

The Outlook for Western Civilization

II—*The Literature of Hope*

BY GLENN FRANK

AS I stated in these pages last month, my editorship of this magazine will come to an end in the early autumn, when I assume my new duties as president of the University of Wisconsin. During the last four months of my editorship I am devoting these pages to a review of the observations I have made from time to time during the last six years on the general outlook for Western civilization. I am aware that to many readers this may have seemed a very broad and, perhaps, highly academic topic for consideration in a general magazine, but I have returned to it again and again because of the conviction that the good health or ill health of Western civilization in general will finally color and control, down to the most intimate detail, both our national policies and our personal careers. And I want my final act as editor of this magazine to be a fairly comprehensive restatement of this conviction.

Last month I reviewed the literature of despair, in which many of the most astute students of contemporary affairs express the belief that we are headed toward a new dark ages; this month I am undertaking to suggest the outlines of an emerging literature of hope that has led many equally astute students of our current life to entertain at least

a tentative hope that we may be headed toward a new renaissance. First, however, let me briefly summarize what I said last month about the literature of despair; for the literature of hope, section by section, arises out of the same fields of research and experience which have provided the soil for the literature of despair.

After stating the point of view of those who believe that we are citizens of a disintegrating civilization, I suggested that the literature of despair has been inspired by at least seven distinct fears that have arisen in seven distinct fields of research and experience, namely:

First, *the biological fear* of racial deterioration resulting from a tendency to reproduce our population from our less and least fit human stocks rather than from our better and best human stocks; second, *the psychological fear* that we are rapidly becoming a crowd-civilization, in which the crowd-mind and crowd-processes of thinking are taking the place of the creative insurgency of the free and disciplined intelligence of the individual citizen; third, *the political fear* that democracy, as it comes to the end of its period of quantitative extension and enters its period of qualitative development, may fail to produce a civilization that is at

once stable and progressive; that democracy may, like a pendulum, swing between the equally sinister extremes of reckless revolution and reckless reaction; that it may prove only a half-way house on the road to dictatorship, either the dictatorship of the proletariat or the dictatorship of the plutocracy; fourth, *the economic fear* that our industrial civilization may court disaster by exalting quantity above quality, by mechanizing a civilization that must be kept human if it is to survive; fifth, *the historical fear* that the life of a people moves in a cycle similar to the cycle of birth, youth, middle age, senescence, and death that marks the life of its individual members, and that Western civilization is senescent; sixth, *the administrative fear* that the bigness and complexity of the institutions of our civilization have outstripped the existing administrative capacity of mankind, and that we must either contrive to breed and train more great administrators or reorganize our life in terms of smaller and more manageable units; and, seventh, *the moral fear* that the present younger generation has gone apostate to the sort of standards of thought and conduct upon which alone a stable civilization can be built.

These fears have been so glaringly exploited by sensational journalism and so played upon by shoddy seekers after transient notoriety that we are likely to forget that they are fears entertained by many of the most responsible scholars in biology, psychology, political science, economics, the science of administration, and ethics. In fact, my discussion of the literature of despair ignored the mere sensationalism of the penny-a-line pessimists; it was based solely upon the

writings of accredited scholars. I want to make clear, therefore, that, in suggesting the existence of a literature of hope, I am not attempting to question either the sincerity or the soundness of these fears.

Personally, I believe that all of these fears, with the possible exception of the historical fear, rest upon indisputable grounds; I believe that we shall inevitably enter a new dark ages, a period in which civilized values will go into decline and the race be thrust back into the precarious existence of its primitive ancestors, unless we begin with a decent promptness to remove the legitimate grounds for these fears. And it is at just this point that we are likely to forget the one thing we should remember, namely, that we cannot remove the legitimate grounds for these fears by any mere intellectual or emotional incantation. We can remove the grounds for these fears only by sheer feats of biological, psychological, political, social, economic, educational, and spiritual engineering.

The only valid literature of hope, therefore, must be not a literature of mere optimistic prophecy of a good time coming, but a literature which, arising out of the same fields of research and experience that have inspired the literature of despair, will do two definite things:

First, in its negative phase, it will tell us how to go about removing the legitimate grounds for these fears.

Second, in its positive phase, it will tell us how to set going, nationally and internationally, those biological, psychological, political, economic, administrative, educational, and spiritual forces and policies that will renew, enrich, and create a virile and veracious civilization.

The negative and positive phases of the literature of hope will not be as separate and distinct as I have suggested. In its statements it will be almost exclusively positive, but I wanted to make clear what its two effects would be in the fields of practical affairs. The main thing I want to emphasize at this point is that while mooning optimists may write a literature that will give us the spirit of hope, only responsible scientists, philosophers, administrators, and authentic spiritual seers can write a literature that will give us the anatomy of hope. Social cheer-leaders might do a little toward dulling the despair of a new dark ages, but only social engineers can usher in a new renaissance. A realistic literature of hope has nothing in common with the facile and foolhardy optimism of men who regard optimism as a profession rather than a deduction from the facts in the case. It is, then, a literature of hope, not a literature of optimism, that I am discussing here. Between the two there may be a difference as wide as the world. A literature of optimism may be a literature that creates in us merely a spirit of expectancy that blindly believes a renaissance lies ahead. A literature of hope is a literature that uncovers for us the unused resources of health in our civilization and suggests to us a workable technic for using them. And a realistic literature of hope always warns us against optimism unless we set ourselves manfully at work to harness the forces of health it has pointed out to us.

Unless I misread them, our legitimate prophets of hope have warned us against certain false gleams that we shall do well not to follow. They have, I think, effectively exposed the anthology of false hopes with which

our study-tables were loaded during and immediately following the war. Let me review briefly some of the things that our rather uncritical observers have regarded as grounds of hope for Western civilization—things which seem to me to bear no relation to a realistic literature of hope.

First, many Americans believed that the war would stimulate in the men who passed through it a new spirituality that would be the dynamic of a world-wide renewal. Month after month, during the war, our magazines carried articles asserting that while the boys in the trenches did not talk in exactly ecclesiastical language, they were nevertheless living daily in the presence of death and destiny, daily practising self-sacrifice as men back home were practising professions, and that out of it all they were gaining a moral enrichment and spiritual insight that would make them, when they returned to civil life, the challengers of all that was artificial and insincere in our governments, our schools, and our churches, a new vision that would make them the flaming sponsors of a vast spiritual renewal of our common life.

All the more businesslike writers who had such articles on hand at the close of the war have carefully filed them away. They have not destroyed them, for they know that when the next war comes all they will have to do will be to take these articles out of their files, dust them off, and change the date line, for they will serve as well in one war as in another. For all such articles are based on a great delusion, and the delusions of war seem not to change greatly over the years.

The brutal truth is that war never stimulates spirituality in anybody or

anything. Much that passed as renewed spirituality during the war was but the natural reaction of men in the presence of danger and under the lash of fear, an unconscious attempt to use God as a gas-mask. The test of war-induced devotion comes not during the war, but after the war.

It was not surprising that during the war our more conventionally minded religious leadership should have predicted with confidence that a renewal of civilization would follow the war. History, in a way, was on their side. Great wars and other catastrophes have frequently been followed by revivals of religion in the mystical sense. It has become a maxim that periods of disaster precipitate religious revivals, just as in primitive times famine, plague, or earthquake drove men into their temples to plead with their gods for a tempering of their plight. But modern men are likely to regard such disaster-induced revivals as expressions of panic rather than of piety.

Such crowd-phenomena are, however, deep-set in human nature. They should be approached with a full measure of sympathetic insight, not with cynicism. When tragedy has stalked across the soul of a people, it is not surprising that tried souls and tired minds should seek a refuge in a mystic other-worldliness that will lift them for a time above the perplexing circumstances of their day. It is not strange that an over-strained people should turn from challenging social duties to the sedative of mystic emotion. And this is exactly what men do in war-time.

The spiritual pretensions of war-time and the predictions of good to follow are easy targets for the ironist of post-war days, but it behooves us to step

gently here, for it is hollowness rather than hypocrisy with which we are dealing. Only the pert paragrapher will, at this late date, poke fun at the inflated hopes regarding the spiritual effect of the war on Western civilization. The responsible student of affairs will content himself with a reluctant admission that the war set us back instead of ahead spiritually, that the war left behind a generation of damaged souls instead of the generation of regenerated spirits it promised. This is not, let me make clear, a fling at the returned soldier, for the spiritual havoc of the war is far more in evidence in the non-combatants who stayed at home than in the men who bore the brunt of battle. It is the stay-at-homes who are to-day bringing the firing-squad mind to bear upon the problems of peace. It was Barrie, I think, who suggested that hell hath no fury like a non-combatant. My only point here is that war, however justified it may seem at the moment, is a spiritual liability, not an asset, to a civilization. War unfits men for the procedures of peace, whether in domestic or in foreign policy, and out of war can come no valid contributions to a literature of hope. The literature of hope that I have in mind now has, then, no relation to the promises of spiritual renewal that was bandied about with so much fervor during the war.

Second, many Americans have seen grounds of hope for our war-blighted civilization in the new mysticism that has swept the world in the wake of the war. I cannot believe, however, that the present popularity of mediums and the current hammerings at the gates of the other world have any basic spiritual significance for the immediate future

of Western civilization. Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and their associates bring us what they regard as indisputable contact with the other world. Our printing-presses are pouring out a stream of spiritualistic literature. Never has there been so wide interest in spiritualism. All this is, I think, only natural after a war that has left empty chairs in millions of homes, but I doubt that it bears any vital relation to the spiritual renewal of civilization with which we are here concerned.

I am not attempting to pass dogmatic judgment upon spiritualism *per se*. In this, as in all matters still under investigation, between dogmatic credulity, on the one hand, and cock-sure disbelief, on the other, there is a middle ground of suspended judgment upon which, it seems to me, all honest minds will stand. It is, I think, the obligation of intelligence to suspend judgment upon the activities of any man who is trying to push a bit further the frontiers of the unknown, even if his actions may seem to us, at the moment, futile and foolish. I am saying only that, as far as my own study has taken me, I do not think that our literature of hope is being enriched by contributions from the spiritualists.

Third, many Americans just now believe that the renewal of civilization depends upon a return to an age of faith. On close examination, it is seen that those who are to-day talking most about a return to an age of faith mean a return to a blind credulity that will fly in the face of modern thought. And by modern thought I do not mean every gay and irresponsible idea that may be advanced by a 1925-model mind; I mean rather the major conclusions that the race has reached after

careful and conscientious research into the machinery and motives of human life on this planet.

Certainly no contribution to a valid literature of hope can come from the apostles of a return to a blind credulity that ignores the discoveries of the modern mind as it has clutched avidly at the garment of God, pleading and plodding for a deeper insight into the meaning of life. And yet there are many who fear that we are on the eve of just such a return to blind credulity. They offer as grounds for their fear Mr. Bryan's sustained and sporadically successful campaign against the honest findings of biology—as if it mattered spiritually whether man was created in a few quick minutes or in many millions of slow years—and the widespread revival of doctrinalism that insists that men must think their way into their living instead of living their way into their thinking.

I do not share the fear of those who think we are witnessing, or are likely to witness, any such wholesale backsliding of the modern intelligence. The reasons that lie back of the current anti-scientific crusade, which is being dramatized as I write in a Tennessee court room, and the revival of dogmatic doctrinalism in many of our churches seem to me to be reasons that are inherent in our age.

An age of enlightenment always brings, sooner or later, a flare-up of the old dogmatisms. Professor Harald Høffding of the University of Copenhagen gives a lucid explanation of this phenomenon in his "Leading Thoughts of the Nineteenth Century," when he says that "the general characteristics of a specific century do not apply equally to all strata of society, let alone to all individuals. In every age

there are great numbers of people who are very little affected by what, from a historical standpoint, gives their time its peculiar character. During the century of 'enlightenment' many cherished quietly their old beliefs; but when the new thought became too obtrusive, they resolutely opposed it. . . . Even in circles where 'enlightenment' was the animating force, a certain weariness would intrude at times—a yearning for different mental food and other ideals. Wherever education and knowledge were more than a passing vogue, men were expected to strain every mental nerve, to think intensely upon every subject. Gradually this brought a desire for relaxation, for rest in the simple and the commonplace, for resigning oneself to formulas that did not need to be reexamined anew every time they were used."

This, it seems to me, is an accurate picture of what is happening in the United States just now. Thousands who are not alarmed by deviations from orthodoxy in religion, in politics, or in economics are plain tired, and are nestling in the comforting arms of normalcy. The more belligerent warriors against political, economic, and religious modernism are men who have been cherishing quietly their old beliefs until recently, but who, seeing that many of the newer conceptions were about to take the field, have come into the open for a valiant last stand. I conceive the anti-modern movement of our time to be, therefore, not the advance of a conquering host, but the fitful writhing of an old order on its death-bed. Clearly, then, I do not believe that the anti-modernists have any contribution to make to our literature of hope. Although, honesty compels us to admit, many scientists have

helped bring the present anti-science movement down upon their heads by the way in which, outside their laboratories, they have indulged in sterile dogmatisms, unsupported by their own researches, which, for the man in the street, have robbed life of its meaning.

It is far from my intention to suggest by all this that the churches will play no part in the needed renewal of our civilization. I mean only that, for the time being, many of our churches are being regrettably rent by doctrinal debates that are paralyzing their power as spiritual factors in our common life. There has never been a time when men were as spiritually hungry as they are to-day. This is not an irreligious age. Only the superficial observer will pass such judgment upon it. Men are hungry for spiritual leadership. Men are interested as never before in the mystery and the mastery of life. They want light on the mystery of life and leadership in the mastery of life. And they do not know where to turn for this light and for this leadership. They turn to the scientists, and find that many of them have been so busy with their analyses that they have lost the sense of synthesis; that life, to them, is a series of proved, but unrelated, facts. They turn to the churches, and they find many of them rent with a bitter theological warfare. They find that, in many instances, the praying-ground has been turned into a prize-ring, and that, to paraphrase one of Mr. Bryan's widely quoted phrases, many ministers would travel at least as far to save a syllogism as to save a soul. Warfare, even in defense of a righteous cause, is a spiritually destructive process; and this applies to theological as well as to military warfare. The man in the street does not

indulge in nice discriminations. He does not realize that the majority of ministers and laymen are not interested in this ill-advised and ill-mannered boxing-bout of the dogmatists, but are devoting their insight and energy to just the things in which he is interested—the mystery and the mastery of life. Unfortunately, the man in the street is likely to form his opinion of the churches more from their theological disputes than from their spiritual ministries. In a day of resurgent doctrinalism, the religious pugilist claims more attention than the religious prophet. But under this carnival of theological pugilism there is a vast and virile religious realism that will, in time, make a fundamental contribution to our literature of hope—a contribution that may, indeed, bind all the other contributions together into a spiritual unity. I do not want to be understood as suggesting that either religion or science should dispense with doctrine; both must, from time to time, garner their findings in statements upon which humanity can act. I suggest only that the present battle is an indecent scuffle over an issue that has no spiritual significance either for our citizens or for our civilization, and that it will not, in my judgment, contribute anything to our literature of hope.

Fourth, I should like to make clear that a realistic literature of hope has no connection with the exploded myth of automatic progress. Any hope that can be entertained by honest minds must be contingent upon humanity's having the wit, the will, and the technique for using the forces of health that may be at hand. The modern mind cannot resign itself to any fatalism, either a fatalism of hope or a fatalism of despair. We are, for good or for ill,

the architects of our own future. We are not doomed to war or famine or pestilence. If these come, it will be because we let our knowledge rot in our laboratories and in our brains. And no beneficent power will carry us baby-like into peace, health, prosperity, and happiness. These await our intelligent use of the knowledge that is ours. The blind believer in progress has no contribution to make to our literature of hope.

I make no apology for having consumed virtually all of the space that is at my disposal for this paper in saying what the literature of hope is not, and reserving only a few brief paragraphs for a description and analysis of the literature of hope. The present status of the literature of hope makes this the only truthful treatment. The only realistic literature of hope that we have is as yet an almost hopelessly incoördinated mass of raw materials. We may call it a "literature" of hope only by courtesy. It would, for instance, be an easy matter to compile a list of titles for a "five-foot shelf" of the literature of despair, because the literature of despair has been written down in terms of clear-cut generalizations and confident prophecies, the authors of which have consciously set themselves to the task of predicting the future of Western civilization. The literature of despair is essentially a literature of prophecy based upon an analysis of what is happening and what is likely to happen to our civilization because we have run into certain biological, psychological, economic, political, administrative, and moral blind alleys. The literature of hope is not a literature of prophecy at all. It is simply the as yet incoördinated collection of all the new ideas, new ideal-

isms, and new spiritual values that have been thrown up as by-products of the sciences, philosophies, and practical adventures of the modern mind, which, if we had the wit and will and technic to use wisely in the rearing of our families, the administering of our schools, and the running of our governments, industries, and professions, might close the door to a new dark ages and open the door to a new renaissance. Thus we see that our real literature of hope has not been written by optimistic prophets; it has been written by men who may not have been at all concerned with speculations about the future of civilization, but by men who are animated primarily by the itch to know.

Modern biology has thrown up a few ideas that represent biology's net contribution to the social and spiritual future of civilization, a few ideas that we have not yet taken seriously either in our social policies or in our personal lives. What are these ideas? I shall not, as a layman, presume to say. That question must be answered by some man in whom a knowledge of biology and a flair for social leadership meet and merge. Modern psychology has likewise made its contribution to the social and spiritual future of civilization. So has economics. So has sociology. So has the science of administration. So have the men who have given their lives to the study of ethics. So have all the sciences and philosophies. So have all the practical adventures in politics, in industry, and in the professions. If we could ferret out these creative and germinal ideas and list them, we would have an inventory of the raw materials of renaissance.

Unfortunately, many of these ideas

are to-day buried under the jargon of technical scholarship. Many of them are still under the exclusive patronage of cloistered intellectuals. They are insulated from fruitful contact with our common life. And just as long as we allow these tonic ideas and energizing ideals and creative spiritual values to lie unused in the corners of obscure laboratories, in the far-from-the-world philosopher's closets, and in the brains of more or less inarticulate scholars, our common life will be captured by catchwords, ruled by snap judgments, and rifled by special interests.

There is going on to-day throughout the civilized world a high-tensioned conflict between what H. G. Wells has described as "very powerful social and political traditions" and "a spreading tide of new knowledge and an unprecedented onrush of new inventions that are entirely incompatible with these social and political traditions that still dominate men's minds."

It is in this "spreading tide of new knowledge" and in this "unprecedented onrush of new inventions" that we must look for our literature of valid hope. We can get along without smiling prophets of a golden age to come if we can only find the men and women who will uncover and thrust into the stream of popular thought these new ideas, these new idealisms, and these new spiritual values upon the use or disuse of which the future of Western civilization depends. Their use will spell renaissance. Failure to use them will spell dark ages.

The determination and formulation of this literature of hope is a primary task for the leadership of the next half-century. I shall undertake to state next month some of the problems that leadership is likely to face.

Some New Books We Have Read

Adventures in Criticism and Reporting

BY THE EDITORS

ERUDITION, NOT INDISCRETION

Anatole France Himself. By Jean Jacques Brousson. J. B. Lippincott Company.

"What pleasure can you find," Anatole France asked of his secretary, "in picking up the careless words that trickle down my old beard? A sadly perverted taste. After all, if you find it amusing—! And then, who can stop you? What I ask of you, my young friend, is not to publish any of this in my lifetime. . . . When I am under the sod, make me say whatever you will. . . . Now, it would be indiscretion. Then, it will be erudition." With this light epigram the greatest modern Frenchman shrugged away the temptation, whatever it may have been for him, to survive only on the plane of the grand style. Without half the fuss about being candid which Mark Twain made, he was ten times as much so as Mark Twain was, or at any rate has yet been permitted to appear. M. Brousson here deals with a brief period of M. France's life, between the "Joan of Arc" and the outbreak of the World War. But "the Master," as he found it somewhat tiresome to be called, was already at the peak of his fame, rich, powerful, and courted by all Europe. And yet

in M. Brousson's handling the hero refuses to pose. Taking such advantage as he likes of his fame, he nevertheless laughs at it. He has his countless letters burned unopened; he ceaselessly ridicules the French Academy, of which he had become a member more or less for the fun of it; he comments with a witty, disillusioned tongue upon all the sacred reputations and prejudices of his time. Even of his own works he speaks slightly. "*Sylvestre Bonnard*," he says, "is the most insipid and tedious of all my books. I wrote it to win a prize of the Academy; and I wrote it so well, or rather so badly, that it won the prize." "My best books? Those that had no success: *Histoire Comique* and *Jeanne d'Arc*. My poorest books? Those that every one praises: *Thaïs* and *le Lys Rouge*."

What Anatole France particularly lacked, his random comments make clear, was the infirmity which late in life assails so many eminent men—the infirmity of a desire to stand up like pillars in the very society they may have assailed. Or, rather, if he had a desire, it was that which had governed all his activities—the desire to be himself and not a symbol. By the intelligence he had lived; he did not propose to die in the odor of respectable senti-