

# The Saturday Review



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## Time to Think

THE GREAT Exposition of 1900 in Paris had numberless visitors, but it is doubtful whether any one of them came back more persistently or thought more deeply about it than Henry Adams. His observations about the Exposition formed a chapter in that eternally challenging volume "The Education of Henry Adams."

Adams brought more than disciplined curiosity to the Exposition. He brought a troubled sense of history. He belonged to a tradition that inquired about the meaning and not merely the function of things. This tradition held that what men made was not as important as why they made it; and that what they did was not as important as what they thought. Adams "haunted" the Exposition to discover not what changes man had made in machines but what changes the new machines were likely to make in man. For the Great Exposition of 1900 did more than greet a new century. It set a dramatic stage for the world of the dynamo. It confronted a startled citizenry with the power of invisible rays. It held out the promise of mighty engines that could take men through the air.

Adams brought to the Exposition his great gift for purposeful brooding. There was no lamentation in his method, no empty shuffling of overblown memories by which the old is made to seem precious and the new absurd and raucous. Adams didn't try to wage war against change—not even in his later years. All he tried to do was to understand it. And understanding was not easy; for "nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts." But

the pursuit of understanding was a worthy end in itself, even though the answers were never found.

As an historian, Henry Adams had trained himself to deal with sequence. These sequences produced assumptions, and the assumptions, he said, were "unconscious and childlike—so much so, that if any captious critic were to drag them to light, historians would probably reply with one voice that they had never supposed themselves required to know what they were talking about." But Adams thought it might be nice to know; he had written a dozen histories in the attempt to find out. From his histories came some satisfactions. He was satisfied that "the sequence of men led to nothing and that the sequence of their society no further, while the mere sequence of time was artificial." He was even beginning to fear that the sequence of thought was chaos. It was in this mood that he turned to the sequence of technology and force. The Great Exposition of 1900 was a wonderful arena for his accomplished brooding over sequence and the meaning of the new age, but it was more than he could take. He found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines, his "historical neck broken by the sudden eruption of forces totally new."

The injury was painful, but it was the kind of joyful pain that creates. Out of it no doubt came his book, the like of which has not been seen since. That book helped its readers to develop respect for the expanding frontiers of the mind. It made the attempted conquest of ideas far more exciting than the prospect of conquering mountain peaks. It made it clear that the mastery of the force that spins the big wheels would be

meaningless and wicked unless man also presides over all the contact points where such force meets his values.

LITTLE more than a half-century has passed since the Great Exposition that so fascinated and troubled Henry Adams. But, compared to the half-century before 1900, we have known since then the equivalent of perhaps 1,000 years of change. We are no longer fooling with intermediate force; we are taking out after the ultimates. Our play is at the extremes—on one end, poking far into the atom to unravel the heart of matter; on the other, reaching out to command the basic energy of the universe. Old mysteries have already been subdued.

There is now scientific knowledge and experience which could within a short time be made to feed every human being on earth and supply the raw energy needed to work his machines. Only yesterday the earth seemed overcrowded with two billion souls. Today, the universe of knowledge, properly put to work, could enable this planet to support fifty or seventy-five billion souls. An age of plenty for the living is now technologically possible and feasible. The only thing lacking to bring it about is wisdom.

A present-day Henry Adams would wander among the cyclotrons and automation marvels instead of the puny dynamos of fifty years ago, aware not only of the miraculous possibilities but the monstrous threats. He would be fascinated to see the way the miracles were being manipulated and subordinated to human will, but he would brood over the highly primitive conditions of the political world society in which the miracles would have to operate. He would see the age of abundance and automation juxtaposed against an age of anarchy.

Whatever Henry Adams's reactions might be to the sleek engines that can exterminate their makers, one thing is certain. He would look around almost desperately for the evidence that we ourselves were not being machine-like in our approach to the problem of the machine. He had feared that the machine might become so successful that man, with his genius for adaptation, might seek to imitate it. And if the imitation were to be resisted, thought would be necessary.

If the language of contemplation is not altogether lost, the nation might find nothing so profitable as a period set aside for sustained thought directed to the completion of the miracles—which is to say, how to keep the servant from becoming the master. The uniqueness of man is thought. The time to demonstrate that uniqueness is now. —N. C.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## MASTERFUL SUMMARY

IN MY OPINION Reinhold Niebuhr's essay "Christ vs. Socrates" [SR Dec. 18] is the finest article ever printed in *The Saturday Review*—and perhaps one of the greatest ever written anywhere. It is a masterful summary of the Christian faith by a great theologian and philosopher. Set out in lucid and compact prose, its deep-thrusting, high-spurting wisdom defines the role of Christianity in the thought and belief of the West.

The above comment was occasioned by the three letters about "Christ vs. Socrates" [SR Jan. 8]. To begin with, C. W. Griffin says in so many words that he does not understand Niebuhr, which should be a courteous admission rather than a criticism. Richard Washburn evidently misses a main point of the essay, or he is too proud to understand the meaning of "a broken spirit and a contrite heart." J. H. Dorey apparently does not make the sharp distinction between Christianity and the Eastern religions which Niebuhr so brilliantly demonstrates, for he surely cannot suppose that Aldous Huxley is a Christian in Niebuhr's terms.

Congratulations to SR for making available to its readers such a tremendously effective exposition.

HARRISON L. REINKE.

Southborough, Mass.

## DIVINE DISCONTENT

CONGRATULATIONS on the article "Peace of Mind," by Warren Weaver [SR Dec. 11]. Here is one reader who heartily agrees with Weaver's protest against too much "peace of mind," and the efforts of the peace-of-minders to relieve us of all stress and tension by the practice of the easy-does-it-method. Weaver, however, is not the only one whose adrenals get stimulated by the clergymen who continuously indulge in indiscriminate condemnation of tension and more than periodically use the "How to Be at Peace" gimmick. But I would point out that there are some clergymen, popular or otherwise, whose adrenals have long since been stimulated as Weaver's have, and under the same circumstance. Here is one—a Unitarian.

NORMAN D. FLETCHER.

Montclair, N. J.

## WEAVER AND PEALE

I HAVEN'T as yet read Norman Vincent Peale's "The Power of Positive Thinking," but I am familiar enough with the topic involved, as who isn't these days, that I must take some exception to Warren Weaver's criticism of the book and the idea behind it.

What particularly disturbed me was the rather ridiculous comparison between the restlessness of protoplasm and the peace of mind of man. Weaver uses the



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"This new calendar—how will it affect charge accounts?"

example that our single-celled ancestors did not indulge in peaceful stagnation and as a result we are here today. This he uses as an argument against an over-indulgence in peace of mind by man. Perhaps he's right in that we need restless minds to solve our problems and advance our civilization, but let's find a better argument. For, whether you accept the theory of evolution or not, how can you possibly compare the purely biological process involved in the activity of protoplasm and single-celled animals with the workings of the complicated structure of the mind of man? Even the most ardent Darwinian must agree that such a facsimile is impossible.

Perhaps I'm just angry because this article has so disturbed my peace of mind that I must leave my state of thoughtless bliss and go out and purchase Dr. Peale's book, which I'm sure is thought-provoking. I'll also buy the next *Saturday Review*, which is always thought-provoking. I'm afraid Weaver in his article might have produced at least one less peaceful mind for him to be concerned about.

ELMER R. POHL.

Fort Knox, Ky.

## THE UN-PEACEFUL LIFE

WARREN WEAVER's "Peace of Mind" gave me quite a lift!

People who have peace of mind  
Are often very dull, I find,  
And those who think most positively  
I'd thank to think away from me.  
In fact, I'm not so very sure  
I even like the "mind mature."

In spite of many a frank misgiving,  
My un-peaceful life is well worth living.

JO HEMPHILL.

New York, N. Y.

## REMARKABLE LIKENESS

CONGRATULATIONS to you on selection of the Grand Prize-winning colorphoto as cover illustration for your January issue of SR. It struck me, at first glance, as a remarkable likeness of the celebrated literary workman Papa Hemingway—leaning on his staff, too tired to fly to Stockholm for the Nobel Prize . . .

The title could, appropriately, have been "Literary Workman in Tango-land."

CHRISTOPHER NORTH.

Haverford, Pa.

## FIRST PRIZE ONLY

JAMES KELLY's review of "First-Prize Stories from the O. Henry Memorial Awards" [SR Dec. 4] brings up a point that has bothered other reviewers. He wonders why certain distinguished short-story writers are not represented. The reason is that the book contains only stories that won first prize. Most of the authors he mentions had stories in the O. Henry anthologies, some winning second prizes. There were times when I thought some of the judges obtuse, but they had their reasons. I believe a selection of stories without reference to prizes would have been better both for the reader and for the record.

HARRY HANSEN.

New York, N. Y.