

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.

America has no concern with the affairs of Europe. I am no apostle of perpetual aloofness from the remainder of mankind. But I hold that America, as well as Europe, must first become a better master of herself. There is more promise in American life than in the life of any other land, but there is many a threat of peril in American life as well. The laxness in economic and social and vital morale has a foothold in America—had it long before the war. It is a part of the deterioration of character wherever the prosperity of the industrial revolution in the last hundred years has carried greatly and suddenly increased welfare to large numbers of the population who had formerly struggled in hardship and straitened circumstances. Steam and electricity and gasoline, "rays and waves and powers" of which man had never before dreamed, have produced a volume of comforts, commodities, opportunities for ease and luxury, for large numbers of people in America never enjoyed before in the history of the world.

The war taught us something. The intelligence tests which we administered to more than 1,700,000 American officers and men demonstrated two things—first, that the average intelligence of the rising generation in America is not high, and that that precious factor itself is being steadily bred out of the American population by the rapid influx of certain inferior racial stocks, or at least of a multitude of inferior representatives of certain racial stocks. Where are your great thoughtful Americans, without whose vision the country perishes and of whose genius America never stood so much in need? Marshall could think; Lincoln could think, no man of his day more clearly, more deeply, than he. Where, in the world of industry and politics in the more democratic America of our time, are the superior men of vision who can think—men of character, sympathetic with popular freedom and capable of leading the people to act upon their thinking? Governmentally we have not been left entirely desolate. From Hamilton and Jefferson to Root and Roosevelt and Wilson and Hughes the American democracy has been helped by availing itself of the disciplined thinking and guidance of men of great intelligence, who have usually acquitted themselves with distinction and discretion. But the tide of democracy, bearing fears as well as hopes, sweeps resistlessly on, with disquieting symptoms of industrial immorality, of social inefficiency, of governmental feebleness, of public inertia upon affairs National and international. All the more need is there that the brains and conscience of the leadership of democracy should keep pace with the march of democracy.

Whether we advance or retreat in America depends, in the last analysis, upon whether we are led by a dynamic minority of brains and sympathy or by a dynamic minority of mattoids and morons. That means of course, in terms of biology, that we must breed from the right stock. And that means that

America must pick the representatives of her immigrant racial strains with a good deal more care than she has since the Civil War.

And it is not all in heredity. If the structural load of civilization weighs too heavily upon American human kind, we can lessen the load. We can alter our values. It is time we did it. It is time we thought far less of commercial values, of speeding up for riches, of luxury and materialism. It is time as a nation that we paid more attention to a life that is simple, to the things of the mind, of taste, and of culture—far less costly, but also in the best sense far richer. We thus follow the social philosophy of our distinguished American sociologist, Giddings. As he urges, we can employ the simpler and more spontaneous, more co-operative ways of getting things done as against the method of getting them done by Governmental agencies with enormous overhead, waste, inefficiency, armies of civil servants. The evolutionary and cultural ways rather than the revolutionary and coercive ways are much less costly and would enormously diminish the operating expenses of civilization.

The concentration of superiority in the higher levels, where it can be most effective in leadership, depends upon how well the channels of opportunity are kept open in America, so that the best in the lower levels may be drained into the higher levels. This we call in America equality of opportunity—the only kind of equality which nature or a sound philosophy believes in. Of later years we have not been so true to this American philosophy. We have adopted "leveling" practices. In American public education we have developed a tendency to run every boy or girl, bright pupil or dullard, through the same mold. The intellectual work of the student bodies in our colleges as a whole we have leveled down to the average or below the average; precisely as some of the labor unions do which debase and discourage bright workingmen by the "go-slow" rules of the union. There are large numbers of students in every college—the best of them from the standpoint of future leadership—whose powers find insufficient outlet and interest in the mass-curriculum constructed for the mass-average. There is an increasing multitude of workingmen who under a false doctrine of equality are having their capacities leveled to the mediocre.

Revolutions never happen. They are caused. They are precipitated mainly by inefficient government, burdensome taxation, by arrogant and greedy industrialism. They follow the previous undermining and discrediting of the existing social order. The wild race for armament, the resulting intolerable weight of taxes, the economic materialism of the ruling classes of Europe, precipitated the war and the revolutionary aftermath of the war.

Bourbonism prepares the ground for revolution. Bourbonism promotes material progress, but chokes human progress. Bourbonism blocks reform, breeds

discontent, thickens the crust of reaction, brings on the earthquake and the cataclysm.

I do not find myself able to follow Mr. Bryan before Southern Legislatures, Southern churches, and Southern college commencements in his flaming opposition to the theory of evolution. In the field in which Mr. Bryan is more at home, the field of ethics, I frequently find little difficulty in following him. I hold with him that civilization is expanding morality. I distrust, with Stoddard, those who all over the world are in violent revolt against civilization, because they make their appeal to envy, hatred, and malice instead of seeking to attain peace on earth, good will among men. They have chosen direct action, sabotage, the general strike, proletarian violence, the ruin of transportation, the paralyzing of economic life, the path of chaos, and not the path of righteousness and peace.

By right of her vast economic and moral reserve, America is fitted for the leadership of civilization. She is not yet ready to lead. She does not yet feel herself experienced enough to lead broadly in the great advance. But the period of caution and aloofness cannot last forever. More and more her wisdom will be sought in the councils of civilization. But her safety and honor at home and abroad can be preserved only by a superior human stock that will choose the right values, simplify its life, perpetuate its breed, and learn increasingly to think.

BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

CRYSTAL COFFIN (THE). By Maurice Rostand. Robert M. McBride & Co., New York \$2.

TRULY RURAL. By Richardson Mifflin Company, Boston. \$2.

WHITE AND BLACK. By Hubert Anthony Shands. Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York \$1.90.

WINDOW-GAZER (THE). By Isabel Ecclestone Mackay. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$1.90.

WITHOUT COMPROMISE. By Lillian Bennet-Thompson and George Hubbard. The Century Company, New York. \$1.75.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

WASHINGTON AND THE RIDDLE OF PEACE. By H. G. Wells. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.

WORK OF THE STOCK EXCHANGE (THE). By J. Edward Meeker. The Ronald Press Company, New York. \$5.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE WORLD WAR. By Louis P. Benezet. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.50.

MISCELLANEOUS

CHARACTER REVELATIONS OF MIND AND BODY. By Gerald Elton Fosbrooke. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$2.50.

COMING OF COAL (THE). By Robert W. Bruère. The Association Press, New York \$1.

STUDENT'S HISTORY OF THE HEBREWS. By Laura A. Knott. Illustrated. The Abingdon Press, New York.

TERRIBLY INTIMATE PORTRAITS. By Noel Coward. Boni & Liveright, New York. \$2.

WELL CONSIDERED GARDEN (THE). By Mrs. Francis King. New and Revised Edition. Illustrated. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$2.