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RETURN TO FREEDOM

The affairs of our time and their impact upon Youth

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THE AFFAIRS OF OUR TIME AND THEIR IMPACT UPON YOUTH

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INTRODUCTION BY

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Government wartime restrictions on materials have made it essential that the amount of paper used in each book be reduced to a minimum. This volume is printed on lighter paper than would have been used before material limitations became necessary, and the number of words on each page has been substantially increased. The smaller bulk in no way indicates that the text has been shortened.

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INTRODUCTION

Talk and Talkers

In the dream scene in Barrie's *A Kiss for Cinderella,* Lord Times, embodying the power and dignity of the press, interrupts the royal goings-on with the disapproving command, "Less talk!" The conversation he was hearing was perhaps unbecomingly frivolous. Yet the reader receives the impression that Lord Times objected to talk as talk. If so, he exhibited a lack of faith which it is the business of educators to exorcise.

The Lawrenceville Forum lectures were founded on a faith in talk. Schoolmasters would be the last to entertain illusions on the subject. They talk too often with too little visible effect for that. But their business is in essence the art of human communication. And they know that the just word, spoken by the right person at the right time, is in the highest degree creative and propulsive.

One of the duties of an American school is to make young people realize that the American concept of democracy stands or falls on the individual's discharge of his civic responsibilities. Americans are inclined to approve of democracy as a general principle but to regard it as a piece of machinery. It looks so big to them that they can scarcely conceive how one person can do anything about it. The obvious fact that masses are made up of individuals does not as often stimulate our hope as unnerve our initiative. To the planners of the Lawrenceville Forum, therefore, it seemed useful to bring before a group of boys distinguished individuals who had a public record which gave their witness prestige and authority.

The idea was conceived in the early part of 1941. Reversing the usual procedure of choosing names first and subjects afterward, the planners first established ten important fields in

which men and women may importantly contribute to their times: civilization and history, statecraft, public affairs, religion and ethics, education and public morals, literature and the arts, science, current history, business and national welfare, manners and civilization. Then the best speaker was sought to occupy each category. The eye of the planners was on the need of emphasizing to students in a secondary school the responsibilities of young people and the part they might be expected, as educated men, to play in solving the problems of the future. The general purpose contained the hope that the audience would infer the importance of individual contributions to the progress of the democratic system.

The lectures delivered during the school year 1941-1942 were published in book form by G. P. Putnam's Sons under the title *Men of Tomorrow*. The second and third years' lectures are the contents of this volume.

Two events have occurred since the project was inaugurated to give the original concept added sharpness and pertinence. The first, of course, was Pearl Harbor. The problems of a democracy scarcely needed further debate before a group whose members were about to go out and fight for it. But Pearl Harbor had also the immediate effect of making thoughtful boys eager to secure that its like should not occur again, and it stirred them to discuss the chief and particular sore spots which periodically plunged the world into paroxysms of self-destruction. To young men in such a case, the advent of leaders of thought was a strengthening and a clarifying experience.

The second event followed from the first. The war has brought to most of us a sense of urgency, of the imminence of critical decisions which cry to be soundly made. Daily duties, even the apparently humdrum routine of academic life in wartime, have been lifted to the higher level of responsibilities which, simply because they are ours, we cannot fail to meet. Young men in such a case are glad to get what help they can from seasoned souls who have walked the path before them or are at present leading others through its first steps.

Of course, one of the problems of democracy is precisely how to keep that sense of urgency in time of peace; how to make permanent and habitual that sense of personal participation in great events; how to raise up men who can see beyond the pedestrian chores of today the hopeful, human, breathing whole of which they are a part. To this end, too, the testimony of men who have kept their faith and kept on trying brings boys measurably closer.

So the Forum lectures have been well timed, better than their planners had seen at the beginning.

It has been heartening to observe the response of the lecturers to their assignment. After accepting the invitation to speak, some of them have asked for conferences to discuss further the purposes of the Forum. They have submitted manuscripts in advance and asked for criticisms or offered alternative approaches to their subjects for our selection. They have been willing to arrive early on the day they were to lecture to meet with small groups of boys particularly interested in their field and later to chat and discuss and argue with larger numbers of boys at tea. When they proceeded to lecture in the evening, considerable numbers of their audience had already taken their measure and found it formidable but human. Later still the speakers frequently talked at length with members of the faculty. It has all been a pretty thorough course in the importance of the individual in a democracy. That it has left its imprint on the boys' minds has been plainly evident through subsequent conversations.

Nor has the effect been one-sided. Men tired by their burdens have come to the school and started willingly enough, but in low mental gear. The eagerness, vitality, and intelligent curiosity of the boys have soon acted on the speakers like a tonic; and at their formal lectures they have responded plainly and pleasurably to the enthusiasm of their reception.

Unconsciously but certainly the schoolboy audience has experienced a sharpening of the critical sense that will add to its members' effectiveness as citizens throughout their lives. They have come to distinguish the merely entertaining from

the solid and the penetrating and to prefer the latter. They can recognize the second-rate or the obvious, and they condemn it as less than the best. It is not given to most men to lead others. All but a few of us are born to follow. In a sound democracy it is essential that the led should be able to recognize sound leadership from hollow.

But the best thing to do about these lectures is to read them; remembering, as their editor says, that they were delivered to "the youth who will determine the quality of civilization in another generation."

Here are the talkers.

Allan V. Heely

Lawrenceville, N. J.
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RETURN TO FREEDOM

Carl L. Becker

THIS vigorous essay on liberty is presented as a survey of the part learning had played in preserving man's free institutions. It is the kind of pronouncement that stabs through the pall of doubts which at times settle down upon a fractious world. "I am persuaded," the author concludes, "that . . . any survey of the long history of learning and the life of man can but strengthen the faith and fortify the courage of all men of good will, since it provides a solid support for believing that humanity is stronger than hate, and will not be defeated by it."

This conviction is the product of a lifetime of absorptive study and admirable scholarship. Carl Becker is a historian whose shrewd, clear thinking has always commanded respect among fellow historians; his skill as a writer has been their envy. He has no vaudeville tricks to call attention to himself: no spotlight follows him across the stage. But those who have an eye to thorough workmanship, who enjoy vivacity without bombast, and the fine competency of a liberal mind, will find this discourse to their taste.

Carl Becker has his roots planted deep in American soil, and our heritage of liberties has been the subject of much of his best writing. Here he widens the horizon whence he views the times by sweeping back into the world of primal man. Bit by bit he traces the progress of free knowledge as it has unsteadily, but surely, advanced against fear, ignorance, and superstition. "The enduring strength of democracy," he remarks near the end, "is that it frankly recognizes the age-long human impulse to know what is true, and attempts to build civilization on a foundation of fully ascertained and verifiable knowledge."

Many years ago John Milton, also a close student of Plato's way of thinking, stated that political liberty depends upon the personal freedom in man's heart and mind from the domination of passion. Man, says Milton in *Paradise Lost,* procures his own enslavement by spiritual lassitude:

> Therefore since he permits
> Within himself unworthy powers to reign
> Over free Reason, God in judgment just
> Subjects him from without to violent lords;
> Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
> His outward freedom.

The application of that conviction to our present problems, with observations on the ways of meeting the challenge, is the substance of this essay.

T. H. J.

LEARNING AND THE LIFE OF MAN

by Carl L. Becker

UNIVERSITIES are commonly called centers of learning. If worthy of the name, they are rightly so called, since the increase and refinement of knowledge is their proper aim and their chief title to distinction. But the term learning, used in this connection, is apt to suggest something massive and formidable. We think at once, if we have even a little learning, of the greatly learned—of Thomas Aquinas, perhaps, and the twenty volumes of the *Summa Theologiae,* or of J. J. Scaliger and the *Emendatione Temporum,* or of old Emmanuel Kant and the *Critique of Pure Reason.* In any case, whether we have ever heard of these greatly learned men or not, we can all think of professors, full of uncommon knowledge of something or other, and therefore able and more than willing to write exhaustive and even exhausting monographs, for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* perhaps, on the most recondite and unalluring subjects, such as paleography, or weights and measures, or the infusoria. Learning in this sense is clearly something exclusive and aristocratic, something at all events which the ordinary man does not yearn for and cannot in any case ever acquire.

Learning of this sort is often subject to suspicion, and even to attack, as an expensive luxury of little import to the general run of men; and, indeed, in so far as it cannot be organically related to the needs of man as a social animal, it must be classed with the eccentric if harmless diversions, such as contract bridge or crossword puzzles. Let us, then, for the moment forgetting about universities and the recondite learning acquired by professors, think of ordinary men and of learning in the broad, elementary sense that it is

possible and appropriate to them. Taking the term in this elemental sense, it is obvious that all men are, within the limits of circumstance and their own capacity, learned. Broadly speaking, the impulse to know, so far from being confined to the greatly learned, is a universal human trait, and the learning accumulated in universities is only a correction and an elaboration of the learning that is always and everywhere essential to the life of man.

Man is not the only creature capable of learning, but he is the only one capable of appropriating for his own use the learning of others. Tigers, for example, have not this capacity. Every tiger, as Ortega y Gassett says, is a "first tiger," starting from scratch, learning all over again what the first tiger learned; so that the race of tigers, after six thousand or six million years of learning, is still condemned to an endless repetition of the same activities. Man is not thus limited. Every generation, appropriating through oral communication and written records the knowledge acquired by those that have gone before, is something different from any preceding generation, and every man in each generation, carrying along day by day the accumulating memories of things experienced by himself and others, is every day something different than he was the day before. Instead of endlessly repeating his activities, man can therefore progressively transform them.

It is true that at any time the activities of man, no less than those of all living creatures, are conditioned by his biological inheritance and his environment; but of all living creatures man alone is capable of making an ideal extension of his environment beyond the narrow confines of what is directly perceived and experienced. The point was once succinctly stated by the late Professor Charles Henry Hull of Cornell University in conversation with the former dean of the law school, E. H. Woodruff. Speaking of a certain man, Dean Woodruff made the unguarded statement that his phenomenal success was wholly due to his environment.

"But what," asked Professor Hull, with that bland simplicity that could prove so devastating, "do you mean by his environment? Do you mean his undershirt or the starry firmament?" What distinguishes the life of man is that his environment may be ideally expanded to include not merely that which is immediately experienced, but also all that is known or imagined to exist within the starry firmament, and all that is known or imagined to have occurred in the dark backward of time passed. Learning is essential to the life of man because it is only through learning that the environment which conditions the thought and conduct of men can be thus expanded and enriched.

Such an ideal expansion of the environment is as necessary for primitive as for civilized man; but the primitive man, for want of knowledge, constructs an environment that is, beyond the realm of immediate experience, largely imaginary. The world as known to primitive men has been well described by Alexander Goldenweiser.

> In all prehistoric communities, those, that is, without written records, the continuity of cultural life . . . is carried by two vehicles: on the one hand, by the objective continuity of material culture; on the other, by tradition, the knowledge of facts and events as carried in the minds of individuals and communicated by the spoken word from father to son.
>
> The historic depth of such tradition is slight. It is communicated by fathers and grandfathers, and it reaches back to their fathers and grandfathers; and beyond this span of three or four generations it does not extend with any degree of accuracy. . . . The knowledge of facts and events, historically so shallow, is also closely limited geographically. . . . The group is thoroughly conversant with the human, animal and material factors of its immediate environment. Outside of this a fragmentary and unreliable set of data is available referring to the people and regions with which some sort of contact is maintained. But there the world of humanity ceases. Beyond is the void, the realm of imagination, with its grotesque creatures and fantastic happenings.

Within this narrow world the primitive man lives. Within it he is at home. His knowledge of it is matter-of-fact, sound, adequate for practical purposes, and sufficiently co-ordinated for him to realize and hold in memory the necessary relation between what he has done, is doing, and purposes to do. Beyond this narrow world is the void—the void of the unknown outer world of nature, the void of the unknown remote times passed. What the void contains the primitive man does not know, but he is aware that it must contain something, something which, since it may aid or thwart his purposes, it would be useful to explore. For primitive man, like the immature child, like the civilized man for that matter, is not content to live wholly within the restricted world of matter-of-fact knowledge, since he finds it too monotonous to be satisfying, too immediately experienced to be wholly intelligible, and too precarious to be entirely safe. Inevitably, therefore, he enlarges the world of the matter-of-fact imaginatively, by projecting into the unknown void —the outer world of nature, the remote world of time passed—those activating agencies and events that his limited experience assures him must be there, and which, being there, provide him with a rational explanation and a moral justification for his daily activities.

In this or some similar manner prehistoric man made an ideal extension of his environment, projecting into the outer void of nature an elaborate structure of magic, and into the outer void of remote time passed, a more or less finished epic story. A little learning was sufficient for creating and sustaining this primitive social structure, and there was no disposition to change it. On the contrary, so long as experience remained fairly constant, the disposition was to retain it intact, since experience seemed to demonstrate that every departure from established ritual and custom would be attended with disaster. Many primitive peoples, therefore, never forced to question the truth of magic or the epic story, and consequently never learning anything more, are still repeating the activities that from time immemorial have

been found safe and sufficient. For them learning is essentially a matter of preserving what has always been known: each generation accepting without question what its fathers and grandfathers knew, and transmitting it unimpaired to its children and grandchildren.

Not all prehistoric peoples, however, were able to retain intact this relatively simple social structure. Some five or six thousand years ago certain peoples in China and India, in western Asia, in Egypt and the Aegean lands had already passed from the primitive to what, for want of a better term, we call the civilized state. The reasons for this change are obscure. But we can note certain characteristics, common to these early civilizations, that distinguish them from primitive society as we know it. They all possessed the art of writing, and they all possessed a more advanced technology. These appear to have been the controlling factors, and it was no doubt largely on account of these factors that the early civilizations all exhibited a social organization in which the relative uniformity of status and possessions had been replaced by sharply defined class distinctions. Above all classes was the king, revered and obeyed as himself a god, or the descendant of the gods, or as ruling in place of the gods. Below the king were the favored few, whose interest it was to support the king since he guaranteed their privileges. There were the priests and scribes, who kept the records and interpreted and administered the ritual of thought and conduct; and the nobles, who appropriated the land to their own advantage and lived in idleness on the labor of others. Below the privileged few were the artisans and mechanics, skilled masters and preservers and improvers of technological knowledge; merchants and money-changers who manipulated the exchanges. Lowest of all were the submerged masses, peasants and slaves, providing under compulsion, as tillers of the soil or personal servants, the material support for the superstructure of privilege and power.

In these more complex but less stable communities it was impossible to retain intact the inherited tradition of habit