

EDUCATION and World Tragedy

The Rushton Lectures

HOWARD MUMFORD JONES



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PREFACE

In the following pages I have tried to unite two qualities not easily fused together; whether I have been successful only the reader can judge. I have tried to be plain spoken about higher education and at the same time to be suggestive rather than dogmatic about educational programs, to write, in other words, for the next few years and the present parlous situation of Western culture rather than for time and eternity. The "ipse dixit" quality of much educational writing seems to me to generate more friction than warmth.

The reader will detect my indebtedness to half a dozen admirable pronouncements about education and the contemporary world — books by Wallace B. Donham, Eric Fischer, Elton Mayo, Alfred North Whitehead, F. S. C. Northrop, Quincy Wright and Erich Fromm, all of whom seem to have penetrated more deeply into the cultural dilemma of the twentieth century than have most of the formal reports on education.

I am grateful also to Walter Rideout, the faculty of Birmingham-Southern College, and to officials of the Carnegie Foundation and the Guggenheim Foundation for sympathetic counsel. But the chief source of strength in these pages has been my wife.

The statistics in chapter one are collected from various sources, often contradictory; later "authorities"

may revise some of them. One difficulty is the word "casualties," which sometimes refers to killed and wounded, sometimes to killed, wounded, prisoners, and missing. But whether the eventual totals shall prove smaller or larger than mine is irrelevant. The picture remains appalling.

The substance of these chapters was delivered on the Rushton Foundation in Birmingham, Alabama, in April, 1946, as a series of three lectures. This admirable enterprise, which it was my privilege to inaugurate, is dedicated to civic education. Another, smaller portion of the book formed the substance of a commencement address at Hofstra College in June, 1946.

HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

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EDUCATION AND WORLD TRAGEDY

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If any human being brought up in the tradition of western civilization could, by some miracle, step outside the familiar patterns of that culture; if history could come to him with the same shock of surprise that a new and stimulating novel brings him; if, in sum, retaining the moral idealism of western civilization as a standard of measurement, he could yet discover for the first time what has happened to mankind in the last fifty years, such a person would, I think, be overwhelmed by a single tragic conviction; namely, that the history of mankind for the last half century has been a history of deepening horror.

Since 1896 the earth has scarcely known a year without warfare, armed revolt, massacre, pogrom or other ingenious form of slaughter. During the first thirty years of the present century, according to Quincy Wright's authoritative study of war, European powers alone fought seventy-four wars, which lasted a total of 297 years; roughly, the average war was four years long. One has to go back to the twelfth century to find a comparable record. In that unenlightened century the average war lasted only three years and a half.

These fifty years include two infernal conflicts — World War I and World War II. They include such disastrous struggles as the Boer War of 1899–1902, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, the two bloody Balkan Wars of 1912–13, the innumerable wars, revolts, “interventions,” and massacres in Finland, the Caucasus, the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Manchuria, Siberia, and other “border” areas, which followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. They include the long drawn out agony of China, which, beginning with the massacre of garrison troops in 1917, continues to this hour. They include the intermittent civil war in Spain. These are the major events.

But there were other episodes, tragic in their time. Who now vividly remembers the Formosa rebellion of 1896? The Cretan massacre of 1897, when Christians slaughtered the Moslem peasantry? The Boxer rebellion of 1900? The Philippine insurrection and the “water cure”? The massacre of a million Armenians between 1896 and 1919? Yet all these are soberly chronicled in any encyclopedia.

The year 1922 is as representative as any. The Irish civil war was raging, and there were Black and Tan outrages. The year opened with the slaughter of 300 Greek civilians in Samsun. By August about 100,000 Greeks had been killed or captured (I do not know the figures for the Turkish dead), some tens of thousands of civilians having been slain. The bloody

climax of 1922 was reached at the taking of Smyrna, when an estimated 200,000 Christians were rendered homeless and the city was given over to pillage, rapine, massacre and fire.

Even at the risk of monotony one must chronicle other wars in this unhappy half century. There was an earlier Graeco-Turkish war in 1897-98, and an Italo-Turkish war in 1911. Between 1928 and 1935 Bolivia and Paraguay fought to exhaustion over the possession of a tropical jungle. Indeed, during many, if not most, of these fifty years there have been rebellions in Latin America; and though it is sometimes said that armed revolt is the standard form of presidential election in that distressed area, a man dead of a bullet in Caracas or Asunción will no more come to life again than a man dead of a bullet at Vimy Ridge or Bataan.

The half century has seen armed rebellion sweep through such famous capitals as Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Athens, and Rome. It has seen more or less protracted revolutionary struggles in Russia, Mexico, Spain, France, Germany, India, Egypt, Palestine, the other Arabian states, Mongolia, China, Hungary, Austria, Greece, Iran, and various other countries, besides what uncounted minor uprisings — Nicaragua, Haiti, Albania, Thailand and the like — only the *World Almanac* now tells us. Ours is a sick age.

How many human beings have been killed directly

or indirectly in the course of this terrible history? It is almost impossible to find out. One man's guess is as good as another's. Statistics about death by warfare are not kept in some continents, and, moreover, by its very nature modern warfare sometimes destroys both record and statistician. For example, we do not know and probably shall never know how many hundreds of thousands have died of violence in Asia and Africa during these fifty years. How many perished during the obscure struggle for the control of Tannu-Tuwa, a country twice as large as Scotland, lying between Mongolia and Siberia? How many Koreans were slaughtered by their Japanese overlords? How many natives died during the struggle for the control of the Belgium Congo? We do not know, just as we do not know how many hundreds of thousands died in Russia, on its borders, or in neighboring states during the terrible convulsions that swept over the future Soviet Union between 1914 and the adoption of the constitution of 1925. We do not know how many millions Hitler and his agents killed. But what we know with rough accuracy is sufficiently appalling.

Before 1900 about 25 per cent of all battle casualties died; in World War I this increased to 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. In the seventeenth century it is estimated that, out of every thousand Frenchmen, 11 died in military service; in the twentieth century, up to World War II, 63 thus perished, an increase of al-

most 600 per cent. Out of every thousand Europeans alive in the twelfth century it is thought that two died as battle casualties; in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century 54 out of every thousand so died, an increase of 1700 per cent. Professor Pitirim Sorokin estimates that during the first third of this century Europe suffered 24 million war casualties. If we slaughtered or wounded every man, woman, and child in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey tomorrow, we should about equal this number.

From the eleventh to the twentieth centuries war casualties totaled about 18 million. In the first three decades of the present century we have therefore killed $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent more human beings than were killed in the previous 800 years. But these figures do not include five other continents, and they take us only to the rise of Hitler. There were, it is thought, ten million dead in World War I. Influenza, typhus, starvation, and other destroying agencies killed some ten million more. But these figures are principally for Europe; the best guess for the whole world is that 40 million died, directly or indirectly, in World War I. To equal this number of Americans we shall have to add to the slaughter of New England, New York, and New Jersey, the deaths of every man, woman and child in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and the

District of Columbia — a little less than one-third of the total population of the United States.

We do not yet know the figures for World War II or for the conflicts that preceded it like the civil war in Spain, which, however, accounted for about two and one-half million dead. One tiny state — Luxembourg — lost 4000 in battle and at least 500 others executed by the conquerors. Twenty-five thousand civilians alone were killed in Belgium. The dead in Holland were at least 200,000 (this does not include later deaths by malnutrition). In Yugoslavia during the resistance to the Germans in 1942-43 there were one million dead; a million more were killed from 1943 to 1945. The Japanese dead are reckoned at more than three million. About three and one-half million Poles were shot, murdered, gassed, starved or tortured to death. According to a correspondent writing in *The Christian Science Monitor* for November, 1945, from Poznan to Stettin the Polish plain, once a granary for Germany, is for 150 miles as "barren and neglected as a desert" and cannot support a new population for indefinite months.

The German dead up to the summer of 1945 are estimated at eight and one-half million; how many have since died of starvation or of vengeance is unknown. The military dead in China from 1937 to 1944 are nearly three million; the civilian dead anything you like — ten million, twelve million, twenty

million. One figure for Russian losses gives 21 million casualties of all sorts. A United Press dispatch from the Vatican in November, 1945, estimated the dead, military and civilian, in World War II at over 22 million, the wounded at 34 and one-half million, or 56 million casualties in all. The population of the entire South, including Delaware and Maryland, in 1940 was 41 millions. If every man, woman, and child in Alabama were butchered they would number less than half the number of Jews butchered in Europe since 1933. If the entire population of the United States were wiped out tomorrow, their number would be less than the number of human beings who have died of violence, disease or starvation in war or as a result of it during the last half century. It doesn't make sense.

While this blind struggle continues, it increases its ferocity. Through the mouth of Satan in *The Mysterious Stranger* Mark Twain sardonically remarks, "No brute ever does a cruel thing — that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense." I turn to the formal indictment listing the criminal acts of the Nazis for illustrations of the Moral Sense of mankind. This document includes only those crimes for which there is legal evidence. Here is a summary of one sub-section of one indictment only — the sub-section covering murders and tortures in eastern Germany and western Russia.

The figures run: at Maidanek 1,500,000 persons exterminated; at Auschwitz, 4,000,000; in Lwow and its environs, 700,000; in the Livenitz forest and environs, 133,000 Jews tortured and shot; in Ganov, 200,000 peaceful citizens exterminated by "the most refined methods of cruelty," mass shootings taking place to the accompaniment of orchestral music furnished by players who were next to be shot; in the Ozarichi region, tens of thousands interned, many dying of typhus injections; in Esthonia, on one day only, at Camp Klooga, 2,000 persons shot; in Lithuania, at Paneriai, at least 100,000 killed; in Kaunas, more than 70,000; in Alytus, about 60,000; at Prenai, about 3,000; at Ukmerge, about 8,000; in Mariampole, about 7,000; in Trakai and its environs, about 37,640; in Latvia, 577,000 murdered; at Smolensk, 135,000; near Leningrad, about 172,000; in Stravopol, tens of thousands; in Pyatigorsk, an unknown number; in Krasnodar, 6,700; at Stalingrad, 50,000; in Orel, 5,000; in Novgorod, many thousands; near Kiev, 100,000; in and about Rovno, one million. There is another column of particulars for this part of Europe alone.

Here is one of the more bearable paragraphs describing the manner of these deaths: "After the Germans were expelled from Stalingrad more than 1000 mutilated bodies of local inhabitants were found with marks of torture. One hundred and thirty-nine

women had their arms painfully bent backward and held by wires. From some, their breasts had been cut off and their ears, fingers, and toes had been amputated. The bodies bore the marks of burns. On the bodies of the men the five-pointed star was burned with an iron or cut with a knife. Some were disemboweled." The full bill of particulars may be read in *The New York Times* for October 19, 1945.

These dead are at peace. Unnumbered thousands of human beings live on in a world-wide condition of famine. Unnumbered thousands of human beings whose lives have been wrecked by war or starvation or despair or disease still exist. Regarding the long-range results of war upon our lives Professor Wright tells us:

Closely related to the racial [i.e., human] cost of war but . . . less susceptible to objective measurement are the social and cultural costs of war in the deterioration of standards. Wars of large magnitude have been followed by anti-intellectual movements in art, literature and philosophy; by waves of crime, sexual license, suicide, venereal disease, delinquent youth; by class, racial and religious intolerance, persecution, refugees, social and political revolution; by abandonment of orderly processes for settling disputes and changing law; and by a decline in respect for international law and treaties.¹

The standards of only a few, he says, are elevated by war, a minor gain which by contrast deepens the gloom of the general picture.

¹ Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, 2 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1942), I, 246.

"Deterioration of standards" is a vague phrase. Three sets of parallel instances may make vivid what Professor Wright has in mind. In 1903 Americans were horrified to learn of an anti-Jewish pogrom in the city of Kiev. Strong denunciations of Russia were uttered by church groups and others. In this pogrom 47 Jews were killed and 700 houses destroyed — altogether an amateur affair. Yet in 1945, although the Germans are known to have massacred between six and seven million Jews by means extending from simple shooting to "the most refined methods of cruelty," foreign correspondents reported that many American soldiers were finding the Germans the most agreeable Europeans they had met and deciding that the horrors of the concentration camps were either incidental or the invention of propagandists.

Again: in 1937 Vittorio Mussolini, warring against the blameless Ethiopians, was roundly scolded by sensitive Americans for saying: "To me war is a sport — the most glorious sport in existence. . . . I remember that one group of horsemen gave me the impression of a budding rose as the bombs fell in their midst." One supposes that if a hundred horsemen were killed as petals of the budding rose, the bomb was singularly successful. Five or six years later, American airmen were regularly cheered for their sporting prowess in bringing down Japanese planes; and the science reporter of *The New York Times* was

thought in 1945 to have written a singularly effective prose masterpiece about the rare beauty of the atomic bomb upheaval over Hiroshima. This killed or mutilated, we are told, 140,000 or 150,000 human beings, 30,000 so completely that no trace of them remains.

The official report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey as printed in *The New York Times* Sunday, June 30, 1946, says that the mortality rate per square mile destroyed at Hiroshima was 15,000 and at Nagasaki, 20,000, and after discussing death by "flash burns" ("radiant heat of incredible temperatures that struck its victims with the speed of light") remarks that other victims were bombarded with visible and invisible rays:

The victims of these rays who did not die instantly were made sterile; pregnant women suffered miscarriages; some lost their hair, suffered diseases of the mouth, pharynx and intestinal tract, or they had hemorrhages of gums, nose and skin.

There is reason to believe that if the effects of blast and fire had been entirely absent from the bombing, the number of deaths among people within a radius of one-half mile . . . would have been almost as great as the actual figures and the deaths among those within one mile would have been slightly less.

The principal difference would have been in the time of the deaths. Instead of being killed outright . . . they would have survived for a few days or even three or four weeks, only to die eventually of radiation disease.

It is encouraging to read that at distances between 6,500 and 10,000 feet from "zero point" of the bomb,