

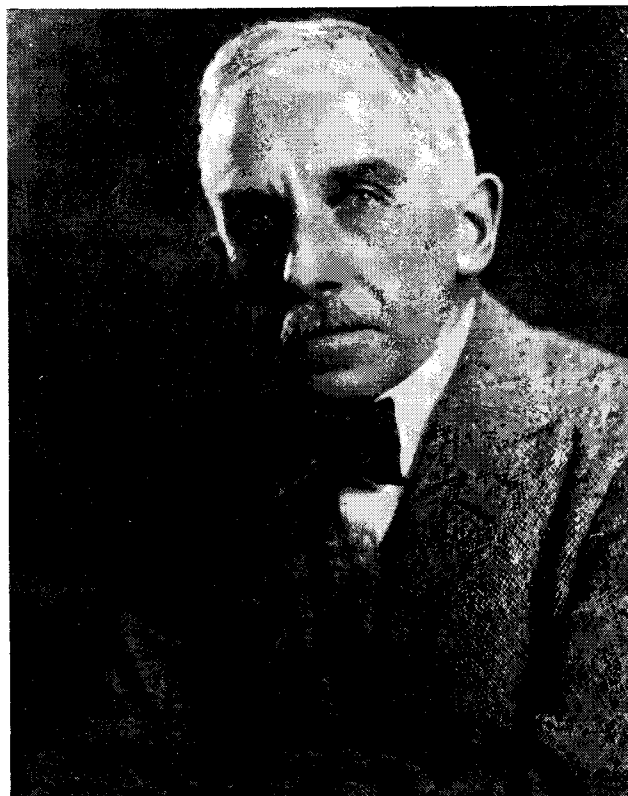
One Per Cent of Human History*

BY JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON

FAMILIARITY by no means always breeds contempt but rather unquestioning acceptance. A personal shock of some kind is usually necessary to arouse curiosity and encourage reflection about conditions, beliefs, and habits amidst which we have been reared; we have become so insensibly immersed in them that we just take them for granted. Unless in some respect they irk us grievously they are immune from analysis and criticism. To the overwhelming mass of mankind things familiar have always recommended themselves as over against novelties. For example, when Dr. Johnson was compiling his dictionary he rejected the word "civilization" as a suspicious novelty; he held that a term then in good standing, "civility," would serve admirably. Today this word suggests "urbanity," the refinements of town life at its best as contrasted with rusticity and boorishness. On the other hand the word of similar derivation and implication which Johnson excluded is now the prevailing name of something which is attracting more and more attention as time goes on. And what is this something called "civilization," the imminent destruction of which is now and then forecast? The fact that Dr. Johnson believed in 1772 that "civility" was the right word for what he had in mind is an illustration of the longstanding and respectable ignorance which was to be so sharply challenged by Darwin's "Descent of Man" a hundred years later. Johnson did not know that his ancestors a short way back in the history of the earth were wild animals leading a naked, speechless, houseless, fireless existence, picking up barehanded a living as raw and hazardous as that of a black bear.

This discovery of man's origin was the shock necessary to provoke that reconsideration of human achievement which has served to put man's career in an entirely new setting with the promise of greatly increased insight as this all important branch of knowledge is widened.

* THE HISTORY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION. By Harry Elmer Barnes with the collaboration of Henry David. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1935. 2 vols. \$10.



JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON

So far as the reviewer is aware there is no work superior or indeed equal to that in hand as an introduction to civilization as now understood and to the possibilities of future research. H. G. Wells urged that no part of human history could be properly grasped without some knowledge of man's whole past, and made this proposition the basis of his "Outline." Dr. Barnes received his training among historians and social scientists to whom this was becoming a commonplace. Wells grew weary, however, as he reached the indescribable complexities of the last hundred years and his account of them is but a hasty sketch compared with his story of earlier times. Dr. Barnes, on the contrary, has been able to combine an excellent summary of so-called ancient and medieval history with an astonishingly comprehensive presentation of existing Western civilization with all its recent revolutionary changes and agonizing bewilderments. He devotes his first and shorter volume to the background of our present scientific age, coming down to the results of the Protestant Revolt. He is slightly more than half through the sec-

ond volume before he takes up the World War. The arrangement is topical with due attention to chronological order. The whole work would equal in extent about six of the seven volumes of Bury's edition of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall." And roughly a quarter of the treatise concerns especially developments of the last twenty years.

The allocation of space is one of the most harassing problems that face everyone dealing with general history. The discovery of man's long existence on the earth compared with former guesses has made historians dissatisfied with the old framework of ancient, medieval, and modern times. If men have been living on the earth for a million or more years they had been on the job of generating and accumulating civilization for more than ninety-nine per cent of this period before what was once known as the Dawn of History arrived. Dr. Barnes suggests that if we want to adhere to the old terms we should have to call

the Old Stone Age, ancient history, the New Stone Age, medieval, and the period since the erection of the pyramids, modern. "From the standpoint of time and culture alike, the whole civilization of man in the West since ancient Egyptian days is 'modern' in character. The term 'contemporary' history might well be applied to the relatively novel culture that has arisen since 1700 as a result of the growth of science, invention, business enterprise, and world trade." Although we often dwell upon the contrasts between our own time and all preceding human experience we generally but feebly sense the incalculable effects that

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Next Week

GOVERNMENT IN BUSINESS

By STUART CHASE

Reviewed by Adolf A. Berle, Jr.

ULYSSES S. GRANT, POLITICIAN

By WILLIAM B. HESSELTINE

Reviewed by W. E. Woodward



"WE ARE PART OF A MAGNIFICENT CREATION"

Drawing by Cesare, from "The History of Western Civilization."

new knowledge and ways of living are exerting on the whole range of beliefs and ideals. Indeed one of the chief aims of a history of civilization is to bring this devastating fact into relief.

Perhaps the best way to get an impression of the scope of our present civilization is to glance through the volumes of a comprehensive encyclopedia, which is an attempt to summarize human achievement. I say "summarize" because most of the articles are mere hints of the various arts and sciences, and for further particulars you are referred to special works. The first edition of the "Britannica" appeared only a short time before Johnson's Dictionary, and it is very instructive to compare its headings in number and content with those of the latest edition. A new dictionary at least as voluminous as Johnson's would be required to take care of a vocabulary unknown to him which is now necessary to describe new things and meet modern demands for more exact analysis and classification of old ones.

Dr. Barnes assigns chapter XIX of his second volume to the intellectual and cultural achievements of the nineteenth century, and closes his work with the outstanding scientific discoveries of the twentieth, and their influence on thought and belief in various realms of human interest—about 150 pages in all. Only a suggestion of the progress in the various fields of science and in the fine arts is possible but stress is properly laid on the change of attitude rather than a bare enumeration of discoveries and innovations, and many varied and striking quotations are recalled which illustrate humorously enough the indignant resistance of religious leaders and certain moralists and men of letters to the awesome readjustments they were summoned to contemplate.

A general air of assurance and finality pervaded most members of the learned classes in previous generations. They felt convinced that they possessed precise and extended knowledge concerning God, the world, man, human destiny, the purpose and meaning of life, and all the other basic problems that confront man. Now all this is changed. We do have, to be sure, much more exact knowledge about the material universe and the biological nature of man, and we are coming to know more about the type of behavior most likely to insure human happiness upon this planet. But the meaning of the whole human drama and its setting in the cosmic scheme of things has become ever more baffling.

It is harder and harder to trace purpose in naive human terms in the whole process of evolution as it now appears. Opposite the author's remarks just quoted are portraits of Freud, H. G. Wells, John Dewey, and Einstein, all of whom would probably concur. The other day I came upon a notice of popular geological accounts of New Hampshire during the last three hundred and seventy-five million years. I happened also to open "What Is Faith?" by J. Gresham Machen, D.D. to whom salvation "presupposes the awful wrath of a righteous God." This idea seems to have been very recently discovered by Paul of Tarsus and might be condemned as modernism in the setting of New Hampshire history and even that of man's brief existence on earth. But however much theologians know of the awful wrath of a righteous God they are commonly very ignorant of his works which appear increasingly difficult to reconcile with their theories. This matter Dr. Barnes has treated with judicious moderation in a special work, "The Twilight of Christianity."

What Dr. Barnes calls "the futile anguish of even cultured intellects with a

retrospective yearning" is illustrated by a lamentation of President Butler.

No small part of the social and political diseases and disorders that are now so generally discussed may be traced to the destruction through unsound educational methods of that common body of knowledge and intellectual and moral experience which held men together through a community of understanding and of appreciation. A steadily growing unity has been displaced for a chaotic multiplicity.

Dr. Butler does not reveal the way in which a salutary common body of knowledge, such as he assumes once existed—with, no doubt, its concomitant common body of ignorance—is to be restored. He hints that we should revert to the wisdom of the Greeks and gain a real understanding of history as he sees its lesson.

Dr. Barnes usually refrains from a direct expression of his personal opinions but in bringing his work to a close he says:

Very often those who most greedily accept and enjoy the products of modern science and technology are engaged in bitter attacks upon science as a whole and upon the scientific approach to life. Not infrequently persons who are most exacting in their demands for the most recent provisions in plumbing, the best medical attention, the most efficient and up-to-date automobiles, and the rest, are found at the same time defending classical or medieval civilization as the ideal period of human development.

In short we need not merely contemporaneous bathtubs but also "contemporaneous intellectual attitudes and assumptions." Certainly it would be diverting to send President Butler to report on the Athens of Aristophanes if we can accept this dramatist's description of the daily habits of his glorious city, or to condemn Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc to a month's sojourn in the most palatial accommodations available in the Age of Faith. But that's something else again.

Dr. Barnes's work as a whole is the outcome of a conviction which he expresses at its close.

The stupendous changes wrought by critical thought, science, and technology in our material civilization have given rise to problems that can be solved only by a corresponding development of the various social sciences which deal with the diverse aspects of social life that have been so thoroughly revolutionized since the days of George Washington. We can no longer hope to receive adequate guidance in these matters solely from the theologian, the metaphysician, or the politician. Instead, we must bring the social sciences up to something like the same level of development and objectivity that has already been attained by the natural and applied sciences.

The point of departure for this hoped-for advance in the so-called social sci-

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In Search of the Meaning of Life

THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER. By L. H. Myers. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THIS is a trilogy, containing two novels, "The Near and the Far" and "Prince Jali," which have already appeared and have now been reviewed, and a third, "Rajah Amar." The story told in these books is not yet complete; this trilogy is but the first volume of a larger work, which, when it is completed, may well take its place as one of the most important works of fiction of our time. For it brings back the aspect of eternity to the English novel. It is laid in the age of Akbar, the great Mogul emperor of India who was a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth; but the author says frankly in a foreword that this is not a historical novel, that Akbar is the only character drawn with any regard for historic truth, that he has chosen his *mise-en-scène* in order to present problems, freed from the accidents of our own social conditions, and yet set under conditions which involve a minimum of explanation. The average reader, he feels, will know enough and not too much about sixteenth-century India. And, one may add, his locale has the advantage of enabling him to introduce naturally a number of recognized schools of thought. Young Prince Jali, the protagonist of one volume, is the son of an enlightened Buddhist and a Christian lady from the Caucasus; and there are besides representatives of a score of religions and philosophies.

The whole action is motivated by the rivalry between Akbar's sons. The interest, however, is not in the single, simple intrigue which runs through the whole three volumes and is left uncon-



L. H. MYERS

cluded at the end of them, but in the speculations it provokes in the actors, who all, in their own reflections and in conversations, consider the philosophy of what they are doing—the philosophy of society; the philosophy of the soul.

It is a unique method, and one that is only intermittently successful. Sometimes one can accept the story as taking place in the plane of essential humanity, but sometimes one is unavoidably conscious that the book is in the seventeenth century but not of it. The method, however, triumphantly justifies itself in the whole middle third, "Prince Jali," where the events, the experiences of murder and first love, are used as the necessary material for an extraordinarily delicate and deep study of a difficult adolescence.

But if the method is successful only at times, the content is always worth pondering and remembering. On every page there is some remark, about politics or people or God, which bears the mark of a mind which is, as so few are, both keen and deep. From it all there emerges in time a position, general indeed, but one which the author holds with utter conviction,—that the important thing in life is the difference between those who do, and those who do not, recognize the eternal and divine elements in life. One will watch eagerly for the conclusion of this work, as one which shows a sensibility naturally as great, if not as artificially hypertrophied, as that of Proust, engaged upon the real meaning of life.

Long Loyalties

WHITE LADIES. By Francis Brett Young. New York: Harper & Bros. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG has written a novel a year for a good number of years now, and each novel each year has been written about by a good number of reviewers. In this way a veritable Francis Brett Young review vocabulary has been built up and anyone wanting to say anything about him at this late date has to make a deliberate choice between using the old words and phrases once more or, in a desperate attempt at originality, trying something new and misrepresenting the book. For his recent novels all have more in common than they have of difference.

The Young novels are long, they are leisurely, and they have much in them of the Victorian technique. They almost invariably tell a good story with an ample background and many characters. They speak lovingly for the old order, but they recognize the inevitability of the encroaching new. No one creates with more ease or greater reality than Mr. Young the English scene and the English family. Here he meets, however different the interest and the attack, Bennett and Galsworthy upon their own ground and without suffering through the comparison.



FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

White Ladies was a house, or more properly an estate, in the possession of the Pomfrets since the medieval nuns who left it its name had been ejected. But the Pomfrets had scattered and had no money to keep the place up, so it stood vacant and abandoned when Bella Tinsley came upon it and fell in love at first sight. Have it she must. When Hugo Pomfret refused, from the safety of Capri, to sell it at whatever price, she very calmly started for that island. She returned as Mrs. Hugo Pomfret. The husband and wife may have had little personal feeling for each other, but they had one passion in common,—their beloved White Ladies. From this point on, the story is of the attempt to reclaim the house out of the past and for the present, with the house rebelling every step of the way and winning ultimately in its fight to keep clear of possession by the Tinsleys.

This love of Bella's for White Ladies is the spring which lies tightly coiled at the heart of the story, but the tensions which hold that spring in place come, strong and sure, out of the past. The earlier Tinsleys, especially the first Arabella and the dark stranger whom she married, were of the spark-flying, chip-falling type of characters that spellbind the reader or the listener wherever good stories are told. It is not without regret that one takes leave of these sturdy forerunners of the main plot. But Mr. Young does not practise fictional economy. He is full of plots and people and lavish in his use of them.

The present novel shows its author at his own uncanny best in endowing things and places with qualities that give them the poignancy of human nature. The bitter determination of the house, White Ladies, gives to its portrayal a deep and tragic note. Inanimate loyalties are long loyalties.