

# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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### On Tolerance

OF all ages ours is perhaps the most tolerant. Other ages have been tolerant from incapacity to be otherwise, from ignorance, from indifference, from licentiousness, but ours is so of deliberation. We have indeed made a cult of toleration, perhaps to the point where toleration is no longer a virtue. Partly we are tolerant because civilization has grown so complex that to resent what is not directly suited to our inclinations would consume all our energies; partly, because as a result of its intricacy we have learned that in order to live we must let live. But largely we are tolerant because the spirit of science has descended upon us, and science has taught us the fallacy of believing that theories are immutable.

It was impossible, of course, that an age which replaced faith with science should retain its moral codes unchanged. Human nature could no longer be measured by the same yardstick when it was seen in part at least to be the victim of glandular deficiencies as when it had seemed to be entirely a thing of the spirit. As soon as the human being no longer appeared unquestionably the captain of his soul, but was rather the resultant of chemistry and experience, conduct could no more be fitted into a cast-iron heath of custom. If man sinned, he sinned as much because of himself as despite himself. And if that was so, the sin was no longer to be regarded as sin.

But an interest in science could not stop with theory, it must proceed to experimentation. And experimentation, again, meant a further loosening of the shackles of convention, or at least an excuse for lenity toward the relaxing of traditional standards. A new attitude developed toward society which regarded it as a vast laboratory where human relationships were in process of shaping, and where precedent was not of necessity the lodestar of action. So now today it has become fashionable to be "open-minded," stupid to be straitlaced, ridiculous to be prudish. This is the canon in the year of grace 1929.

It is the canon, we hasten to add, of the sophisticates. The masses of the nation are undoubtedly still living if not in the full light of Victorian morality at least in the shadow of it. But in a democracy like ours the opinions of the sophisticates bode much for the nation, for by example, through literature, through the press, they seep down into the remotest of our communities.

They interest us here because they are so largely the forces that are shaping our fiction, or at least that part of it which pretends to be criticism of life rather than mere narrative of incident. The younger generation of novelists, at any rate, has wholeheartedly embraced the belief that tolerance is a virtue, and that the ordering of the individual's life, so far as it does not contravene the mechanism of the social group, is no one's business but the individual's. They mean by that, and we mean, in interpreting them, of course, that the relation of the sexes is one that no longer can be judged by the strict regard for marriage that prevailed even fifty years ago. They quite frankly accept the idea of experiment as applying to marriage, and they look upon infidelity as quite as often the result of the endocrines as of insufficient moral sense or will-power. The right of the individual to love where and when he will is again and again their thesis. What they are doing to society by their theories no one can as yet say. What they are doing to literature at the moment is to make it appear repellent to

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### Pyrranean Twilight

By JOSEPHINE PINCKNEY

THE yoked white bullocks  
Sway to the sound  
Of creaking wood,  
Feet follow ground

In a homeward slant  
To the bullock-sheds,  
Beast and driver  
Fain of their beds.

The ranges alight  
With flaming grain  
Sparkle darkly  
Like wine of Spain.

The smothered red  
Settles to ash;  
Night wells up  
In the narrow gash

Between cracked peaks  
That sharpen and blacken;  
The green and the purple  
Yield and slacken.

Blackness bubbles  
Dissolving rocks  
And church-towers  
And ripping flocks

That spiral down  
To the valley-bed,  
All flows homeward  
Shepherded.

Silence is out  
Dissolving sound,  
Deep sleeping  
Is in the ground.

Labor of day  
Has long release,  
All is cleansed  
For passion's peace,—

For the heart's vibrations,  
Musical — rich —  
That spiral up  
To a mountain-pitch.

### Not Such Defenders\*

By ELMER DAVIS

MR. ALFRED ZIMMERN is a zealous worker for a better and more intelligent world, so when he calls attention to a perilous condition in the world as it is he is worth listening to; especially when he contrasts our ways with those of the Greeks, on whose affairs he is expert. All but one of the essays in this volume, he candidly admits, are left-overs from the material assembled for his famous work on the Greek Commonwealth; and it is a tribute to the solidity of his scholarship that after twenty years they hardly date at all. Of most interest is the study of slavery in Greece, which dissipates, at least so far as Athens is concerned, the impression one might get from the writings of wealthy philosophers, that the Greeks spent all their time in politics, fighting, and arguments about virtue and justice, while the slaves did all the work. Certainly the Greeks disliked drudgery and indoor work, as Mr. Zimmern concedes, and left it to the slaves wherever they could. But there remained a good deal of labor for the citizens, as anyone who got his impressions of Athenian life from the theater rather than the philosophers must have recognized. (Such a state as Ægina, about which we know little, may have been quite different.)

But the title essay, lately written, is the one that counts. The title, of course, derives from the famous story in Herodotus which represents Solon the sage talking to Croesus the richest man in the world, "not as equal but as master. Today Croesus is king in fact if not in name, and the successors of Solon, no longer law givers, count themselves happy if they are not his hirelings." That is to say, our civilization is based on the work of experts, thinkers, scientists; but it is not thinkers but rich men who rule the world. "In the reversal of the two rôles lies the central problem of twentieth-century civilization."

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What, another central problem? Mr. Hoover seems to think that law observance is the central problem of twentieth-century civilization; and Dr. John B. Watson says it is sex; and Mr. William C. Durant thinks it is the frowardness of people who bear stocks which Mr. Durant is bulling—but they may all be right. If laymen understand the implications of the Einstein theory, all problems are central in curved space which has no periphery. Zimmern's problem, at any rate, is serious enough; for we cannot go on living, as the later Romans disastrously tried to go on living, on the intellectual capital accumulated in the past. "Knowledge is not a commodity that can be collected and stored; it exists nowhere but in the living mind." What makes a state or a world civilized is

the presence of a sufficient proportion of civilized persons—that is, of men and women who have individually made the effort to absorb, and as it were live over again in their own wider experience, the thought of their predecessors in civilization . . . The only valid test of political, social, and economic institutions is whether they are such as to provide the community with an assured succession of such individuals. Abridge or limit this succession and a process of decadence will set in.

Mr. Zimmern does not think we are providing for that succession. Applied science is more profitable, and more attractive, than the pure science on which technological advancement depends; and those who have the "vocation of thought"—educators, research

\* SOLON AND CROESUS, and Other Greek Essays. By ALFRED ZIMMERN. New York: Oxford University Press. 1929. \$3.

### This Week



"Andrew Johnson."

Reviewed by WILLIAM MACDONALD.

"Frontiers of Hope."

Reviewed by NORAH MEADE.

"Compass Rose."

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMAYER.

"Young Mrs. Greeley."

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT.

N. S. N. S.

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

### Next Week, or Later

Salvation by Philosophy.

By RALPH BARTON PERRY.



workers, artists, journalists—have let the rich get the upper hand. "Solon is decked out with titles and decorations and signs of outward honor"; he gets honorary degrees, and space in the newspapers; but "the voice that commands is the voice of Cræsus," and what he commands is nothing less than "the daily martyrdom of truth."

A situation so deplorable—and so pointedly in contrast, Mr. Zimmern assures us, with the practice of the Greeks who started our civilization—calls for inquiry as to how we got that way; also as to what we can do about it. Mr. Zimmern finds two principal causes—"the increase of the aids to knowledge and the diffusion of instruction." There is such an accumulation of fact nowadays that the thinker is in danger of getting lost in it; and universal literacy has not turned out to be the same as universal education. Why? "The pervading influence of Cræsus." Rich men made of education for the masses "a training in the aptitudes needed for the routine work of a machine-driven society." Universal education has produced a Lincoln, a Masaryk; but in spreading it out we have had to dilute it till it can hardly be called education at all. It appears that the influence and example of America, too, have helped corrupt Europe and give Cræsus the advantage over Solon.

Yet Zimmern ends on a note of optimism. The intellectuals can win, if they will only get together. "Cræsus, supreme in the art of organization, has mobilized his millions; Solon, individualist by the very nature of his work and thought, has set nothing against him but tenacious individual wills." But let the intellectuals unite their forces; let the associations of particular sciences intermingle more than they do, so that not only may historians meet historians, but biologists and astronomers as well. "Science, Art, Letters, and Education together form an indissoluble whole. United, they can stand four-square against the onslaught of Cræsus; divided, they will be individually overpowered." Here is a salvation-and-redemption drama, which can almost be chopped up into acts as it stands; the assault of tyrannous Wealth upon virtuous and innocent Learning, the momentary triumph of the villain; the rallying of the forces of righteousness, and the last-act struggle that brings down the curtain on a happy ending. Are we to be saved so simply as all that? Think not.

Mr. Zimmern is a man of such obvious good will that it seems ungracious to point out that good will is not enough. Possibly even Cræsus, in his thick-witted way, is doing what, to him, seems right. If we are to extricate civilization from such a dire peril we need not only good will but clear thinking; and here Zimmern sets us a bad example, which begins with his very title. He presumably knows that the Solon-Cræsus story is a myth; chronology makes it virtually impossible to believe that the two ever met, and if they had met their conversation would hardly have been as represented by patriotic Athenian legend a hundred and fifty years later. But the reader unacquainted with critical history is likely to suppose that this is fact.

It is fact, Zimmern might counter, in its essence, in that it expresses the Greek view that thought was of greater weight than money, that the sage had a right to lay down the law to the millionaire. Well, it is true in general that the Greeks esteemed intellect more highly than we do, and money less highly. They had more intellect than we, in proportion to their numbers, and less money; whether their relative estimate of these two ingredients of civilization was the cause or the effect of this remains uncertain. But, as with most other members of the human race, money that they despised was usually other people's money, money they could not get. Give the average Greek a chance to get money, even by selling out his country, and he usually took it. Even their intellectuals were willing to work for men like Cræsus; though if they happened to be wealthy intellectuals they worked for other reasons than money, and resigned, as Plato resigned his job with Dionysius, when things did not go to suit them. Wealthy intellectuals have been known to resign, even in this degenerate time. Cræsus then respected Solon for what he could get out of him, as he does now. When Philip made Aristotle Alexander's tutor, it was not because he wanted Alexander to be another Aristotle; it was because he believed that Aristotle's teaching would help Alexander to out-Cræsus Cræsus.

There is something, then, in Mr. Zimmern's contrast between Greek and modern ways, as there is

something in his main thesis; but both need qualification. A man who comes to the defense of intellectual integrity ought himself to set an example of exactitude and straight thinking. His criticism of popular education, also, is partly true; some rich men in every generation have wanted the schools to turn out willing factory hands and competent clerks. But how many high-school students would of their own accord elect Plato and Thucydides rather than bookkeeping and business English? One is tempted to wonder, besides, how many high school students would get much out of Plato and Thucydides. The question despairingly raised by Ros-tovtzeff, at the conclusion of his study of the decay of Roman culture, remains unanswered: Can any culture survive the dilution involved in its extension to the masses?

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Again, when Mr. Zimmern particularizes, careful discrimination between fact and innuendo would make his argument more trustworthy. Certainly he has plenty of fact to support it. Modern universities need libraries and laboratories; rich men, or legislatures, must provide them; and sometimes those who have paid for the tools want to have something to say about the uses to which they are put. (Legislatures especially.) The Grievance Committee, or whatever it is called, of the American Association of University Professors could cite plenty of instances; and it is of America that Mr. Zimmern seems to be chiefly thinking. It is not very hard to guess what two nations he has in mind in the following:

In some countries where intellectual standards are still maintained, academic administrators tend to be unsuccessful, so that teachers and thinkers are living in chronic embarrassment and even squalor; whilst in others, where the canons of the spirit are held of less account, the authorities have frankly adopted business methods and standards, and preserve the semblance of a university at the cost of its reality. When such is the case, Cræsus does not require to command. It is enough for him to whisper.

As a statement of fact, this is incontrovertible; given such and such premises, such and such conclusions inevitably follow. But the language carries an inference that is wholly misleading. Virtually all American universities use business methods in the management of their finances, something that is, or used to be, rare in England. But business methods and business standards are very different. Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago are rich universities, they try not to waste their money; therefore, by Zimmern's innuendo, they are subservient to the whispers of a corrupt plutocracy. That may not be his intention, but it is the meaning his language carries; and it is not true. He could find plenty of evidence to support his argument without a generalization that destroys confidence in his judgment. *Non tali auxilio.*

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When he attacks such subsidizing of text books and teachers as the utility interests have engaged in, he is on surer ground; but in his criticism of journalism he goes back to vaguely devastating generalizations of the every-schoolboy-knows order. The result is more half-truths. With a magnanimous gesture he pardons the working newspapermen who, when the paper changes owners and opinions, "for the sake of their wives and families drive their pens against their convictions." They are committing the sin against the Holy Ghost, but it is the system that is at fault; these poor wretches are only its victims.

The mistake is in allowing the public to believe that a profession which in the nineteenth century aspired to the intellectual influence of the preacher and the professor is still endeavoring to live up to the same responsibilities.

If Mr. Zimmern will study the most respected newspapers of the nineteenth century, he will discover that most of them, not only in their editorials but in their news columns, were quite as bigoted, dogmatic, and unfair as most of the preachers and some of the professors of that not entirely golden age. With all allowance for certain deplorable modern tendencies, the general standard of accuracy and fairness in reporting news is probably higher today than it ever was in the past. People who deny that have not done much reading in the newspapers of earlier times. The chief enemy of journalism at present is not Cræsus but the man in the street; metropolitan papers must interest a great many people to pay their way. It costs millions to start them and keep them going; if Mr. Zimmern can think of any method to get us back to the day when

any gifted editor could start a paper on a shoestring, he will confer a benefit on journalists and journalism. But he only confuses the issue by implying that nothing but the individual malignity of rich men is to blame.

The trouble (so it seems to this reviewer) is that Zimmern has completely misconceived, or at any rate completely misstated, the problem. It was stated more effectively, because more coolly and exactly by James Truslow Adams, in the July *Harper's*. What gives Cræsus his power? Not the minor causes mentioned by Zimmern, but the fact that Cræsus has won general admiration by attaining, in conspicuous quantity, what most people want. (Why they want it is another and not wholly irrelevant matter.) That is to say the real enemy of the intellect and the intellectuals is not Cræsus but Mammon; not the wicked conspiracies of certain rich men, but the materialistic standards of an age in which, for the first time, material comfort is within the reach of all. And most people want it, even if they happen to be intellectuals by temper and vocation. The curse of modern literature, said a magazine editor to me not so long ago, is that an author wants to live like a business man—buy his wife a car and a fur coat, send his children to a decent school; whereas in the great days of letters an author counted himself lucky to escape starvation. But it would be easy to name certain very good authors who do their best work for Mr. George Horace Lorimer, with the prejudices and preferences of his three million readers constantly in mind—far better work than they turn out, in the intervals, merely to please themselves.

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That argument cannot be pressed too far; I believe it is valid for most fiction writers in this present and somewhat peculiar age, but it certainly is not true for intellectuals in general. They can get on, and get the world on, only by seeing and saying what seems right to them, without any consideration of the will of Cræsus or—a more serious danger, I think—of the *ardor civium falsa jubenium*. An eminent scholar, let us say, reaches some conclusions on a matter of popular interest. If he is rigidly conscientious in his thinking the chances are they will be conclusions needing some qualification, not black-and-white but gray. He can state them with scrupulous exactitude in a scientific periodical, where they may be read by two or three thousand people, most of them experts in his line who will disagree with him out of mere professional jealousy; and he will be paid twenty-five dollars, three months after publication.

But he knows that if he "popularizes" his conclusions—that is to say, if he paints them up, shades the truth a little, states as fact something that may be only dubious inference—he will make his argument interesting to two or three million people; in which case he can sell it to a popular magazine and get twenty-five hundred dollars a week after acceptance. If he does that, Zimmern would call it a martyrdom of truth, and rightly. But is that the fault of Cræsus? I have a considerable acquaintance among magazine editors, and I have not found them men who wilfully corrupt their contributors. To interest two or three million people one must usually make broad statements, without qualification. For such statements the magazine editor offers a market; he leaves it to the intellectual to decide whether such statements can truthfully be made. If the intellectual makes them untruthfully in order to get the money, whose is the fault? The doctrine of free will has gone out of fashion; but I am antique enough to think that not Cræsus but the intellectual is to blame.

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Mr. Zimmern, I take it, would disagree. The implication of his whole argument is that morality is only a problem in physics, whose outcome can be determined by a calculation of forces. Let Cræsus only tempt Solon with enough money, and Solon will certainly fall. He admits exceptions, implying that he himself has fought with the beasts at Ephesus and come out victorious, as doubtless he has. But he does not seem to have much hope that the average intellectual will refuse to sell his soul for money whenever he gets an attractive offer.

If things are as bad as that I cannot see much hope in his scheme for a coöperation of modern Solons against Cræsus. All it would amount to, if his implications are accepted, is One Big Union of intellectuals for the purpose of taking control of the shop away from Cræsus. I am not versed in syndicalist philosophy, but I doubt if that would save the world, though it might mean more money for