

## HOPE OR DESPAIR: WHICH?

BY RALPH W. HYDE.

WHEN men speak of a hope with regard to the future of mankind it is usually in the sense that some not too remote change will bring about his perfection. Indeed most of these overzealous ones can generally point out some particular dawning movement which will in time develop and accomplish all that is desired in the way of improvement. But does it not seem preposterous to look about us and try to detect anything like a sign when we know so positively how in the past even the most momentous upheavals have scarcely made an impress upon the fashioning of men's souls and characters? This remodeling of man and of his society is a process which must go on for eons, and no passing, even startling organic change in the social structure, can influence it. Are men in their souls much altered by the Reformation? Are they made over aesthetically by the Renaissance? Have they become different political beings since the French Revolution?

But our publicists (who in this age are our chief spokesmen, philosophers being little heeded except they be themselves mere publicists whom the people in idolatry have chosen to distinguish) though they be often discriminating and sagacious thinkers, in the midst of pointing out the inefficacy of some tendency will invariably commit themselves to the folly of pinning their faith to some rebirth of intellectual activity which seems to them just about to be achieved, or, when they become overstimulated by some novel and engaging theory, foolishly attribute to it an overwhelming force with which it should pervade men's minds and extirpate forever all irrationality.

The usual intellectual is prone to inhibit himself from frankly uttering a pessimistic note, because he is aware that the world too often confounds a mere dark view of a thing with moroseness. A complaint may be actuated by charity for humanity—yet we scent

only acerbity in it. We are quick to cry Cynic. So for one in whom excessive concern and interest in humanity compel a darkened aspect, there is this way out—to seize upon some faint semblance of order in a mighty chaos and allow his imagination to exaggerate it until it becomes a refuge for his own confusion, and which he in his enthusiasm straightway transforms for his readers into a hope.

So we find even an Arnold after defining so precisely the true meaning of culture, and remarking, apparently with much misgiving, that "it needs times of faith and ardour, times when the intellectual horizon is opening and widening all around (for culture) to flourish in," so we find him saying after these words, this: "And is not the close and bounded intellectual horizon within which we have long lived and moved now lifting up, and are not new lights finding free passage to shine in upon us?" It sounds so like the usual expression of hope from a pulpit, if we could substitute for the idea of a heralded intellectual renaissance that of a fervid religious awakening. The "new lights" to which Arnold referred are already dimmed—they make little impress on us. We "think" we see "new lights" of our own time, and some of us *dare* to think they will not dim.

Why do even our most merited thinkers fall so easily into this error of sensing a decline of stupidity among the masses after so positively revealing the existence of that stupidity and alluding to it only disparagingly? Why, if not to conceal their pessimism?

Now, it is no sin (intellectually) to be misunderstood, but it is a sin against taste and serious literary endeavor to be *indifferent* about being misunderstood, and for this reason may we be permitted first to state a position, which may by now be somewhat anticipated by the reader, and then, secondly, because of its being in a measure a pessimistic one to show the exact viewpoint from which our feeling takes its rise.

What is the general conception of man viewed in the light of his own reasoning capacity? He is a being who has more right to be proud of himself and of the things he creates than any other living creature that walks, creeps, flies or swims. His possession of the rational faculty not only distinguishes him in the strict logical way but in a wider sense entitles him to dominance in the world of living things, and in the exercise of this dominance he is justly proud. And in his use of it to secure unto himself those things which materially elevate him he exhibits such ingenuity, such skill, such inventiveness and such constructive ability that he can himself

but marvel at the supreme power which is his right and which naturally he views with an unruffled complacency.

But withal he is a being terribly harassed and fettered, and chiefly because more ignorance than wisdom prevails in his particular dominion, and one of the things he deems to be his mission is to dispel ignorance and promote wisdom. But being hampered by not having as yet stumbled upon the open sesame to all the dark mysteries of the universe he has made himself dreadfully conscious of a terrible servitude to the insoluble and the unknown. But has his emancipation from this enslavement been his constant hope or his eternal quest? No, he has taught himself to abide it, then finding it not particularly inhibitive to his own will and development, he has learned in a great measure to ignore it until finally he has fallen into a mode of existence termed the PRACTICAL, the never-ceasing round of comfort-seeking industry.

Ask me if I hope for his emancipation through the advent of an epoch not remote, through any of the things he has himself created, art, science, philosophy, I should say these things *do* have their effect and in the main the effect is progressive rather than retrogressive, but to suppose these can materially alter the nature of the race or the individual to any appreciable extent is almost as foolish as to suppose the human body might be permanently altered by surgery.

And here we must speak of a thing which is ever present in the minds of those who have a deep faith in the sudden making-over of mankind—enlightenment. We may perhaps suggest calling this thing enlightenment a mere illusion though it is cherished by many not considered susceptible to illusions. We admit it does bring some fruition of intellectuality, but upon analysis it is obvious that whenever and wherever it occurs it may be properly defined merely as a change of view, the casting off of one belief to take on another. The new idea serves well, and while yet new appears to be what we are looking for, but does it not wear away after awhile and finally get discarded for something newer? And through these so-called eras of enlightenment the only notable change in men is the effect of the sudden upheaval of ideas by some mighty revolution. But sweep aside customs, laws, institutions: does the *nature* of the man change in the process?

Let us look at some specific custom which may be said to have been relegated through enlightenment. There is torture. Extreme physical torture as a means to extort confession may be

instanced as having been abandoned through the enlightenment of man. But in the place of the medieval rack we have our modern, far more effective, *mental* torture of the Third Degree.<sup>1</sup> Was the manipulator of the rack any more brutish than our present-day officers of the law to whom is entrusted the efficacy of the Third Degree?

So we may not confidently expect any appreciable making-over of mankind merely because sporadically new tendencies are stirring and enlightenment seemingly is spreading. We may *not* hope, *primarily*, because at present *individuals only are intellectualized*, and *secondarily*, because *irrationality of even noted intellects is still a very common thing*.

Let us dismiss this minor cause first, for it is the simpler. By *noted* intellects we mean those who are appraised by their contemporary public. The judgment is hasty and consequently usually erroneous but it establishes as authority their work and takes it for a guide. The work of more rational thinkers, having no direct appeal, is thus kept in the background until time proves its worth, even then it receives nothing like an understanding or appreciation from the general public, and "younger" intellectuals pronounce it as being true of its time but inconsistent with *their* time.

The major cause, which, as stated, was *that at present individuals only are intellectualized* demands more explanation.

To understand this we must survey mankind almost from his initial efforts at rationality until the present age and determine what has been his chief concern. Here I want a term that will designate an extremely long period of human development but through which there has been only *one outstanding objective*—a *prime* objective to which all other urges, purposes, intentions, projects, undertakings, aspirations, be they of whatever nature, are necessarily subordinate and often subservient. Now AGE is employed in one sense to designate the material medium chiefly used by man in the pursuit of his objective, e. g., Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Steel Age. So I cannot refer to a time period embracing all these as an AGE, and have consequently thought to choose CYCLE to signify an *extended* division of human development. In the sense then, of the time period involved in the attainment of a predominating objective, the generation of cosmos was probably cyclic (and there

<sup>1</sup> Third Degree is not really a new idea, nor is it in any sense to be viewed as a moderation of former practices. Vigil Torture was long ago used in Italy and with more success than the rack. See *Ring and the Book*. Guido Franceschini was subjected to it.

you have philosophical problems of Beginning, Motion, Matter, Space and what else), the evolution of life upon our planet is cyclic (the scheme of which Geologists, Biologists, Paleontologists, and Anthropologists are painstakingly working out); but to think of cycles with regard to man is to stretch the imagination indefinitely. Epochs, eras, ages are easily comprehensible, but a cycle—where should it begin, where should it end, what should define it and being defined, we should have to answer what preceded it as well as what shall succeed it.

We may begin by suggesting that mankind are now in a cycle which I call the *PHYSICAL CYCLE* because mankind are still chiefly concerned with their physical well-being. Previous to this was the cycle of *PARTIAL RATIONALITY* when mankind were still acting more instinctively, but in that cycle there must have been numerous instances of individual primitive ratiocination developing perhaps in the same proportion that there is in our cycle individual *embryonic* intellectuality. To go beyond the cycle of *PARTIAL RATIONALITY* would imply non-rationality, which of course was prior to the advent of mankind.

It will be seen that our cycle, having for its main objective the attainment of ease and comfort and the acquirement of physical conveniences and advantages in addition to its actual life-sustaining needs and overwhelmingly predominant to them, began with the fashioning of the first implement and that the fashioning of implements is still the most potent of factors in our civilization because the objective is still being pursued, much more complicatedly of course but just as diligently and unremittingly as of old.

Yet upon examination there is motive behind this objective—the inherent Heaven-given respect for the body perhaps. And it may be the design of the Cosmic Intelligence that when this objective be strictly rather than indifferently adhered to until we attain something like perfection of body, time enough will have elapsed for the physical entity to develop a *workable* intellectual entity within itself, and then the motive just referred to, namely, respect for the body, will have been transferred to and become a respect for the new highly-developed mentality. And, excluding certain obvious aberrations such as luxurious and wanton excesses, just as the general trend of the *present* objective has been for *refinement—materially—of the corporeal self*, so the course of the objective taken up when a *workable* intellectual entity is evolved will be toward a *gloss—intellectually—of the mental or subjective self*.

Now, it requires a multiplicity of individual energies exerted in improving their physical well-being in order to progress, and seeing that we certainly have had this unconcerted but coeval endeavor there is no mystery nor anything to marvel at in present-day material achievement. It looms large to a small mind. It dwindles before a mature one. When, as will be in the more or less remote INTELLECTUAL CYCLE, we shall have a multiplicity of individual energies exerted in improving their *intellectual* well-being we shall see some definite progress on that side as well. All that the change implies is a general diverting of the mass of mankind from an employment of the rational faculty in the advancement of physical ends to an employment of it in the advancement of purely mental or intellectual needs.\*

And we *shall* have this other cycle surely, for when all the inconveniences of the physical existence have been provided for mankind will naturally seek for something else. He must first begin to tire of physical comfort and its attainment though, and tire he will when he has dallied with it long enough. There are already unmistakable signs that he rues many of the incongruities his unending pursuit of comfort and ease has led him into. There is disputations over property rights involving ill-feeling, hatred, and finally individual litigation and strife or collective warring: this thing he is tiring of or at least showing signs of it. Sooner or later he will see futility in many things which to him now are the vital processes of his life.

The ultimate of course is the *thoroughly rational being*, not existing sporadically but universally, and this being was conceived by that fine mind, the master mind of all philosophy, Aristotle, and was placed by him in the stars. When we look back over the ages and think of that rationally ordered scale of Aristotle's from innate organic matter to plants, from plants to animals, and from animals to humans, and thence to the stars and beyond to God we cannot help reflecting that Aristotle could conceive man

\*The reader must not infer that we are not cognizant of a vast scientific progress really pertaining to the physical well-being of the race; but it has for its motive not the comfort and ease as has our extensive industrial activity. It is working upon lines which will tend to preserve the physical vitality of the race—a very necessary precaution, and a factor in the development of a more potent intelligence. Biologists tell us that the present mode of life will reduce us in physical stature and mental equipment, and that sterility is on the increase. They urge an inuring of the human rather than a refinement that has as a consequence a softening.

only as an *imperfect* being and hence the logical necessity for the higher beings having an abode in the stars. But we in a more enlightened epoch have become so satisfied with the achievement of man and so proudful of our rationality that we have ceased to imagine the probability of anything higher except it be God.

Our hope, then, is this evolution of reason. We may expect a man rationally ordered at last, changed but little physically from his present type, but inwardly possessing a super will causing his appetites and passions to subserve his intellect, employing in his social intercourse no instrument save his reason, loving his neighbor if only for the sake of learning from him, hating no one if only to enjoy and maintain his equanimity.

But is all art then, all thought, futile—except it may have a *transitory* influence upon the evolution of society? Must we await mankind's wearying of his present imbecile practices? The highest art is never futile, for it has an ennobling quality in its power of counteracting concurrent falsities—acquisitiveness, enmity, trade rivalry, all those abominable, innocuous forces about in the world which are the products of our physically developed civilization.

Let us have more art, more philosophy, and more religion as correctives of such evil forces, but let us take care that these institutions be themselves kept pure. The aberrations and speciosities of art, the charlatanism and sophism of much our philosophy, the superstition and insufficiency charged to many religions: these must be rooted out if art, philosophy and religion are to have any power in combating the grosser evils all combining against truth and right.

Granted such improvements and adjustments be made we may expect a forward movement, but I confess to groping in the midst of present-day enlightenment. Such a welter of tendencies and assumptions leading nowhere does indeed induce despair. I put my whole trust in the next cycle. I am convinced of its coming, though I cannot prophesy the manner of its coming. Let civilization wreck itself and be rebuilt; let the race return to savagery that it may get a fresh start; or, perhaps preferably, let it gradually remould itself in an evolutionary process. But nothing can shake my faith in the ultimate sway of reason. To speak in the Aristotelian sense, if the *formal* cause is the essence of a thing—its concept—then the *final* cause must be its realization. *Form* is the idea, and the idea of man involves his being rational—the thing which distinguishes him from animals. Maintaining that his present rationality is incomplete and far from being a perfect reflection of the *form*—the idea, then we

must be on our way to the *Final* cause, the ultimate toward which the evolutionary energy is directed.

And the moralist may take heart that the unboundless sway of reason will change the nature of man at bottom, will make good men instead of bad, will accomplish and *establish* good instead of evil. And the artist, the thinker, or the religionist not holding and clinging fast to this ideal is certainly exerting a harmful influence. Every dweller in the realm of pure truth is a harbinger of that yet distant age when the ruling forces and passions of our present era will be a past and dead and not even a curiosity provoking history.