

THOUGHTS AND ADVENTURES

Churchill Reflects on Spies, Cartoons,
Flying, and the Future

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{257} It must be admitted that in one great sphere the thrones are neither vacant nor occupied by pygmies. Science in all its forms surpasses itself every year. The body of knowledge ever accumulating is immediately interchanged and the quality and fidelity of the research never flags. But here again the mass effect largely suppresses the individual achievement. The throne is occupied; but by a throng.

In part we are conscious of the enormous processes of collectivization which are at work among us. We have long seen the old family business, where the master was in direct personal touch with his workmen, swept out of existence or absorbed by powerful companies, which in their turn are swallowed by mammoth trusts. We have found in these processes, whatever hardships they may have caused to individuals, immense economic and social advantages. The magic of mass production has carried all before it. The public have a cheaper and even better article or a superior service, the workmen have better wages and greater security.

The results upon national character and psychology are more questionable. We are witnessing a great diminution in the number of independent people who had some standing of their own, albeit a small one, and who if they conducted their affairs with reasonable prudence could 'live by no man's leave underneath the law.'² They may be better off as the salaried officials of great corporations; but they have lost in forethought, in initiative, in contrivance, in freedom and in effective civic status.

These instances are but typical of what is taking place in almost every sphere of modern industrial life, and of what must take place with remorseless persistency, if we are to enjoy the material blessings which scientific and organized civilization is ready to bestow in measureless abundance.

In part again these changes are unconscious. Public opinion is formed and expressed by machinery. The newspapers do an

2. From Rudyard Kipling, "The Old Issue," October 9, 1899: "All we have of freedom, all we use or know / This our fathers bought for us long and long ago. / Ancient Right unnoticed as the breath we draw / Leave to live by no man's leave, underneath the Law. / Lance and torch and tumult, steel and grey-goose wing / Wrenched it, inch and ell and all, slowly from the King. / Till our fathers 'stablished, after bloody years, / How our King is one with us, first among his peers."

immense amount of thinking for the average man and woman. In fact they supply them with such a {258} continuous stream of standardized opinion, borne along upon an equally inexhaustible flood of news and sensation, collected from every part of the world every hour of the day, that there is neither the need nor the leisure for personal reflection. All this is but a part of a tremendous educating process. But it is an education which passes in at one ear and out at the other. It is an education at once universal and superficial. It produces enormous numbers of standardized citizens, all equipped with regulation opinions, prejudices and sentiments, according to their class or party. It may eventually lead to a reasonable, urbane and highly-serviceable society. It may draw in its wake a mass culture enjoyed by countless millions, to whom such pleasures were formerly unknown. We must not forget the enormous circulations at cheap prices of the greatest books of the world, which is a feature of modern life in civilized countries, and nowhere more than in the United States. But this great diffusion of knowledge, information and light reading of all kinds may, while it opens new pleasures to humanity and appreciably raises the general level of intelligence, be destructive of those conditions of personal stress and mental effort to which the masterpieces of the human mind are due.

It is a curious fact that the Russian Bolsheviks in carrying by compulsion mass conceptions to their utmost extreme seem to have lost not only the guidance of great personalities, but even the economic fertility of the process itself. The Communist theme aims at universal standardization. The individual becomes a function: the community is alone of interest: mass thoughts dictated and propagated by the rulers are the only thoughts deemed respectable. No one is to think of himself as an immortal spirit, clothed in the flesh, but sovereign, unique, indestructible. No one is to think of himself even as that harmonious integrity of mind, soul and body, which, take it as you will, may claim to be 'the Lord of Creation.' Sub-human goals and ideals are set before these Asiatic millions. The Beehive? No, for there must be no queen and no honey, or at least no honey {259} for others. In Soviet Russia we have a society which seeks to model itself upon the Ant. There is not one single social or economic principle

or concept in the philosophy of the Russian Bolshevik which has not been realized, carried into action, and enshrined in immutable laws a million years ago by the White Ant.

But human nature is more intractable than ant-nature. The explosive variations of its phenomena disturb the smooth working out of the laws and forces which have subjugated the White Ant. It is at once the safeguard and the glory of mankind that they are easy to lead and hard to drive. So the Bolsheviks, having attempted by tyranny and by terror to establish the most complete form of mass life and collectivism of which history bears record, have not only lost the distinction of individuals, but have not even made the nationalization of life and industry pay. We have not much to learn from them, except what to avoid.

Mass effects and their reactions are of course more pronounced in the leading nations than in more backward and primitive communities. In Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and France, the decline in personal pre-eminence is much more plainly visible than in societies which have less wealth, less power, less freedom. The great emancipated nations seem to have become largely independent of famous guides and guardians. They no longer rely upon the Hero, the Commander, or the Teacher as they did in bygone rugged ages, or as the less advanced peoples do to-day. They wend their way ponderously, unthinkingly, blindly, but nevertheless surely and irresistibly towards goals which are ill-defined and yet magnetic. Is it then true that civilization and democracy, when sufficiently developed, will increasingly dispense with personal direction: that they mean to find their own way for themselves; and that they are capable of finding the right way? Or are they already going wrong? Are they off the track? Have they quitted the stern, narrow high-roads which alone lead to glorious destinies and survival? Is what we now see in the leading [260] democracies merely a diffusion and squandering of the accumulated wisdom and treasure of the past? Are we blundering on together in myriad companies, like innumerable swarms of locusts, chirping and devouring towards the salt sea, or towards some vast incinerator of shams and fallacies? Or have we for the first time reached those uplands whence all of us, even the humblest and