

## RETARDED EVOLUTION.

BY T. SWANN HARDING.

AS the musical critic of one of the great dailies of a prosperous mid-western city wended his way from a popular concert given to a partially filled house by the city's symphony orchestra, he was elbowed into the gutter by a traffic blocking crowd waiting patiently their turn to enter a combination moving picture and vaudeville theater. The contrast conduced to thought. True the weather was bad; that might reasonably have lessened the attendance at a church, or a lecture, or an orchestra concert; but the places where the masses desired to go would be quite as full as on any other day.

What was the world coming to? Where was this boasted evolution of man from the mere mammal? Had not the Darwinian process been arrested after all at a point where the difference between man and monkey was decidedly too slight for comfort? Is not the human animal rather habitually attracted by the same material things which appeal to an intelligent horse, and does the human not generally neglect those things which alone could satisfy a spiritual nature? Said G. K. Chesterton—you can say to a man who has transgressed the moral law—"Be a man!" But you cannot say to a crocodile who has just completed the deglutition of his tenth explorer—"Be a crocodile!" But can you, with impunity, direct the attention of the human to the nobility of manhood when the tastes of said human so closely resemble those of the lower animal?

What a mania for amusement we do have! What fear of ourselves! How madly people try to get away from themselves and how desperately they are horrified at the prospect of being alone. For they find themselves such poor company! This in large measure accounts for the vogue of the moving picture, of vaudeville and of the dance. Whereas a reasonably reflective adult should in many cases be content with the companionship of a good book—or should

even find profit in cogitation—we find people, and not only young people either, out till early morning day after day, painstakingly seeking happiness and solemnly assured that it is only to be found where lights glitter, where loud music arrests and strikes dumb the ear, where crowds throng and where money must be spent extravagantly.

Can this be regarded otherwise than as a low stage of mental development? But did not John Drinkwater recently write in appreciation of the "Follies"? And did not Rachmaninoff become wildly enthusiastic over the pulsating "jazz" coaxed from a tinkling xylophone by a vaudeville "artiste," while the great Paderewski more than once hammered out American rag-time in his own home during those merry days before the war? Did not Lord Dunsany, even while denouncing "silly revues," admit that they had an attraction for him as for all real men? Has not Brander Matthews, with that breadth of vision which never troubled austere William Winter, told us that spectacle has a legitimate place in the theatre; reminding us that Kemble and Siddons were compelled to step aside for *The Castle Spectator* and *The Cataract of the Ganges*, that Shakespear's own theater was frequently used for exhibitions of fencing and of bull or bear baiting, while the amphitheater of Sophocles was also the scene of cock-fighting? And not long since an unusually thoughtful clergyman asserted that the critic who viewed the amusement craze too superciliously might perchance be a snob; for here were doubtless new art forms in evolution. In fact European visitors of undeniable taste have insisted that "rag time" was a real and typically American contribution to music and folk lore.

These facts cannot be ignored. It cannot be denied that the producers of the "Follies" and the "Passing Shows" have done something of positive value in easing the tedium of life by bringing together several comedians of undeniable talent surrounded with a clever hodge-podge and mounted in a manner highly artistic. The obsession of the general public and the press with certain penuriousness in the matter of costume merely demonstrates our lack of moral poise and refined taste and our unwholesome and childish subconscious. More unfortunate is the tendency to multiply revues beyond the supply of talent and cleverness and artistry and thus to degrade. It is true also that out of the welter of "jazz" with all of its hideous vulgarity there may be coming American art forms. Certain it is there is little but cant in the idea that America lags hopelessly behind Europe in these matters; a very little study will show that Europe produces and always has produced and applauded quite as much of

the banal as America. If the evolution of man from mammal is retarded, or arrested entirely, this is true the world over and not alone in North America.

In the course of a work on subnormal psychology Goddard<sup>1</sup> tells something about the amusements prized by the feeble minded. At one time he was called upon to entertain a group of these people and by chance he early made some mention of bean soup. This liquid having formed rather a staple portion of their diet for some time past appealed to them as irresistably funny and they laughed heartily. Dr. Goddard perceived thereupon that nothing further was needed to amuse them and by injecting the words "bean soup" at frequent intervals he kept them convulsed for half an hour or more. It is difficult to distinguish, in type, between this and the painfully limited activities of two burlesque comedians or vaudeville entertainers whose efforts, however, amazingly beguile groups of normals—albeit dull normals in majority. It is, in the light of such facts, also difficult to postulate the time when there will be forty orchestra halls and one moving picture theater instead of the reverse: for minds which lack the capability of forming the complicated neuron tracks necessary for the appreciation of more abstract pleasures cannot be rendered normal by any process of mere education.

In fact expert psychologists tells us that "sensuous pleasures and the joy of physical action and expression bulk more largely in the early stages of human life than they do in the more reflective consciousness that is developed later."<sup>2</sup> The progress of this development, therefore, gives proof of the transition from the more animal satisfaction of immaturity to the more spiritual satisfaction of normal maturity. It is a sad commentary on our low intellectuality that during fuel shortages it was necessary to keep open the theater, the dance hall and the pool parlor while the church or the lecture hall could be closed with perfect impunity. A further illustration of the depravity of public taste is found in the fact that the divorce of a burlesque queen occupied two columns in the daily paper which finds it profitable to pass without mention a concert by a famous orchestra. The reflection is not on the government in the one case or on the paper in the other: in each case the institution merely mirrors public taste where falls the incidence of reprobation. How much more wholesomely and humanly we should have been living had we been able to dispense with sensual amusement for several

<sup>1</sup> *Psychology of the Normal and the Subnormal*. Henry H. Goddard.

<sup>2</sup> *Elements of Constructive Philosophy*. J. S. Mackenzie.

days and to supply the deficiency with helpful books, with serious reflection upon life and our place therein, or with the beauties and the solaces of nature.

It may be asked how we can insist that these things are so much more valuable. We cannot do otherwise than so insist unless we dare to discount mental evolution through the ages. That man's spiritual side is his better nature has been admitted in all ages and by deep thinkers of whatever stripe, whether religious, scientific, philosophic, agnostic or infidel; what Haeckel called vital force, Emerson called the Oversoul and Channing called God. A. Clutton-Brock<sup>3</sup> has called our attention to the fact that all men in all ages have largely possessed and endeavored to express the same values; even those apparently furthest from us share them and these values of ours are not peculiar to the elect. Mowry Saben<sup>4</sup> has demonstrated the same thing about morals: the pagans had quite as excellent moral systems as we have ever had; "if it be said that the pagans did not live up to these lofty ideals, it is sufficient to say that they lived up to them quite as well and closely as Christians live up to the Sermon on the Mount." Thorstein Veblen<sup>5</sup> very clearly expressed the idea that in every life it is "some ulterior, immaterial end, in the pursuit of which these material means find their ulterior ground of valuation," and that this is so even among the "common run that do not habitually formulate their aspirations and convictions in extended and grammatically defensible form." There are things of eternal value and we cannot believe otherwise; these things make for self-realization and spiritual unfolding and we are never taught otherwise; the great minds of earth past and present agree upon the tremendous importance of certain fundamentals and it is only the mind untrained, or incapable of being trained, which fails to appreciate these things.

In music we may observe an interesting evolution from the lower to the higher, from the stage where the foot must pat and the shoulders undulate, to the stage where the art makes a more abstract and intellectual appeal, but gives a permanent satisfaction not to be compared to the maudlin intoxication of the "shoulder shaker." There comes, of course, and with annoying frequency, the statement that the great musicians have seldom led exemplary lives and that they, of all persons, should have been uplifted by music if anyone can be. None the less good music does educate as well as entertain

<sup>3</sup> *Studies in Christianity*. A. Clutton-Brock.

<sup>4</sup> *The Spirit of Life*. Mowry Saben.

<sup>5</sup> *On the Nature of Peace*. Thorstein Veblen—On Peace and Neutrality.

and it has a cultural value though composed and played by a libertine—provided the libertine be for the nonce a true musician. It is not contended that music will transform a rascal into a saint; it is certain that it will make him a more useful and and a more pardonable rascal; it is certain that music ameliorates in spite of inhibitions. Through that loose lived composer, weak instrument though he was, many were refined, cultured and ennobled.

It has been objected that music in abstract is valueless; that it is valueless to acquire the ability to criticise the symphony, coldly and pedantically—with the icy evaluation of the classist. Amiel indeed once said “In truth, whether one knows or whether one does not know, is so perfectly imperceptible cosmically that all complaint and all desire are ridiculous.”<sup>6</sup> The same objection might always be made by the uneducated regarding any abstraction. Molecule and psychic phenomena are studied in spite of the obstinate and rebellious results of pure experience; yet these abstractions underlie life’s myriad trivialities. Art, science, philosophy and literature offer us vast fields of exploration and we may better be piecing together the fundamental laws of the Cosmos, at least occasionally, than always assuming satisfaction with a fractional knowledge of puny man and his anthill earth. “We may think of human goodness as meaning rather the general spirit of devotion to what is true and beautiful”<sup>7</sup> than as a devotion to what is momentarily satisfying in the manner of an opiate.

To attain this broader outlook on life what more valuable or more easily obtained assistant can we get than a book? Read, and associate with the best minds that have ever lived upon this planet, the mighty aristocracy of the dead. Read, and live the lives lived in all ages, by all men, in all climes. Read, and survey the world in every era, from the hazy memoried days when some hoary headed Hebrew penned the Pentateuch, through the Middle Ages, into modern times and projecting out toward futurity. Whenever you can, wherever you can, however little you can, read; read and learn.

Peruse Bacon on *Studies* and learn to choose the good and to reject the bad. Consult Lamb’s *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading* and learn when and where to read, and above all, how “to lose yourself in other men’s minds.” Study Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, where he gets more out of twenty-two lines of *Lycidas* than most men would from an anthology, and learn to read slowly and

<sup>6</sup> *Journal Intime*. J. F. Amiel.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. Cit.* 2.

thoughtfully. Discriminate, concentrate, deliberate—to do each is essential; to neglect any one is to read unwisely.

Read, for knowledge and pleasure will accrue therefrom as an unearned increment. "Reading maketh a full man"; will you be filled then with grain or husks? With the masterpiece or with the idle and meaningless tales that slip weekly from the press to find their way to well merited oblivion? How much time out of these few years of life can we afford to waste in reading profitless books? Any of it? But it must always be remembered that reading, to be profitable, must inculcate or invigorate the faculty of thinking; the thoughts of another must be merely the stimulant needed to start our own reflections. Too many people are well read but utterly lack the ability to think; in fact for this very reason wise men have written books in order to discourage the reading of books!

We are too prone to refuse to think as it is; too prone to adopt whatever convictions are most convenient by what Spinoza in his shorter treatise calls "hearsay." Like Emerson's conservative we possess the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political theory we meet—and let it go at that. "Life is ruled more by emotion and habit than by reason,"<sup>8</sup> rightly says James Bryce—although the dear fellow apparently imagined that he could compile an unbiased and unemotional report of German atrocities in Belgium while his mind was dammed with passion and anti-Germanism. (Or did he think this? More likely he was too intelligent to think so but thought the more wood the more fire!) Our own pragmatic philosopher reminds us that we are more than likely to discount a novel experience as false just because of its novelty. And Bertrand Russell<sup>9</sup> declares that what we often imagine to be thought is really nothing more than a conflict of impulses at the termination of which the most powerful impulse rules and directs the "reasoning" animal!

Given the emotions pride, superciliousness and domineering, coupled with the habit of having one's own way, and you have inevitable conflict of opinion with the misunderstandings and quarrels which follow in train. Given the emotions of partisan loyalty and prejudice, coupled with the habit of believing everything published in derogation of opponents, and you have the political bigot. Given the emotions of self-righteousness and intolerance, coupled with the habit of accepting the assertion of a sectarian leader as divine fiat, and you have the religious bigot. Given the emotions of contempt, suspicion and duplicity coupled with a habit of thinking

<sup>8</sup> *South America*. James Bryce.

<sup>9</sup> *Justice in War Time*. Bertrand Russell.

along stereotyped lines toward preordained conclusions, and of regarding all honest difference of opinion and all other logical methods as hypocritical and heretical, and you have the philosophic bigot.

Given the emotions fear, distrust, suspicion, hatred, brutality coupled with a lack of international consciousness and a childish habit of avenging insult to national prestige with blood, of regarding our own nation as infinitely superior to all others and hence necessarily fitted to rule the world, or to wage offensive wars of defence, and you have a Great War. Given a few hours of reason—cool, clear, unbiased reason—and war would be both impossible and absurd. In China man must pay his account to humanity by tenaciously holding his place in the sequence of generations; in the occident he profitably dies fighting for the cause and thus, going into bankruptcy, constructively pays the reckoning in full.<sup>10</sup>

How much habit in the world, how little intellectual grasp; how much emotionalism, how little reason; how much impulse and how little thought! In what a large majority of cases habit, impulse and emotion, rather than reason, govern us and, in pure animal fashion, we let them dictate our line of action. For to lack the moral or intellectual control of impulse is more plainly just to be an animal. In Freudian terms it is to live largely in the subconscious, just where the animal is predicated to live altogether. Any dog, if he deteriorated a little from the average standard of dogdom, could find gratification in eating gluttonous dinners and dancing dumbly nights on end. Let it not be said that any respectable canine would do this: for be it noted that the dog is far enough advanced intellectually to have adopted an Epicurean standard of pleasure, and the Epicurean standard is ages in advance of the dining and dancing mania. But we could forgive a dog for it more graciously than we could forgive a human. There is some consolation in the fact that men with normal minds will always react to the proper stimulus if it be applied and will almost always ultimately insist upon being men.

In certain contrast to those people who work themselves ill in the effort to be properly amused<sup>11</sup> are those who amuse themselves by placidly, complacently, shamelessly doing—nothing. Ben Jonson said "What a deal of cold business doth a man misspend the better part of his life in! In scattering compliments, tendering visits, following feasts and plays." Yes, Ben, and also consider those good ladies who inhabit more or less stately apartment houses and who, all summer long, occupy the benches out in front in bovine

<sup>10</sup> *Op. Cit.* 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Beyond Life.* James Branch Cabell. Cf. on this matter.

inertia, physical and mental as well, assisting one another to do nothing. Women of more than average intelligence, of disused faculties, of undeveloped talents and possibilities; women who could do something, be something, accomplish something—sitting, sitting, sitting, hour after hour, idly chatting of the most vapid commonplaces. They read not neither do they sew; one day of idleness follows another in an unvaried succession of wasteful monotony. "The very breath that frames their words accelerates their death," yet they sit certainly quite as immoral as those restless, butterfly creatures who work at the task of pleasure seeking with an assiduity that might accomplish much, more commendably employed.

The world holds out to every man the opportunity for service; the opportunity to do some positive good; the opportunity to leave that indelible footprint Longfellow would have resting "on the sands of time." Is it not one duty of man to leave the world better for his having lived therein; is not this the least he can do whatever his philosophy? "The cow is a most respectable, orderly, docile and inoffensive animal; yet, since the days of Isis, no man has honored the cow. Now there are human beings who possess a cow-like virtue, who pass their existences doing very little harm to anyone, and very little good. They are turned into life as into a pasture, and when their time comes are turned out again."<sup>12</sup> Why even be a cow if it is possible to be a man?

Then there is another creature perhaps still sorer than the empty ladies of the bench. There is the man who had been house officer in a type of theater which constantly requires the strong arm policy for a matter of thirty years! There is the girl who has been a simple stenographer for a period of ten years—a long time when you look back on it from twenty-eight. What more tragic than the necessitous pursuit of the commonplace? And, unless the slaving be the means to a greater end, how terrible the sacrifice! This type is so aptly described by Gerald Cumberland in *Set Down in Malice* that one cannot forebear quotation—

"I allude to the vast throng of people who arise at eight or thereabouts, go to the city every morning, work all day and return home at dusk; who perform this routine every day, and every day of every year; who do it all their lives; who do it without resentment, without anger, without even a momentary impulse to break away from their surroundings. Some people amaze and stagger one. To them life is not an adventure; indeed, I don't know what they consider it. They marry and, in their tepid, uxorious way, love. But

<sup>12</sup> *Nature's Immortality*. Francis Thompson.



love to them is not a sacrament. They do not travel; they do not want to travel. They do not even hate anybody."

A more intelligent species of this genius is alluded to by Ford Maddox Hueffer in what is a most interesting preface to a most mediocre book.<sup>13</sup> In reality Hueffer describes the gentle amenities of this type of mind when educated. And he admits that "there is no reason in the world why a man should not pass a large portion of his time, or his whole time, in collecting instances of misprints . . . in playing patience or in collecting postage stamps. These are innocent and innocuous occupations and all of them are mental soperifics and anodynes in a world that is sad enough and tragic enough." But he finds it hard to convince himself that the "ergoteur" (a blood brother to the "cognoscente" cousin in Goldsmith's *Vicar*), the gentleman who dilates on infinitely unimportant immaterialism; or the doctor of philosophy whose thesis related to the use of the word "at" in *The Rape of the Lock*; or the savant who ignores Jesus Christ because Kuno Meyer discovered five grammatical errors in a Celtic translation of the Sermon on the Mount; are very important members of society.

By all means let us have the light pleasures, the passing shows and the moving pictures as anodynes for care; but let us have something else besides. The sinfulness of the present age, its gross immorality and its reversion to animalism come about because these purely incidental matters are given the all important place in our scheme of things. Even drudgery at a worthless task—think of being in the male chorus of a musical comedy, or a superfluous footman, or an instructor in ball room dancing, or a pig sticker!—or at best a task valuable in a remote sense but stultifying to the worker, may be less an abomination if it enables one to so mould circumstances that it becomes a stepping stone to something nobler. If economic necessity bind us thereto like a galley slave, we may circumvent fate by using our faculties in some other direction when at leisure, and thus accomplishing positive good. Otherwise we have done not a whit more than an intelligent horse—we have merely exerted ourselves sufficiently to go on living and have spent the remaining time eating and sleeping and acting in a fittingly gregarious manner. "Blessed is he who has found his work," said Carlyle. "let him ask no other blessing."

There are those, and they exist the world over, for it is a great mistake to imagine that dollar chasing is an American provincialism—the chasing of francs and pounds and pesos is very real and very

<sup>13</sup> *When Blood is their Argument*. Ford Maddox Hueffer.

spirited—who make the dull task simply the gateway to wealth. And, though Americans have probably been no more prompt than other people to procure money, we have instituted the dollar valuation of life more painstakingly than any other nation. On this foundation of plutocracy we have reared an aristocracy of wealth which lacks the pardonable features of an aristocracy of culture; and the extent to which we have gone is distressing.

We view askance the talent which does not cash out in dollars. Recently some whimsical pedagogue exposed the *Importance of Being a Professor*<sup>14</sup> and the old story of the inability of the people generally to recognize talent when it fails of decent remuneration was told again. Moreover it has been a commonplace among some American critics to call our attention to England where mere money cannot buy one's way into the "best circles." And it is to a large extent true that in Europe people see things in better perspective; they have perspicuity, to a greater extent than we, to recognize real genius even when it is not adequately rewarded from a pecuniary standpoint. They know, these people of the older civilizations, that a man may be extraordinary, profound, learned and worthy both of admiration and respect—and yet poor!

With this money mania goes the craving for extravagance that leads to much unnecessary improvidence. It is surprising how many young people imagine that it is impossible for them to exist without silk shirts and expensive furs and suits bought at double the price so as to be assured of a certain magic name in the collar. Graduates of colleges and universities spend their money in precisely the same foolish ways, demand the same type of amusements and luxuries that gratify those in a social strata so much lower that the college people cannot discern them with the naked eye. True the poorer classes dance at cheaper halls, see cheaper shows and wear cheaper models of more expensive clothes; but the type is absolutely the same, the aspiration is the same, the extravagance is the same and the effort for sensual satiety is the same. If our universities fail to teach the younger generation how to think and how to live what can we expect? Here is an excellent place to apply Aristotle's mean and to guard against miserliness on the one hand and extravagance on the other, although the present crop of misers suffers severely from blight.

Undeterred, this money mania certainly leads to a suppression of the spiritual side of man, which again is but a euphonism for what is plainly an atavistic tendency toward animalism. This is readily

<sup>14</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1919.

to be noticed in the industrial centers where wealth comes easily, where intellectuality is low and where it is almost impossible to interest people in things esthetic, cultural or ethical. Six dollars for a single meal is nothing; a dollar to hear a great dramatist or a noted pianist is too much. It has been said that present industrial unrest is largely due to the blind groping of the masses for spiritual self-realization.

No wonder the common man fails in the attainment of spiritual self-realization when his educated fellows do so when, indeed, the greatest have done so. There is something strangely pathetic about the aged Darwin's assertion that he sometimes wondered whether he had not bought too dearly his achievements in science. An epoch making system he formulated; an inspired book he wrote; a new world he discovered, and yet the steady grind, year in and year out, took from him that which was more precious than much fine gold. For in age he found that he had lost his taste for the higher, more esthetic things; good music and fine literature no longer charmed him as they had in youth; the taste for poetry was gone—and gone forever, for it was then too late to acquire faculties which had atrophied through long years of disuse and neglect.

"The cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run," said Thoreau.<sup>15</sup> And Stevenson quotes him with lively approval adding "that a man may pay too dearly for his livelihood, by giving, in Thoreau's terms, his whole life for it, or, in mine, bartering for it the whole of his available liberty and becoming a slave till death." Thoreau decried the money evaluation of life and lauded instead the way of inner riches followed by the philosophers of old and by the real benefactors of the race; these men saw life largely and developed symmetrically.

Darwin a one sided man! If so, how many lesser men have travelled life's short pathway deformed mentally, to reach the grave with talents in embryo and capacities dormant. How many of these might have been earth's noblemen had there been a sympathetic voice, a master touch, to make them realize their unsuspected ability. What greater and more fundamentally religious mission than to make the great masses of men realize and draw upon the unlimited power within!

And so there are lives all about us devoted to worthy ends, but so intensely, so fanatically, as to brutalize. There was a life so blindly devoted to a science that art and music and literature, that

<sup>15</sup> *Familiar Studies*. R. L. Stevenson. Thoreau.

the song of birds and children's laughter all meant nothing; and when the day of leisure finally came, the capacity to appreciate was gone forever. There are those who attain opulence by dint of painful economy only to realize sadly and in bitterness that they have lost the ability properly to enjoy wealth. How foolish when devotion to these ends is so blind that all the finer part of life is starved out of existence! The Darwin who explained why the ears of the Belgian hare drag on the ground discovered that he himself had atrophied organs and faculties.

Lopsided lives, mentally deformed—lives more unfortunate than those grotesque shapes of physical deformity; more repellent than the athlete with magnificent biceps and spindle legs! We who were meant to develop fully, physically, mentally, morally and spiritually have not lived other than as the brute—even though we be greater than Darwin—if our development be not well rounded. Not science, not riches, not amusement, not the end in view is wrong; but it is the devotion of all our time and all our energies to one infinitesimal fraction of the universe that is horribly wrong. Only worse are those deformed and idiotically lived lives like the ones in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* until came the master touch; then what a change came with spiritual awakening! Must we be counted among those who ask with a blank and imbecile look—"Who is Huxley" or "What are Keats?" Or had we not better partake rather of the kind of living practised by that mathematician, dramatist, economist, educator, author and distinguished parliamentarian and diplomatist—Jose Echegaray e Izaguirre, perhaps the greatest man Spain produced in the nineteenth century, and consequently a man all but unknown in the United States.

No. Food, raiment and a modicum (usually too large) of amusement are not all life holds. Beyond these trifling things—necessary as they are—lies the vast domain of the spirit. The fabled prince could not be content in the Valley of Happiness though every creature want were supplied. For he lifted his eyes unto the hills and said—"O Master, what is beyond? What is beyond?" Within this narrow, confined world we walk but cannot be content though material gifts be showered upon us with a lavish hand; without lies the uncharted universe of better things. Like Alice in the Looking Glass, we somehow know that we are real and not the dream illusions of a sleeping King; we know that there is a beyond to which we shall awaken in due season. It behooves us to vegetate in mammal satiety no longer. We must look unto the hills, nor must we be satisfied with looking but, like the venturesome Prince, we must climb them

and ultimately scale the furthest mountain to embark upon that mystic land beyond.

That the spirit of to-day yearns for something better, though it knows not what, and though it sadly lacks intelligent direction, is evidenced by the popularity of such pseudo-philosophic cults as Christian Science, New Thought, Ethical Culture and Spiritualism. A greater number of people than ever before know the spirit of inquiry and reach out blindly—almost frantically—for something that shall satisfy that craving they do not understand, the craving of their starved spirituality. Unfortunately most of these people are of the type so aptly characterized by Gerald Cumberland as *Intellectual Freaks*<sup>16</sup> who “were cultured without being educated, credulous but without faith, bookish but without learning, argumentative but without logic.”

Carefree looking girls who rather suggest the dance hall than Indian mysticism, lisp in half meaningless syllables the queer conglomeration of philosophy, science, superstition and unadulterated ignorance taught by varied occult and near-occult societies. They speak of “Yogis” and “astral bodies” and “going into the silence” with a garrulity that suggests technical nomenclature in everything save only percision. In nearly every instance there are elements of truth, but the philosophy is always ancient and often long discredited by minds of first rate calibre; the science is usually puerile and always distorted. The most ordinary platitudes are uttered in obtruse phraseology and the most trite and commonplace ideas are accepted with enthusiasm as distinctly oracular.

A moderately sane sample of this consummate gibberish runs as follows “The flow of the efferent fluids of all these vessels from their outlets at the terminal loop of each culminate link on the surface of the nuclear organism is continuous as their respective atmospheric fruitage up to the altitudinal limit of their expansibility, whence, when atmosphered by like but coalescing essences from higher altitudes,—those sensibly expressed as the essential qualities of external forms—they descend, and become assimilated by the efference of the nuclear organism.”

Now the reader will have to admit that this looks very good and sounds even better than it looks; we have here in contiguity diction that should fit together and express an idea, but if that paragraph means anything to a rational mind Henry James should be forgiven and presented with a gold medal for clarity. It is quite in a class with the newspaper gem which read—“The birds filled

<sup>16</sup> *Set Down in Malice.* Gerald Cumberland.

the tree-tops with their morning song, making the air moist, cool and pleasant." In both cases the writer should have been apprehended and led away to be shot as humanely as possible. G. B. S. was right when he remarked that the only crime of the anarchists was that of shooting the wrong people.

Yet your average person reads that and it arouses an idea. Your average person can read the queer spasm about the efferent fluids and begin to feel very erudite, very superior and very much inspired. Of the reason for this, more later on; but the whole circumstance demonstrates at very least that humanity yearns with a mighty yearning, for spiritual refinement; for something beyond mere material comfort. The pity is that so much valuable desire and endeavor is so hopelessly misdirected. What a help a little real education would be; the education which James calls *sui compos*—or "the ability to suspend belief in the presence of an emotionally exciting idea";<sup>17</sup> this, coupled with sufficient information to enable one to embrace ideas discriminatingly.

Perhaps more unfortunate than these cult deluded creatures who are at least struggling with the problem and reaching out for a solution, are those self-satisfied persons who are so complacent in their abysmal ignorance that they really resent any offer of enlightenment. Nevertheless these people are convinced beyond all shadow of doubt that they are, somehow, the elect of the earth, the supreme development of living things, the culminating point of evolution. They wear fine clothes, they eat at the best restaurants and they dance only at the most aristocratic hotels; in short they go through all the proper and conventional automatic evolutions that they presume to be necessary for one who craves to be called "society." They view with a sneer "queer" persons whose intellects are developed. Their motto is "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be otherwise" and their coat of arms bears a lorgnette lying haughtily on an opera cloak. This class will be very difficult to arouse to the necessity for spiritual development so deeply is the purely animal mode of living imbedded in their natures.

True there are those like that splendid and over conscientious pessimist Amiel who say that no matter what we do we can never more than "slightly undulate the line of destiny." Amiel replies thus to his own query "What is life? . . . It is but the variation of an eternal theme; to be born, to live, to feel, to love, to hope, to suffer, to weep, to die." And, he adds, "The entire human race is but a lightning flash compared to the duration of the planet; and the planet

<sup>17</sup> *Principles of Psychology*. William James.

might revert to a gaseous state without the sun being for an instant affected. The individual is but an infinitesimal atom of nothingness." But when all this has<sup>18</sup> been said what is there to prevent a human being from attaining the greatest height, and living the most complete life that his fully developed intellect will permit? And what healthy soul could be nourished entirely upon Amiel's sad philosophy?

For here is the minority of the ages, the minority who esteemed genius instead of talent, depth instead of cleverness, art instead of sensuousness, literature instead of entertainment; the minority that has gradually come to be a majority and, outweighing the dictum of any one generation, rules unchallenged. The majority may claim the world's attention for the moment, but the will of the chosen minority of the ages is in the end supreme.

"The chosen heroes of this earth have been in a minority. There is not a social, political or religious privilege that you enjoy to-day that was not bought for you by the blood and tears and patient sufferings of the minority. It is the minority that have vindicated humanity in every struggle. It is the minority that have stood in the van of every moral conflict, and achieved all that is noble in the history of the world. You will find that each generation has always been busy in gathering up the scattered ashes of the martyred heroes of the past, to deposit them in the golden arm of a nation's history." So John B. Gough answered the question *What is a Minority?*

The multitude may madly acclaim a Bougaereau or a Canova or a Murillo, but the minority of the ages hands down to posterity the artistry of a Valasquez, a Rembrandt, a Manet. Bernini, Thorwaldsen, Dolsi and Reni were admired in their day, but the world of art now worships Titian and Raphael and da Vinci—the chosen of the minority. Brahms and Gluck and Bellini and Rossini bowed to the vociferous plaudits of the indiscriminating multitude, but as time goes on their devotees yield to that elect minority who appreciated the pioneers, the men who boldly ventured into new fields while the vulgar eagerly praised their mediocre favorites—Bach, Wagner, Schubert, Straus—these shall live on forever. The courtly Weber was petted by princes while unkempt old Beethoven was looked askance; the gentlemanly Mendelssohn captivated Europe with his now almost forgotten melodies but the art of an unknown and an unhonored Schumann compels admiration still.

Gone are Diderot and de Bury and Pope and Hallam. And who are the masters? A common showman who blandly thieved the plots of other men; a blind and bigoted Puritan who quarreled with

<sup>18</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 6. Present author's translations in all citations from Amiel.

his wife; an execrable and irascible Frenchman who groveled to a Prussian King and was exiled from his native Paris! Yes, Mr. Pepy's found the plays of William Shakespeare insipid, passe and out of date! Brilliant average citizen Pepys! Representative of the vast majority in taste; and yet there rules always in the end that steadily growing minority of the ages, which pins its faith to the truly great and which in time becomes the intelligent, educated, cultured and comprehending majority that knows.

But can we postulate that day when culture will be more generally diffused; when we shall have the forty orchestra halls and the one moving picture theater instead of the reverse? Scarcely; for in the light of scientific psychology of the normal and abnormal this is an impossible ideal. It is a melancholy fact that the average mentality of this country is but slightly over twelve years, on a scale which assumes adult maturity to be reached at twenty years. This means that almost half our population is in reality sufficiently feeble minded barely to escape some institution.<sup>19</sup> This means, furthermore, that our average mentality is just slightly above the moron stage—at least nothing more than what would be called "dull normal." It is very obvious that the highest culture cannot become universal.

While facing this fact it is nevertheless evident that a vast work is to be accomplished toward educating each mind up to the limit of its capacity. There are plenty of fifteen year old minds going around which might be educated up to eighteen years. Of course it must be remembered that if the mental age be fifteen further education is impossible. Education cannot outdistance intellect—or if it does we merely have another educated fool—because certain minds lack entirely the physiological attribute of forming the complex neuron tracts which are necessary for the appreciation of more abstract things. To the imbecile anything is an abstraction which he has not experienced; he can conceive of ten horses if he has seen ten horses, but cannot comprehend the idea of ten cows if he has not seen ten cows. The moron, while more advanced, still lacks many factors upon which depends the ability to progress far up the mental scale. And certainly an average mentality of twelve years will never spell universalized intellectuality of a very pronounced excellence.

But there are many people going through the world little realizing the actual capacities that they have. There was known to the writer a girl who lacked even a complete grammar school educa

<sup>19</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 1.



tion and whose reading and other mental pasttimes were most trivial. But this girl was subsequently placed in an atmosphere of refinement and erudition and she very rapidly developed into a charming letter writer, an intelligent conversationalist and a sensible reader of the very best books and reviews. Minus this stimulating environment she would have gone on the typical "shop girl" type and would have missed most of life's finer gifts.

It is ours to be what Emerson in *Power* well named "plus" people. He declared that in every company there was to be discovered a sex of mind quite distinct from physical sex—"namely the inventive or creative class of both men and women, and the un-inventive or accepting class." Every man has within him the possibility of belonging to the former class. The distinction is quite clearly between the man who lives as befits a human being and the man who lives after the manner of the less fortunate but more pardonable animals. And in the striving for higher things, in the thrill that comes with esthetic enjoyment and creative production, comes the only real happiness that we can know here. Joy we may easily attain. But happiness comes not with diligent and painstaking search, but indirectly, as the unearned increment of living the higher life. To be a man; then, is to be truly happy as well.