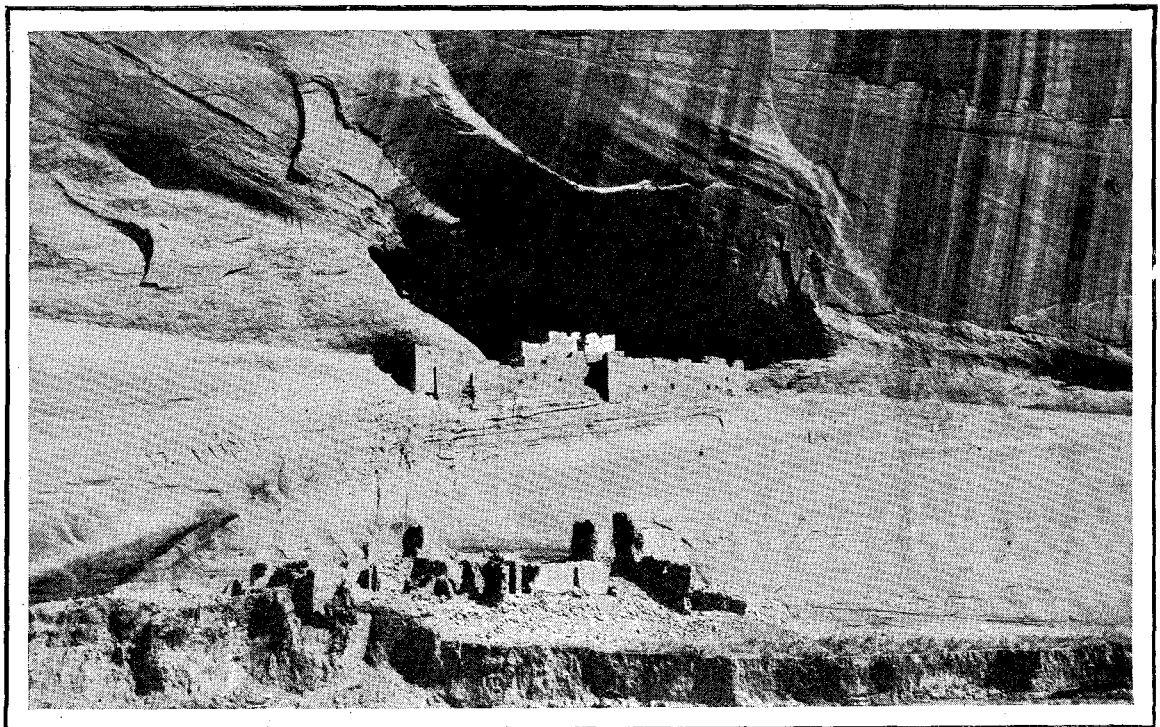


DESERT LANDS AND DESERTED HOMES

PICTURES FROM AN OUTLOOK READER



SUNSET ON THE MOJAVE DESERT, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



THE "WHITE HOUSE," A CLIFF CASTLE IN CANYON DE CHELLY, NORTHERN ARIZONA

From Philip Johnston, Los Angeles, California

THE BOOK TABLE

IN TERMS OF AMERICAN LIFE

BY FREDERICK M. DAVENPORT

AS the aftermath of the war has settled upon the world, men have become less and less satisfied with a naïve and immediate explanation which involves only Germany and the unfortunate Archduke Ferdinand. Men's minds have become centered upon Western civilization itself—how thin the veneer of it, after all, how subtle and yet how vast the forces of disruption which lurk beneath the surface, what a battle it is to preserve the civilization which a few years ago we thought strong enough to endure the assaults of every foe! Lothrop Stoddard has shown in his most recent book¹ how the danger to what is best in modern civilization is deeper than the war. The war has hastened the oncoming of the danger, has shaken and strained civilization to the breaking-point, has hastened racial impoverishment; but the real causes of what the world is now experiencing lie deeper than the war.

The first fact we have to face is a fact of biology—that some racial stocks are permanently weak and some are strong; but the strongest peoples, the strongest stocks, of to-day have no greater physical or intellectual capacity than the strongest stocks of civilization long buried in the past. The germ-plasm of capacity flows at approximately the same level through the centuries. The acquired characteristics of individuals of one generation are not transmitted to the individuals of the next. Each generation may develop a more complicated social environment and pass it on; but each new generation takes over the more difficult and complex environment at the cost of distinct and increased effort on the part of the individuals of the new generation, who have no greater inherited capacity to bear the burden than those who have gone before, and who, in the experience of all civilizations hitherto, have shown a progressively weakening capacity to bear the burden.

The tendency of civilization is to rear a greater and greater structural load upon its human foundations. That is peculiarly true of our own civilization. Power, organization, wealth, luxury, leisure, art, science, learning, government, a vast complex of values good and bad, now engage the energies of man. And a brain famine has set in. Neither in government nor economics, the two fields in which extraordinarily wise leadership is indispensable to civilization, do we find in the world to-day the intellectual capacity or the character to bear the increasing burden. Misgovernment among the nations and a world-

wide economic and industrial warfare are the ripe fruits of this incapacity.

There have been many civilizations in the past, great civilizations, and they are all gone. Modern biology makes it clear to us that there is no law of the decay of civilizations, but there are reasons for it. In the period of barbarism and savagery the weak, the stupid, and the degenerate were ruthlessly eliminated in the struggle for life and livelihood. In civilization the delinquents and defectives, the unadaptable and the incapable, have not only been supported by the superior stocks, but have bred to their desire's content. It is humane to care for the insane, the habitual pauper, or the instinctive criminal; but is it in the interest of civilization to allow him to reproduce his kind?

But that is not all of it nor the worst of it. When a race enters into civilization, it enters "in the pink of condition." In the earlier stages of its history it has eliminated its weaklings. The superior individuals have the choicest mates and the largest families. These are the simple values of the time. But we know that the expanding desires and demands of civilization alter that. A distinguished biologist of New England reckons that at the present rate of reproduction a thousand Harvard graduates of to-day will have only fifty descendants two centuries hence, whereas a thousand Rumanians in Boston, at their present rate of breeding, will have one hundred thousand descendants in the same space of time. Biological regression, the scientists call it. Not complete, because there may be many individuals in the Rumanian stock capable of climbing the social ladder and becoming superior; but the best-trying stock, the stock we know about as fit to organize and apply sound social control to civilization, is passing in many important parts of America.

But that is not all. There is a large element of primitive traits in most populations—people unadapted to progress, of wild nature, who have no desire nor capacity to keep pace with civilization. They are continually on the border-line of unrest and revolt. In ordinary times social control represses them. But in time of war, in time of vast dissension, of profound political or industrial or social injustice, "they gather themselves for the spring." They feel themselves to be permanent under-men. They know that civilization is not, can never be, for them. They are always ready, with reasons good or bad, for a revolt against orderly progress, against civilization.

In time of grave economic and social injustice in the latter part of the eighteenth century this human element

showed its teeth in France, and frequently and yet more frequently in various corners of Europe during the nineteenth century. This was the time of the triumph of machine industry and capitalism, when abuses were rife, when a great number of people were precipitated into the depths who did not belong there. Mere evolution towards political liberalism became too slow. Karl Marx and evolutionary Socialism raised its head. Then at the close of the nineteenth century appeared Georges Sorel and revolutionary Syndicalism—the state to be abolished, but a federation of trade unions to take its place; the class struggle, direct action, the general strike, sabotage, frightfulness, chaos, the dictatorship of the proletariat, "the war of the hand against the brain."

The most startling phenomenon of the aftermath of the Great War exhibits this reversion to the primitive in Russia, a country which occupies one-sixth of the earth's surface and embraces a population of 150,000,000. Russia, a land of wild, barbaric racial strains, having yet hardly learned the alphabet of social order, is the natural home of this fierce outburst of rebellion against the good and evil of civilization. Cold and nakedness, plague and famine, arrogance and terrorism, the tragic destruction of the middle class—these be the early fruits of the revolt against civilization. But the clearest revelation of the primitive sub-consciousness which now rules Russia, whatever Tchitcherin and Lenin may say, is the attitude of the proletarian Government towards the intellectuals of Russia, who, as Stoddard writes, "have long stood bravely between the despotism of the Czar and the benighted masses, striving to liberalize the one and enlighten the other, accepting persecution and misunderstanding as part of their noble task." These have been killed and starved and driven into exile by the new radicalism of Russia—the revolt of the new radicalism against superior intelligence. It is the same hatred of genius and learning which Robespierre showed by sending the great chemist Lavoisier to the guillotine with the remark: "Science is aristocratic; the Republic has no need of savants."

All this mainly, though not entirely, according to Stoddard. And now, speaking mainly, though not entirely, personally, I know it is part of the question which split the Genoa Conference, and I know it has distinctly two sides; but I yet hold that the policy which was back of the refusal of Secretary Hughes, of our Government, to recognize or treat with the emotional sub-conscious class mind of the Russian Soviet in its arrogant revolt against civilization is the surest statesmanship to follow. If America is to err at all, America errs safest on that side.

I am not one of those who believe that

¹ The Revolt Against Civilization. By Lothrop Stoddard. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$2.50.