

*Cogitations*  
*from*  
*Albert Jay Nock*

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*With a Note by*  
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To E.A.O., friend and teacher



*I am not myself very much concerned with the question of influence, or with those publicists who have impressed their names upon the public by catching the morning tide, and rowing very fast in the direction in which the current was flowing; but rather, that there should always be a few writers preoccupied in penetrating to the core of the matter, in trying to arrive at the truth and set it forth, without too much hope, without ambition to alter the immediate course of affairs, and without being downcast or defeated when nothing appears to ensue.*

—T. S. ELIOT

*Socrates and his disciples admired this world, but they did not particularly covet it, or wish to live long in it, or expect to improve it; what they cared for was an idea or a good which they found expressed in it, something outside it and timeless, in which the contemplative intellect might be literally absorbed.*

—SANTAYANA



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## A Note to the Reader

I first assembled these quotations from the works of Albert Jay Nock about eight years ago. They were slightly revised a couple of years later and many copies have gone out to members of The Nockian Society and other admirers of AJN. Now on this centenary of Nock's birth it seems appropriate to help keep his memory green with a special publication. There was talk of a new collection of essays or a new edition of his *The Theory of Education in the United States*, but commercial publishers beat us to the punch. Such is the growing popularity of Albert Jay Nock! Consequently, The Nockian Society decided, much to my pleasure, to mark the centenary with this attractively bound edition of the Nock anthology.

It might be remarked here that The Nockian Society is aware that Nock never sought disciples and that any following of "little Nocks" echoing his every word as holy writ would have been to him "a terrible thing to think upon." The important thing, he said, is not *who* is right but *what* is right. His was a disinterested love of truth. We can honor him, then, not by trying to sell his ideas, but by emulating him in the pursuit of excellence for its own sake.

The Nockian Society has, too, remembered Nock's distaste for most organizations so it has "no officers, no dues, and no meetings." That you may catch the flavor of the Society, here is the message that went out in the first bulletin.

### *Patrons:*

Francis Rabelais	No Officers
Artemus Ward	No Dues
H. L. Mencken	No Meetings

Three admirers of the late Albert Jay Nock met for lunch early in 1963—a doctor, a businessman, and a clergyman. Individually, each had found his own way to AJN, and felt an

affinity for Nock's ideas as well as Nock's nonpushy approach to the idea business. A common interest in AJN had brought these three together in the first place; here, as in other instances, Nock proved to be a touchstone. Men who respond to Nock tend to hit it off pretty well together. This is a sufficient reason for The Nockian Society.

We are not out to save the world. Neither is our aim to idolize a man or endorse every idea embraced by AJN. Nock had a way of setting ideas in motion and then keeping out of their way. The Society keeps out of its members' way, as it pursues a policy of salutary neglect.

The most tangible thing about this Society is its mailing list. Those whose names are writ therein receive an occasional memorandum containing priceless information available nowhere else. The Hon. Sect'y is eager to add your name to this collection, and will dispatch a free packet of Nockian literature to you at the first sign of interest.

\* \* \*

Nock avoided publicity as doggedly as most men seek it. The maxim of Epicurus, "Live unknown," was one he adhered to faithfully—compulsively, some might say. Van Wyck Brooks tells us that in *The Freeman* days "no one knew even where he lived, and a pleasantry in the office was that one could reach him by placing a letter under a certain rock in Central Park."

In his *Memoirs* Nock affirmed that "whatever a man may do or say, the most significant thing about him is what he thinks; and significant also is how he came to think it, why he continued to think it, or if he did not continue, what the influences were which caused him to change his mind." One may understand Nock by the simple expedient of reading his books for he was as outspoken in the expression of his beliefs as he was reticent about his private life. What Nock says of Thoreau is, then, true of himself. "One may know him intimately and profitably through his works—there is no other way—but what one may know or not know *about* him is of no importance." So one may *penetrate* Albert Jay Nock only by carefully reading his books. Gustave Thibon expresses this idea

so well: "Mere physical proximity without moral intimacy, is the surest way to miss the secret beauty of a soul, to brush by without seeing it. . . ." It is not close at hand that greatness is to be seen, but from within; vicinity without intimacy sets up the densest and most impassable of barriers.

\* \* \*

Albert Jay Nock was a *clarifying* thinker. He never presented his ideas as being brand new, fresh off the press, but, on the contrary, as being in most cases fairly well-established, if, indeed, not ancient. It was his forte to give the known a new twist, to offer a new slant on things which usually conflicted with the stereotyped thinking of his contemporaries. AJN was, too, a radical thinker, if by radical we mean getting to the root of a matter and not being satisfied with superficial explanations. His desire, in every instance, was to find "the reason of the thing" to "get wisdom, get understanding."

As a social critic, Albert Jay Nock stands head and shoulders above most. Much of what passes for social criticism must be taken in small doses, or one will come away depressed and generally in a mood to chuck it all. The reader may agree to everything the critics say, one hundred per cent, but he is nevertheless left in a despondent mood. Not so with the greatest critics who are aware "that for life to be fruitful, life must be felt as a joy; that it is by the bond of *joy*, not of happiness or pleasure, not of duty or responsibility, that the called and chosen spirits are kept together in this world."

The great critics help "the truth along *without encumbering it with themselves*." Hence they are not subject to the shortcomings of so many writers who have something of importance to say, but usually spoil it by the injection of their own personalities. The

. . . most searching criticism is made by indirection, by the turn of some phrase that at first strikes one as quite insignificant, or at least quite irrelevant to any critical purpose; yet when this phrase once enters the mind, it becomes pervasive, and one finds presently that it has coloured all one's cast of thought—and this is an effect which only criticism of the very highest order can produce.

The true critic's remarks are made, so to speak, *en passant*. His primary purpose, in other words, is not to offer criticism, this being only a sort of by-product. Nock, like all great critics, was a fine artist and as such he was able to create a mood without mentioning it. His chief concern was creation for he held with Goethe that the critic should be primarily concerned with the processes that build up, and not with those that tear down. "The final purpose of the arts is to give joy." Just so, and it matters not how little joy may be current in the society for,

the true critic has his resources of joy within himself, and the motion of his joy is self-sprung. There may be ever so little hope of the human race, but that is the moralist's affair, not the critic's. The true critic takes no account of optimism or pessimism: they are both quite outside his purview; his affair is one only of joyful appraisal, assessments, and representation.

And again as to the primary purpose of art:

When Hesiod defined the function of poetry as that of giving "a release from sorrows and a truce from cares," he intimated the final purpose of all great art as that of elevating and sustaining the human spirit through the communication of joy, of felicity; that is to say, of the most simple, powerful, and highly refined emotion that the human spirit is capable of experiencing. This, no doubt, does not exhaust its beneficence; no doubt it works for good in other ways as well; but this is its great and final purpose. It is not to give entertainment or diversion or pleasure, not even to give happiness, but to give joy.

Of all other men in American letters perhaps Nock might be most aptly compared with Henry David Thoreau. Nock, like Thoreau, was a discriminating man who was concerned with the quality of life lived and he learned early with Thoreau that a man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to do without.

What Richard Groff writes of Thoreau applies equally to Nock:

In this emphasis on inner transformation rather than on outward activity, Thoreau echoes the words of Lao Tse, who taught, "The way to do is to be." Insofar as it is the *kind of persons we are* which is at the heart of our problems, then obviously we must begin by changing ourselves. This attitude is at sharp variance with that of those reformers and agitators with plans for reorganizing the old institutions of society or instituting new ones in order to improve the condition of man.

Nock would have nothing to do with the collectivism of his day. As was said of Kierkegaard, AJN "stationed himself to defend the individual against any philosophical, political, or religious teaching that tended to slack off this consciousness of the individual's essential responsibility and integrity." Neither was Nock tempted by the activism of his fellow "intellectuals" who for more than fifty years have been guilty of treason because they have willingly deserted the cause of truth and, in Russell Kirk's words, gone "a-whoring after strange gods, whose blandishments both the traditions of their culture and the discipline of their profession should enable them to resist." The disinterested love of truth has been replaced by a lust for power and prestige; no longer guardians of the truth, they have gone to the service of the states which "would use the scholar and debase him." Nock was one of the few intellectuals to retain his integrity and avoid what Julien Benda called *The Treason of the Clerks*. By clerks Benda meant "all those whose activity essentially is *not* the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of nonmaterial advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: 'My kingdom is not of this world.'"

The job Nock loved best, though it brought him neither fame nor fortune, was being a spokesman for the remnant. If we belong in the remnant, he wrote, we will

proceed on our way, first with the more obscure and extremely difficult work of clearing and illuminating our own minds, and second, with what occasional help we may offer to others whose faith, like our own, is set more on the regenerative power of thought than on the uncer-

tain achievements of premature action. Such persons have the power to see things as they are, to survey them and one's own relations to them with objective disinterestedness, and to apply one's consciousness to them simply and directly letting it take its own way over them unchartered by prepossession, unchanneled by prejudice, and above all uncontrolled by routine and formula. Those who have this power are everywhere; everywhere they are not so much resisting as quietly eluding and disregarding all social pressure which tends to mechanize their processes of observation and thought. [The remnant is] an order of persons—for order is the proper word, rather than class or group, since they are found quite unassociated in any formal way, living singly or nearly so, and more or less as aliens, in all classes of our society. . . .

It is not unlikely that future historians may see Albert Jay Nock as a prophet in the great tradition of Isaiah and Jeremiah, though his habits and vocabulary were not those of the ordinary clergyman, he calls one to the life of the "spirit"—the "inner life"—and away from an existence concerned primarily with things. Susan Stebbing writes of what I refer to, her term being "spiritual excellences" which are

intellectual and moral capacities lacking which the life of human beings would be nasty and brutish; length of days could not redeem it. The excellence I call *spiritual* includes love for human beings, delight in creative activities of all kinds, respect for truth, satisfaction for learning to know what is true about this world (including ourselves), loyalty to other human beings, generosity of thought and sympathy with those who suffer, hatred of cruelty and other evils, devotion to duty and steadfastness in seeking one's ideals, delight in the beauty of nature and art—in short, the love and pursuit of what is worthwhile for its own sake. In this pursuit the individual does in fact have at times to suffer pain and to surrender what it would be good for him to have were it not for the incompatible needs of others, needs which he recognizes as claims upon himself. This is another spiritual excellence. These excellences are to be found in *this* world; no heaven is needed to experience them.

Nock was more concerned with being and becoming than with doing and getting. His was an aristocratic spirit which "is not a matter of birth, or occupation, or education. It is an attitude of mind carried into daily action, that is to say, a religion. [The aristocratic spirit] is the disinterested, passionate love of excellence. . . ."

In one of his letters, AJN remarks that "Rabelais was one of the world's great libertarians—he has been a stay and a support to my spirit for thirty years, and I could not possibly have got through without him." His Introduction to *The Works of Rabelais* might also serve to explain why his own books, especially *The Memoirs*, are worth reading.

It must be laid down once and for all, that the chief purpose of reading a classic like Rabelais is to prop and stay the spirit, especially in its moments of weakness and enervation, against the stress of life, to elevate it above the reach of commonplace annoyances and degradations, and to purge it of despondency and cynicism. He is to be read as Homer, Sophocles, the English Bible, are to be read. . . . The current aspect of our planet, and the performances upon it, are not always encouraging, and one therefore turns with unspeakable gratitude to those who themselves have been able to contemplate them with equanimity, and are able to help others to do so. In their writing one sees how the main preoccupations, ambitions, and interests of mankind appear when regarded "in the view of eternity," and one is insensibly led to make that view one's own. Thus Rabelais is one of the half-dozen writers whose spirit in a conspicuous way pervades and refreshes one's being, tempers, steadies, and sweetens it, so that one lays the book aside, conscious of a new will to live up to the best of one's capacity, and a clearer apprehension of what that best may be.

\* \* \*

Some thanks are in order: to the Hon. Sect'y of The Nockian Society whose light touch on the Society bulletins is a delight; to Marion Norrell, the lovely indentured servant who is the *real* secretary of the Society; to Leonard E. Read (Publisher of *The Freeman*) and the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education (especially Eleanor Orsini) for their assistance in

a good cause; to Jacques Barzun who found time in a busy schedule to write us a provocative Preface; and, finally, to my wife, Laura, who came out of retirement (and almost ceased cooking meals) to design the cover that graces this slim volume.

I hope very much that readers will be pleased to make the acquaintance of Albert Jay Nock, a man so well described by that colossal Dutchman, Hendrik Willem Van Loon, as being "endowed with profound knowledge, blessed with immense possibilities for the enjoyment of life, and possessed of a rare genius for the handling of words."

ROBERT M. THORNTON

Fort Mitchell, Kentucky  
1970



# Albert Jay Nock

A Note by Jacques Barzun

The imaginary fanatic of the French Revolution who never said, apropos of Lavoisier, that "the Republic has no need of *savants*" enunciated a great truth. It applies, of course, not to any factual reality, but to the emotions of democratic republics.

The oldest and mightiest of such republics, the United States, has adhered to the principle with almost painful fidelity. It has resolutely disregarded its great artists, scientists, and critics, proceeding in its salutary neglect from a correct reasoning that they were a free gift from Providence, not a necessity with a place clearly marked out in the present.

That is why we keep "discovering" those free gifts—Melville, Jonathan Edwards, Henry Adams, Willard Gibbs, Henry James, John Jay Chapman, Albert Jay Nock. As the old man said who kept hiding macaroons among his heaped up papers, "it is such a pleasure to come upon them unexpectedly." And perhaps these artists, critics, men of science are all the better for being aged in the wood. But surely we are not the better for having missed their contemporary effect. For example, Nock's book on education in the United States could have saved us endless mistakes had we heeded it during the past half century. Again, why were we so limited in imagination (though ever boastful of "creativity") that we could not separate Nock's *literal* advice about government from the fruitful implications of his libertarianism for manners and the intellectual life? No harm is done if we read his *Jefferson* as a biography and his Rabelais studies as travel books and compare them with other biographies and studies. But it is harm done to ourselves not to discover in those works an ideal of the complete man and of the moral life. Must we always be moved

only by unreadable books in treatise form, which profess to "tell all" with the aid of quotations and references—that is, others' thoughts pickled in disinfectant scholarship?

Never mind the answer just now. Here is a small book full of Nock's thoughts, as fresh as they were when first minted. It is not all of Nock, and the effect is less than the sum from which they came. But it is a man thinking, which the republic needs more than it thinks—ambiguity intended.

# Reform

It makes me wonder afresh at the curious point of view of the reformer who wants us all to be alike or assumes that we are all alike. One wonders where he could have spent his days.

SELECTED LETTERS, 62

*Il faut cultiver notre jardin.* With these words Voltaire ends his treatise called *Candide*, which in its few pages assays more solid worth, more informed common sense, than the entire bulk of nineteenth-century hedonist literature can show. To my mind, those few concluding words sum up the whole social responsibility of man. The only thing that the psychically-human being can do to improve society is to present society with *one improved unit*. In a word, ages of experience testify that the only way society can be improved is by the individualist method which Jesus apparently regarded as the only one whereby the Kingdom of Heaven can be established as a going concern; that is, the method of each *one* doing his very best to improve one.

MEMOIRS, 307

Thus the notorious failure of reforming and revolutionary movements in the long run may as a rule be found due to their incorrigible superficiality.

THE STATE, 133

My notion is that it is not so important at the moment to try to make people take up with this, that, or the other view, as it is to establish the questions that must be considered before *any* competent view can be formulated. These questions are sunk now in an immense depth of ignorance, and until they are brought up and at least clearly presented, I don't believe the moralist has any chance at all.

SELECTED LETTERS, 115

The sound Pantagruelist knows how and when to treat grave subjects lightly in order to establish a clearer sense of their relative importance and a proportionate respect for their seriousness, never misappraising the one, or misapplying the

other; the attainment of this knowledge is indeed perhaps the prime object and intention of the Pantagruelian philosophy.

MEDITATIONS, 10-11

The wise social philosophers were those who merely hung up their ideas and left them hanging, for men to look at or to pass by, as they chose. Jesus and Socrates did not even trouble to write theirs out, and Marcus Aurelius wrote his only in crabbed memoranda for his own use, never thinking anyone else would see them. They have come down to us by sheer accident.

JOURNAL, 30

Nothing can be done about the liquor problem, the farm problem, problems of public ownership, and the other social problems that afflict us. I say, nothing can be done; that is, nothing except the one thing that will never be acknowledged as necessary, the self-imposed discipline of a whole people in acquiring a brand-new ethos. We have hopefully been trying to live by mechanics alone, the mechanics of pedagogy, of politics, of industry and commerce; and when we find it cannot be done and that we are making a mess of it, instead of experiencing a change of heart, we bend our wits to devise a change in mechanics, and then another change, and then another. . . . (The) clear insistent testimony that a nation's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that it possesseth; that it is the spirit and manners of a people, and not the bewildering multiplicity of its social mechanisms, that determines the quality of its civilization.

JOURNEYMAN, 124-7

## *Education*

The literatures of Greece and Rome comprise the longest and fullest continuous record available to us, of what the human mind has been busy about in practically every department of

spiritual and social activity; every department, I think, except one—music. The record covers twenty-five hundred consecutive years of the human mind's operations in poetry, drama, law, agriculture, philosophy, architecture, natural history, philology, rhetoric, astronomy, politics, medicine, theology, geography, everything. Hence the mind that has attentively canvassed this record is not only a disciplined mind but an *experienced* mind; a mind that instinctively views any contemporary phenomenon from the vantage point of an immensely long perspective attained through this profound and weighty experience of the human spirit's operations. . . . These studies, then, in a word, were regarded as formative because they are *maturing*, because they powerfully inculcate the views of life and the demands on life that are appropriate to maturity and that are indeed the specific marks, the outward and visible signs, of the inward and spiritual grace of maturity. And now we are in a position to observe that the establishment of these views and the direction of these demands is what is traditionally meant, and what we citizens of the republic of letters now mean, by the word *education*; and the constant aim at inculcation of these views and demands is what we know under the name of the Great Tradition of our republic.

EDUCATION, 62-3

How can there be any great men among us until the right relation between formative knowledge and instrumental knowledge becomes implicit in the actual practice and technique of education?

RIGHT THING, 114

Education contemplates another kind of product; what is it? One of the main elements in it, I should say, is the power of disinterested reflection. One unmistakable mark of an educated man is his ability to take a detached, impersonal and competent view of something that deeply engages his affections, one way or the other—something that he likes very much. The study of history has really no other purpose than to help put this mark on a man. If one does not study it with this end in view, there is no use studying it at all.

JOURNEYMAN, 45

As a state-controlled enterprise maintained by taxation, virtually a part of the civil service (like organised Christianity in England and in certain European countries) the system [of compulsory popular education] had become an association *de propaganda fide* for the extreme of a hidebound nationalism and of a superstitious servile reverence for a sacrosanct State. In another view one saw it functioning as a sort of sanhedrin, a leveling agency, prescribing uniform modes of thought, belief, conduct, social deportment, diet, recreation, hygiene; and as an inquisitional body for the enforcement of these prescriptions, for nosing out heresies and irregularities and suppressing them. In still another view one saw it functioning as a trade-unionist body, intent on maintaining and augmenting a set of vested interests; and one noticed that in this capacity it occasionally took shape as an extremely well-disciplined and powerful political pressure-group.

MEMOIRS, 263-4

It is one of my oddest experiences that I have never been able to find anyone who would tell me what the net social value of a compulsory universal literacy actually comes to when the balance of advantage and disadvantage is drawn, or wherein that value consists. The few Socratic questions which on occasion I have put to persons presumably able to tell me have always gone by the board. These persons seemed to think, like Protagoras on the teaching of virtue, that the thing was so self-evident and simple that I should know all about it without being told; but in the hardness of my head or heart I still do not find it so. Universal literacy helps business by extending the reach of advertising and increasing its force; and also in other ways. Beyond that I see nothing on the credit side. On the debit side, it enables scoundrels to beset, dishevel, and debauch such intelligence as is in the power of the vast majority of mankind to exercise. There can be no doubt of this, for the evidence of it is daily spread wide before us on all sides. More than this, it makes many articulate who should not be so, and otherwise would not be so. It enables mediocrity and submediocrity to run rampant, to the detriment of both intelligence and taste. In a word, it puts into a people's hands an instrument which very few can use,

but which everyone supposes himself fully able to use; and the mischief thus wrought is very great. My observations leave me no chance of doubt about the side on which the balance of social advantage lies, but I do not by any means insist that it does lie there.

MEMOIRS, 48-9

Not until much later, when I had seen something of mass-education and observed its results, did I perceive how great this advantage is. With Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other, the student gets the best out of Hopkins and gets as much of it as he can absorb; the law of diminishing returns does not touch him. Add twenty students, and neither he nor the twenty gets the same thing; add two hundred, and it is luck if anybody gets anything remotely like the same thing. All Souls College, Oxford, planned better than it knew when it limited the number of its undergraduates to four; four is exactly the right number for any college which is really intent on getting results. Socrates chatting with a single protagonist meant one thing, and well did he know it. Socrates lecturing to a class of fifty would mean something woefully different, so he organized no class and did no lecturing. Jerusalem was a university town, and in a university every day is field day for the law of diminishing returns. Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem and talked with fishermen here and there, who seem to have pretty well got what he was driving at; some better than others, apparently, but all on the whole pretty well. And so we have it that unorganised Christianity was one thing, while organised Christianity has consistently been another.

MEMOIRS, 51

Education, in a word, leads a person on to ask a great deal more from life than life, as at present organized, is willing to give him; and it begets dissatisfaction with the rewards that life holds out. Training tends to satisfy him with very moderate and simple returns. A good income, a home and family, the usual run of comforts and conveniences, diversions addressed only to the competitive or sporting spirit or else to raw sensation—training not only makes directly for getting these, but also for an inert and comfortable contentment with them.

Well, these are all that our present society has to offer, so it is undeniably the best thing all round to keep people satisfied with them, which training does, and not to inject a subversive influence, like education, into this easy complacency. Politicians understand this—it is their business to understand it—and hence they hold up “a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage” as a satisfying social ideal. But the mischief of education is its exorbitance. The educated lad may like stewed chicken and motorcars as well as anybody, but his education had bred a liking for other things too, things that the society around him does not care for and will not countenance. It has bred tastes which society resents as culpably luxurious, and will not connive at gratifying. Paraphrasing the old saying, education sends him out to shift for himself with a champagne appetite amidst a gin-guzzling society.

FREE SPEECH, 216

## *Nature and Truth*

When the men of science have said all their say about the human mind and heart, how far they are from accounting for all their phenomena, or from answering the simple, vital questions that one asks them! What *is* the power by which a certain number and order of air vibrations is translated into processes of great emotional significance? If anyone can answer that question believe me, he is just the man I want to see.

SELECTED LETTERS, 22-3

But unfortunately Nature reckes little of the nobleness prompting any human enterprise. Perhaps it is rather a hard thing to say, but the truth is that Nature seems much more solicitous about her reputation for order than she is about keeping up her character for morals. Apparently no pressure of noble and unselfish moral earnestness will cozen the sharp old lady into countenancing a breach of order. Hence any enterprise, how-



ever nobly and disinterestedly conceived, will fail if it be not also organized intelligently.

FREE SPEECH, 172

Truth is a cruel flirt, and must be treated accordingly. Court her abjectly, and she will turn her back; feign indifference, and she will throw herself at you with a coaxing submission. Try to force an acquaintance—try to make her put on her company manners for a general public—and she will revolt them like an ugly termagant; let her take her own way and her own time, and she will show all her fascinations to every-one who has eyes to see them.

SNORING, 67-8

I saw reports lately of an astonishing thing that took place in England. A committee of high-grade scientifickers watched a young Indian walk twice through a trench filled with fire. They examined his feet immediately afterward and found not a blister or an abrasion of any indication that would normally appear. This has given rise to a great deal of comment, most of it frankly puzzled. Garvin, in *The Observer*, says, the most that can be made of it is that apparently mind sometimes works upon matter through channels which we have not yet explored. For my own part, I like to take it as backing up a belief I have long had, that God is a being of very delicate, refined, and delightful humour. I can imagine that when we have got all our little certitudes down to a fine point, and have prescribed our limitations upon human capacities, and have measured the range of all operations of human faculties, God does something like this in a playful kindly way, just to show us where we get off. I have noticed that such incidents have a way of turning up about every fifteen or twenty years, at intervals just about long enough for human conceit and self-assurance to get their growth. We lay it down absolutely, for instance, that mind cannot possibly operate upon matter in this, that, or the other way. We are sure of it; nothing can be more certain. Then God digs up an East Indian from somewhere or other, puts him through his paces, and says, "There, I think that will probably hold those nincompoops for a while."

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 136-7

Maintaining the order of nature appears to me quite as respectable a miracle as an isolated, momentary, and relatively very insignificant interruption of that order would be. Gravitation, always varying directly as the mass and inversely as the square of the distance, holds the stars in their courses to the farthest reaches of the universe; and here, on a third-rate planet moving in a tenth-rate solar system, it also enabled me this morning to find my shoes exactly where I left them when I took them off last night.

MEMOIRS, 287

Not long ago I read of a fine exhibition of intellectual integrity by a physicist lecturing on magnetic attraction. He told his students that he could describe the phenomena, put them in order, state the problem they present, and perhaps carry it a step or two backward, but as for the final "reason of the thing," the best he could say was that the magnet pulls on the steel because God wants it to.

MEMOIRS, 288

The egregious intellectual dishonesty of the English and Americans comes out strongly in their shirking of the names of things and actions. We got used to "mandates" instead of the gross word "possessions," and "reparations" instead of "indemnity" in the war. Now we accept the dole by calling it "unemployment relief." Shortly we shall have to find some acceptable synonym for inflation, I dare say.

JOURNAL, 125-6

Lord, how the world is given to worshipping words! Eschew the coarse word *slavery*, and you can get glad acceptance for a condition of actual slavery. A man is a slave when his labour-products are appropriated, and his activities are governed by some agency other than himself; that is the essence of slavery. Refrain from using the word Bolshevism, or Fascism, Hitlerism, Marxism, Communism, and you have no troubles getting acceptance for the principle that underlies them all alike—the principle that the State is everything, and the individual nothing.

JOURNAL, 280

# *Economics*

Fundamental economics are very simple; the humblest of us understand and practice them all the time, though we are like Moliere's hero when we do it. The trouble is that convenience introduces complications. Money is a complication; other evidences of debt, such as checks, drafts, notes, bills of exchange, are complications introduced for convenience. Then some person with a predatory sagacity sees a way to exploit the complications and does so; then another and another; indefinitely. When the process of exploitation has gone far enough, there are collisions of predatory interest, and finally a great general dislocation. When this takes place, if people had their minds on fundamentals, they would see that the only thing to do is to recede. But their minds are set on the complications, and all they can think of is driving ahead and devising a new and more intricate lot of complications to pile atop of those that have done the mischief. All this means an increase of power and prestige for the State, and a corresponding degeneration of society.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 94-5

The general preoccupation with money led to several curious beliefs which are now so firmly rooted that one hardly sees how anything short of a collapse of our whole economic system can displace it. One such belief is that commodities—goods and services—can be paid for with money. This is not so. Money does not pay for anything, never has, never will. It is an economic axiom as old as the hills that goods and services can be paid for only with goods and services; but twenty years ago this axiom vanished from everyone's reckoning, and has never reappeared. No one has seemed in the least aware that everything which is paid for must be paid for out of production, for there is no other source of payment.

MEMOIRS, 246

All this disgusting humbug about money! It would be as easy to devise an international currency as to devise postage-stamps, were it not for the element of speculation. At present, money

is not only a medium of exchange; it is also a commodity, like pork, which a crew of swindling scoundrels can gamble with; and naturally, governments will not do anything to divest it of this latter character.

JOURNAL, 220

The sum of my observations was that during the last twenty years money has been largely diverted from its function as a mere convenience, a medium of exchange, a sort of general claim-check on production, and has been slyly knaved into an instrument of political power. It is now part of an illusionist's apparatus to do tricks with on the political stage—to aid the performer in the obscenities incident to the successful conduct of his loathsome profession. The inevitable consequences are easily foreseen; one need not speak of them; but the politician, like the stockbroker, cannot afford to take the long-time point of view on anything. The jobholder, be he president or be he prince, dares not look beyond the moment. All the concern he dares have with the future is summed up in the saying, *Après moi le deluge*.

MEMOIRS, 247

Every government that has cheapened its currency has been knavishly false to a trust; so have those which, like ours, use public funds to subsidize large-scale gambling and swindling.

JOURNAL, 139

I have been thinking of how old some of our brand-new economic nostrums really are. Price-regulation by State authority (through State purchase, like our Farm Board) was tried in China about 350 B.C. It did not work. It was tried again, with State distribution, in the first century A.D., and did not work. Private trading was suppressed in the second century B.C., and regional planning was tried a little later. They did not work; the costs were too high. In the eleventh century A.D., a plan like the R.F.C. was tried, but again cost too much. State monopolies are very old; there were two in China in the seventh century B.C. I suppose there is not a single item on the modern politician's agenda that was not tried and found wanting ages ago.

JOURNAL, 254

It is the depression, of course—there is so devilish much unemployment that you can't get anybody to do any work on anything.

JOURNAL, 268

How odd it is that while Socialism can not muster a corporal's guard of voters in this country, the successive steps that lead directly to a Socialist regime (of course under another name) are not dreaded or deplored by anyone, but are taken willingly and gladly. The Federal Farm Board, the adventures of the State in railway-control, in aviation, road-building, control of shipping and waterways, the endless run of so-called "social" legislation—well, there you have it. Now the cry is to set up "national planning" of industry under a Board of Economic Control. Why not honourably and candidly swallow the dose, name and all?

JOURNAL, 270

All these things have to be paid for out of production, and production can be overloaded, as it has been in all countries, until it becomes swaybacked under its burden of paper obligations.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 177

A falling stock market seems to clarify and stimulate thought. When it is rising, nobody cares to know why or how, but when it falls, everyone is very eager to know all about it, and yards of explanation come out in the newspapers from pundits in our colleges and the investment departments of our banks.

JOURNAL, 60

Reports seem to show that the regular pre-election effort to start a boom in the stock market is on. Americans have a strange notion that the ordinary laws of economics do not apply to them, so doubtless they will think they are prosperous if the boom starts, and that deficits and indebtedness are merely signs of how prosperous they are.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 123

As Herbert Spencer has shown, no man or body of men has ever been wise enough to foresee and take account of all the factors affecting blanket-measures designed for the improvement of in-

corporated humanity. Some contingency unnoticed, unlooked for, perhaps even unforeknown, has always come in to give the measure a turn entirely foreign to its original intention; almost always a turn for the worse, sometimes for the better, but invariably different. It is this which predestines to ultimate failure every collectivist scheme of "economic planning," "social security," and the like, even if it were ever so honestly conceived and incorruptibly administered; which as long as Epstein's law remains in force, no such scheme can be.

MEMOIRS, 261

Economism then (after 1870) had a clear field. The European spirit was everywhere promptly replaced by the spirit of an unintelligent, myopic, dogged, militant, political and economic nationalism, and the war of 1914 fixed this spirit upon Europe forever, as far as one can see. Wilson's shallow stultiloquence about "self-determination" and the "rights of small nations" rationalised it everywhere to the complete satisfaction of the political mind, and gave it respectability as good sound separatist doctrine. Epstein's law immediately and on all sides swept in an enormous herd of political adventurers, the innumerable Pilsudskis, Horthys, Kerenskys, Masryks, Beneshes, big and little, and kept them working tooth and nail to provide pasturage for themselves in a mishmash of little twopenny succession-states. In each of these, strictly according to pattern, they made it their first business to surround themselves with a high-tariff wall and order up a first-class army.

MEMOIRS, 163-4

We all now know pretty well, probably, that the primary reason for a tariff is that it enables the exploitation of the domestic consumer by a process indistinguishable from sheer robbery.

THE STATE, 125

. . . the great truth which apparently must forever remain unlearned, that if a regime of complete economic freedom be established, social and political freedom will follow automatically; and until it is established neither social nor political freedom can exist. Here one comes in sight of the reason why the

State will never tolerate the establishment of economic freedom. In a spirit of sheer conscious fraud, the State will at any time offer its people "four freedoms," or six, or any number; but it will never let them have economic freedom. If it did, it would be signing its own death warrant, for as Lenin pointed out, "it is nonsense to make any pretense of reconciling the State and liberty." Our economic system being what it is, and the State being what it is, all the mass of verbiage about "the free peoples" and "the free democracies" is merely so much obscene buffoonery.

MEMOIRS, 211

## War

A few months ago a member of the Administration asked me if I thought we were "gypped on this war (WWII)," and I replied briefly that I did. I could not enter into any discussion of the matter, for my questioner would not have understood a word I said; or perhaps might not even have believed me if I had explained that anything like military victory or military defeat was farthest from my thought. I could not explain that a boatman moving around in the Gulf of St. Malo or in the Bay of Fundy is not at all interested in what the waves are doing, but is mightily interested in what the tide is doing, and still more interested in what it is going to do.

After the war of 1914, Western society lived at a much lower level of civilisation than before. This was what interested me. Military victory and military defeat made no difference whatever with this outcome; they meant merely that the waves were running this way or that way. The great bulk underlying and carrying the waves, the tidal mass, was silently moving out at its appointed speed. So likewise I might have told my questioner that we are "gypped on this war" because not victory, not defeat, not stalemate, can possibly affect the tidal motion of a whole society towards a far lower level of civilisation.

MEMOIRS, 249-50

The truth about these is, simply, that all nations would be glad to abolish war, but are not willing to let go of advantages which they know they can not keep without war. Hence the indispensable condition precedent to abolishing wars is that the nations should experience a change of heart and exercise repentance and seek justification by faith. It is the disinterested acceptance of a new mode of thought, and the entrance into a new spirit. Nothing else will answer; that fact is plain to anyone with any measure of common sense. . . . Meanwhile good works like the disarmament conferences . . . represent no actual self-transformation on the part of the nations, nor a real desire for any. Hence they not only fail of their good intentions, but become the instruments of a peculiarly cruel deceit; they have the nature of sin.

FREE SPEECH, 31-2

Lately I have thought that we pacifists were barking up the wrong tree in laying so much stress on the horrors of war. I am coming to be much less interested in what war does to people at the time, and much more in what it does to them after it is over.

LETTERS, 96-7

In "liberating" France, Poland, Persia, the Danube states, we have merely made your uncle Joseph [Stalin] a present of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Europe. By conquering Japan we shall make him a free gift of as much of China as he wants.

LETTERS, 194

Armaments have a great deal less to do with starting a war than people think they have. I hate to play into the hands of the militarists by saying so, for they are the most objectionable people in the world, as a class; but the truth is as I have said. There are fashions in everything, and it has been the fashion for some time to overplay the influence of armament in war-breeding. Armament has a deal to do with deciding wars, but not much with starting them. Neither has war talk, this, too helps a war along, once the war gets going, but it has little to do with bringing one on. What I mean is, for example, if there were no collision of economic interest between Great Britain and us, the two countries might run all kinds of armament races and blackguard each other indefinitely with might and



main, but no war would come of it. The truth is, however, that armament races and war talk never do set in unless such a collision is either present or impending. When they set in, therefore, sensible people do not fool away their attention on absurd schemes for limiting armaments or hushing war talk; they look around to see where the economic collision is, and what, if anything, can be done about it.

"Mr. Smith and Mr. Smythe," HARPER'S, *May*, 1929

As long as you have nations, you will have armaments; and as long as you have nationalism, you will have nations; and you will have nationalism as long as the existing theory of the State predominates. Therefore any talk about disarmament, even if sincere, is superficial and puerile.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 57

## *Politics and Politicians*

The simple truth is that our businessmen do not want a government that will let business alone. They want a government that they can use.

LETTERS, 105

The old proverb about politics making strange bedfellows is quite wrong; it makes the most natural bedfellows in the world. Crook lies down with crook in any bed that interest offers; swine snoozes with swine on the litter of any pen that interest opens.

JOURNAL, 248

It occurred to me then, how little important it is to destroy a government, in comparison with destroying the *prestige* of government.

JOURNAL, 283

When the Presidency goes to a man who does not seek it and does not want it, I shall be interested in what takes place, but not before; and I believe this happened but once in our

history, in 1800. John Randolph's forcible testimony to the absolute disinterestedness of Mr. Jefferson ought to be taken as final, if any be needed, for Randolph was a bitter enemy.

JOURNAL, 167-8

Slave-mindedness is the hateful thing, whether it follows Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt, Mussolini—what matter? Is not the mass-leader, too, the most slave-minded of all? The French revolutionist's saying, "I *must* follow the mob, because I lead them," ought to be embroidered on every national flag, it strikes me. How right Huxley was about what he called the coach-dog theory of political leadership, i.e., that a leader's duty is to look sharp for which way the social coach is going, and then run in front of it and bark.

JOURNAL, 231-2

I once voted at a Presidential election. There being no real issue at stake, and neither candidate commanding any respect whatever, I cast my vote for Jefferson Davis, of Mississippi. I knew Jeff was dead, but I voted on Artemus Ward's principle that if we can't have a live man who amounts to anything, by all means let's have a first-class corpse. I still think that vote was as effective as any of the millions that have been cast since then.

JOURNAL, 73-4

Bureaucracy is ineradicable as a cancer, when once it gets well-rooted.

JOURNAL, 141

How interesting it is, that in this most pretentious and swaggering country, a man can get himself elected to any kind of office on the strength of any kind of promises, then disregard them at his utter pleasure, with no action taken, or even any notice taken.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 51

I wonder sometimes—though knowing our public as I do, I should not—why so few people seem aware that the principle of absolutism was introduced into the Constitution by the income-tax amendment.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 59

The problem of "relief" seems still to be a problem, and it will

continue to be one until it is solved in a way that nobody will like. No country was ever yet rich enough to feed all its idle people, nor is ours. When Rome began to subsidize its populace, it signed its own death certificate, and our bold start on "unemployment relief" last year was a signal to the undertaker to clear for action. JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 61

Politicians leap with joy on this-or-that proposed advance in "social legislation," not out of any primary interest in social welfare, but because it means more government, more jobs, more patronage, more diversions of public money to their own use and behoof; and what but a flagrant disservice to society can accrue from that? SNORING, 191

Indeed, the very cartoons on the subject show how widely it has come to be accepted that party platforms, with their cant of "issues," are so much sheer quackery, and that campaign promises are merely another name for thimblerrigging. The workaday practice of politics has been invariably opportunist, or in other words, invariably conformable to the primary function of the State; and it is largely for this reason that the State's service exerts its most powerful attraction upon an extremely low and sharp-set type of individual.

THE STATE, 179

The pressure of centralization has tended powerfully to convert every official and every political aspirant in the smaller units into a venal and complaisant agent of the federal bureaucracy.

THE STATE, 13

Since 1860, Liberals had been foremost in loading up the statute-book with one coercive measure of "social legislation" after another in hot succession, each of which had the effect of diminishing social power and increasing State power. In so doing, the Liberals were manifestly going dead against their traditional principles. They had abandoned the principle of voluntary social cooperation, and embraced the old-line Tory principle of enforced cooperation. Not only so, but they had transformed themselves into a band of political Frankensteins.

By busily cutting down the liberty of the individual piecemeal, and extending the scope of the State's coercive control, their work was reaching the point where a few easy finishing-touches would reduce the individual to a condition of complete State-servitude; thus bringing forth the monster of collectivism, ravenous and rampant. . . .

On every point of conventional morality, all the Liberals I have personally known were very trustworthy. They were great fellows for the Larger Good, but it would have to be pretty large before they would alienate your wife's affections or steal your watch. But on any point of intellectual integrity, there is not one of them whom I would trust for ten minutes alone in a room with a red-hot stove, unless the stove were comparatively valueless.

Liberals generally—there may have been exceptions, but I do not know who they were—joined in the agitation for an income tax, in utter disregard of the fact that it meant writing the principle of absolutism into the Constitution. Nor did they give a moment's thought to the appalling social effects of an income tax; I never once heard this aspect of the matter discussed. Liberals were also active in promoting the "democratic" movement for the popular election of senators. It certainly took no great perspicacity to see that these two measures would straightway ease our political system into collectivism as soon as some Eubulus, some mass-man overgifted with sagacity, should manoeuvre himself into popular leadership; and in the nature of things, this would not be long.

MEMOIRS, 124-6

The political liberal is the most dangerous person in the world to be entrusted with power, for no one knows what he will do with it; and the worst of him is, that whatever he does, he will persuade himself that it was the divinely-appointed thing to be done, e.g., Mr. Wilson at the Peace Conference. . . . The Liberal has no character, only stubbornness; and there is nothing he will not do. . . . I have known many political liberals in my lifetime, some very highly placed, and there is none of them whom I would willingly see again, either in this world or in the next.

JOURNAL, 10-11

At any time after 1936 it was evident that a European war would not be unwelcome to the Administration at Washington; largely as a means of diverting public attention from its flock of uncouth economic chickens on their way home to roost, but chiefly as a means of strengthening its malign grasp upon the country's political and economic machinery.

MEMOIRS, 247-8

## *The State*

To take another example, the present state of public affairs shows clearly enough that the State is the poorest instrument imaginable for improving human society, and that confidence in political institutions and political nostrums is ludicrously misplaced. Social philosophers in every age have been strenuously insisting that all this sort of fatuity is simply putting the cart before the horse; that society cannot be moralized and improved unless and until the individual is moralized and improved. Jesus insisted on this; it is the fundamental principle of Christian social philosophy. Pagan sages, ancient sages, modern sages, a whole apostolic succession running all the way from Confucius and Epictetus down to Nietzsche, Ibsen, William Penn, and Herbert Spencer—all these have insisted on it.

MEDITATIONS, 20-1

Probably not many realize how the rapid centralization of government in America has fostered a kind of organized pauperism. The big industrial states constitute most of the Federal revenue, and the bureaucracy distributes it in the pauper states wherever it will do the most good in a political way. The same thing takes place within the states themselves. In fostering pauperism it also by necessary consequences fosters corruption; obviously it is impossible to have any but a corrupt government under these conditions, either in state or nation. All this is due to the iniquitous theory of taxation

with which this country has been so thoroughly indoctrinated—that a man should be taxed according to his ability to pay, instead of according to the value of the privileges he obtains from the government.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 5

The worst of this ever growing cancer of Statism is its moral effect. The country is rich enough to stand its frightful economic wastage for a long time yet, and still prosper, but it is already so poverty-stricken in its moral resources that the present drain will quickly run them out.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 12

This is of a piece, however, with the general truth that as government consolidates and strengthens, the power of independent moral judgment in the citizenry weakens; and this is one of the most interesting phenomena of our time. One sees it in every country where Statism prevails—Italy, Germany, Russia, etc.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 26

One would think people might sometime be led to fathom out the underlying reason why, in general, political organization thrives on policies that would be fatal to nonpolitical organization; and whether *ipso facto* political organization is not inimical to society.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 58

I suppose that in the whole country today one would have to go a long way to find a boy or girl of twenty who does not automatically take for granted that the citizen exists for the State, not the State for the citizen; that the individual has no rights which the State is bound to respect; that all rights are State-created; that the State is morally irresponsible; that personal government is quite consistent with democracy, provided, of course, it be exercised in the right country and by the right kind of person; that collectivism changes character according to the acceptability of the peoples who practice it. Such is the power of conditioning inherent in a State-controlled system of compulsory popular instruction.

MEMOIRS, 265

Some of the more adventurous spirits, apparently under the effects of Mr. Wilson's inspiration, went so far as to propose educating all mankind into setting up a World State which should supersede the separatist nationalist State; on the principle, so it seemed, that if a spoonful of prussic acid will kill you, a bottleful is just what you need to do you a great deal of good.

MEMOIRS, 266

Even a successful revolution, even if such a thing were conceivable, against the military tyranny which is Statism's last expedient, would accomplish nothing. The people would be as thoroughly indoctrinated with Statism after the revolution as they were before, and therefore the revolution would be no revolution, but a *coup d'Etat*, by which the citizen would gain nothing but a mere change of oppressors. There have been many revolutions in the last twenty-five years, and thus has been the sum of their history. They amount to no more than an impressive testimony to the great truth that there can be no right action except there be right thinking behind it. As long as the easy, attractive, superficial philosophy of Statism remains in control of the citizen's mind, no beneficent social change can be affected, whether by revolution or by any other means.

MAN, XIV

The question I wish to raise is whether it is possible for human beings to be happy under a regime of absolutism. By happiness I mean happiness. I do not mean the exhilaration arising from a degree of physical well-being, or the exaltation that comes from a brisk run of money-getting or money-spending, or the titillations and distractions brought on by the appeal to raw sensation, or the fanatical quasi-religious fervor that arises from participation in some mass-enterprise—as in Russia and Germany, at the moment. I refer to a stable condition of mind and spirit quite above anything of that kind; a condition so easily recognized and so well understood that I do not need to waste space on trying to define it.

SNORING, 26

Let us suppose that instead of being slow, extravagant, inefficient, wasteful, unadaptive, stupid, and at least by tendency

corrupt, the State changes its character entirely and becomes infinitely wise, good, disinterested, efficient, so that anyone may run to it with any little two-penny problem and have it solved for him at once in the wisest and best way possible. Suppose the State close-herds the individual so far as to forestall every conceivable consequence of his own bad judgment, weakness, incompetence; suppose it confiscates all his energy and resources and employs them much more advantageously all round than he can employ them if left to himself. My question still remains—what sort of person is the individual likely to become under those circumstances? SNORING, 27

The State is no proper agency for social welfare, and never will be, for exactly the same reason that an ivory paperknife is nothing to shave with. The interests of society and of the State do not coincide; any pretense that they can be made to coincide is sheer nonsense. Society gets on best when people are most happy and contented, which they are when freest to do as they please and what they please; hence society's interest is in having as little government as possible, and in keeping it decentralized as possible. The State, on the other hand, is administered by jobholders; hence its interest is in having as much government as possible. It is hard to imagine two sets of interests more directly opposed than these.

SNORING, 191

If we look beneath the surface of our public affairs, we can discern one fundamental fact, namely: a great redistribution of power between society and State. This is the fact that interests the student of civilization. He has only a secondary or derived interest in matters like price-fixing, wage-fixing, inflation, political banking, "agricultural adjustment," and similar items of State policy that fill the pages of newspapers and the mouths of publicists and politicians. All these can be run up under one head. They have an immediate and temporary importance, and for this reason they monopolize public attention, but they all come to the same thing: which is, an increase of State power and a corresponding decrease of social power.

THE STATE, 3



It is obvious that private forms of these enterprises must tend to dwindle in proportion as the energy of the State's encroachments on them increases, for the competition of social power with State power is always disadvantaged, since the State can arrange the terms of competition to suit itself, even to the point of outlawing any exercise of social power whatever in the premises; in other words, giving itself a monopoly.

THE STATE, 8-9

The method of direct subsidy, or sheer cash-purchase, will therefore in all probability soon give way to the indirect method of what is called "social legislation"; that is, a multiplex system of State-managed pensions, insurances, and indemnities of various kinds.

THE STATE, 17

It is easy to provide the appearance of any desired concession of State power, without the reality; our history shows innumerable instances of very easy dealing with problems in practical politics much more difficult than that. One may remark in this connection also the notoriously baseless assumption that party-designations connote principles, and that party pledges imply performance. Moreover, underlying these assumptions and all others that faith in "political action" contemplates, is the assumption that the interests of the State and the interests of society are, at least theoretically, identical; whereas in theory they are directly opposed, and this opposition invariably declares itself in practice to the precise extent that circumstances permit.

THE STATE, 19

The positive testimony of history is that the State invariably had its origin in conquest and confiscation. No primitive State known to history originated in any other manner. On the negative side, it has been proved beyond peradventure that no primitive State could possibly have had any other origin. Moreover, the sole invariable characteristic of the State is the economic exploitation of one class by another.

THE STATE, 44-5

There are two methods, or means, and only two, whereby man's needs and desires can be satisfied. One is the production and exchange of wealth; this is the *economic means*. The other is the uncompensated appropriation of wealth produced by others; this is the *political means*. . . .

The State, then, whether primitive, feudal or merchant, is *the organization of the political means*. Now, since man tends always to satisfy his needs and desires with the least possible exertion, he will employ the political means whenever he can—exclusively, if possible; otherwise, in association with the economic means. He will, at the present time, that is, have recourse to the State's modern apparatus of exploitation; the apparatus of tariffs, concessions, rent monopoly, and the like.

THE STATE, 59-61

Wherever economic exploitation has been for any reason either impracticable or unprofitable, the State has never come into existence; government has existed, but the State, never.

THE STATE, 47

Based on the idea of natural rights, government secures those rights to the individual by strictly negative intervention, making justice costless and easy of access; and beyond that it does not go. The State, on the other hand, both in its genesis and by its primary intention, is purely antisocial. It is not based on the idea of natural rights, but on the idea that the individual has no rights except those that the State may provisionally grant him. It has always made justice costly and difficult of access, and has invariably held itself above justice and common morality whenever it could advantage itself by so doing.

THE STATE, 49-50

It is of great help, for example, in accounting for the open and notorious fact that the State always moves slowly and grudgingly toward any purpose that accrues to society's advantage, but moves rapidly and with alacrity toward one that accrues to its own advantage; nor does it ever move toward social purposes on its own initiative, but only under heavy pressure, while its motion toward antisocial purposes is self-sprung.

THE STATE, 51-2

The historical method, moreover, establishes the important fact that, as in the case of tabetic or parasitic diseases, the depletion of social power by the State cannot be checked after a certain point of progress is passed. History does not show an instance where, once beyond this point, this depletion has not ended in complete and permanent collapse. . . . Of two things, however, we may be certain: the first is, that the rate of America's approach of that point is being prodigiously accelerated; and the second is, that there is no evidence of any disposition to retard it, or any intelligent apprehension of the danger which that acceleration betokens.

THE STATE, 63-4

Instead of recognizing the State as "the common enemy of all well-disposed, industrious and decent men," the run of mankind, with rare exceptions, regards it not only as a final and indispensable entity, but also as, in the main, beneficent.

THE STATE, 148

My point is, that if the State were limited to purely *negative* interventions which I enumerated, and had no oversize power beyond that, then it wouldn't be the State any more. It would then be *government* only. . . . The point is only that when Society deprives the State of power to make positive interventions on the individual—power to make positive coercions upon him at any point in his economic and social life—then at once the *State* goes out of existence, and what remains is *government*.

LETTERS, 195-6

## Society

There is a greater difference between Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Sophocles, and the man of the crowd, than there is between the man of the crowd and the higher anthropoids; but in our institutional view, Socrates and the man of the crowd alike count one.

JOURNAL, 44

"Man will become more clever and sagacious," said Goethe, "but not better, happier, or showing more resolute wisdom; or at least, only at periods." Inevitably so. Cleverness and sagacity are traits which the Neolithic man shares with his humbler relatives in the animal world; he owes his survival to his immense superiority in combining and managing the two. In respect of the other traits he is devoid of capacity; they characterize the human being. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is found in the apparent anomaly which so baffled Mr. Jefferson and Henry Adams: that with all man's marvelous ability to invent things which are potentially good, he can always be counted on to make the worst possible use of what he invents; as witness the radio, printing press, aeroplane, and the internal-combustion engine. . . . The problem of conduct here presented is past all resolving. Mr. Jefferson gave it up in despair, saying, "What a Bedlamite is man!"

MEMOIRS, 214-5

What was the best that the State could find to do with an actual Socrates and an actual Jesus when it had them? Merely to poison the one and crucify the other, for no reason but that they were too intolerably embarrassing to be allowed to live any longer.

MEMOIRS, 274

Every person of any character, I think, wants above all to keep the integrity of his personality intact, and under the idea of organization that prevails in this country, that seems impossible unless one stays out pretty resolutely.

JOURNAL, 55

It seems that the time has come to point the moral; and in so doing, we come in sight of the one and only service that Americans can render—not the American Government, but such Americans as are candid enough and flexible enough to have learned a good many things in the past four years, and to have forgotten a good many as well. This service consists in pointing out that matters at stake in Europe can not be settled by machinery alone; they must be settled by a wider culture, a firmer will, and a better spirit. The League of Nations is machinery, and so is the World Court; machinery,

moreover, devised for an entirely different purpose from that to which the interventionists would invoke it. This is plain to everyone; as plain as that a reaper is not designed to pull a train. The thing is to abandon a blind and unintelligent faith in machinery, and to give oneself over to the promotion of a culture competent really to envisage a world order of peace and freedom erected upon the only basis able to sustain it, the basis of social justice. Those who do this are the true interventionists; they proffer Europe the only real help that Americans can give. The interventionists here, and those abroad who ask our aid, never show, we regret to say, that they are concerned by the injustices that afflict Europe; they are concerned only by the inconveniences arising from her condition. Even the British liberals who lately addressed a communication to Americans at large, show hardly more than a perfunctory concern with injustice, but an enormous concern with inconvenience.

The time has come, in our opinion, to disallow all this and to reaffirm the revolutionary doctrine set forth in the Declaration of Independence, that the Creator has endowed human beings with certain inalienable rights; to give more interest to principles and less to machinery; to think less about acting and organizing and instituting, and more about establishing a culture that will afford a proper foundation for national action. The time has come, in short, for inaugurating a really moral movement instead of protracting the succession of ludicrous and filthy hypocrisies which have so long passed for moral movements; for an interest in justice and a belief in human rights wherever there are human beings—in Egypt and Haiti, India and Santo Domingo, quite as much as in Corfu or the Ruhr. It is all very well to go about establishing justice and human rights, in the time of it; but the first step towards establishing them is to believe in them, and that is the step to be taken now.

FREEMAN, 124-6

Railways, banks, telephones, finance companies, industrial development, newspapers—all such things are most commonly and generally accepted among us as absolute goods in themselves, quite irrespective of their effect upon the spirit of the

individual life, and the quality of the collective life, which are lived under their influence. . . .

Again, we read not long ago a statement by the president of a great chemical concern, in which he predicted that science would possibly before long enable us to produce synthetic food, cheap fuel, artificial wool; to store solar heat, to do without sleep, and to prolong mental and physical vigour. The tone of the statement left no doubt that this chemist regarded all these matters as absolute goods in themselves, whereas clearly they are nothing of the kind. If they are made to tend towards the enrichment and deepening of the spiritual life of man, they will be good; if they are made to tend against it, they will be bad; if they are made to tend neither way, they are of no consequence except in point of curiosity, like Mark Twain's toadstool.

Again, we lately saw the advertisement of a life-extension institute, headed, "Do You Want to Add Ten Years to Your Life?" Here once more the obvious assumption was that longevity is in itself a good and desirable thing. But is it? There is of course in all of us the primary instinct of self-preservation which speaks out strongly in favour of living as long as we can; and it is to this instinct, this irrational and almost bloodthirsty clinging to life, that the advertisement was intended to appeal. As such it seemed to us, we admit, a little ignoble; we were reminded, as all such enterprises which are now so much in vogue remind us, of Julius Caesar's remark that life is not worth having at the expense of an ignoble solicitude about it. But instinct apart, the worth of such enterprises is measured surely, by the quality of the life which we are invited to prolong. The content of the average life being what it is, and its prospects of spiritual enlargement and enrichment being what they are, may longevity be so indubitably regarded as an absolute good that one is justified in an almost ferocious effort to attain it?

We are not now concerned that these questions be answered; we are concerned only that they be raised. We are concerned with the habit, which seems to us unintelligent and vicious, of regarding potential accessories to civilization as essential elements in civilization. We insist that civilization is not to

be measured in terms of longevity, trackage, the abundance of banks and newspapers, the speed and frequency of mails, and the like. Civilization is the progressive humanization of men in society, and all these things may or may not sustain a helpful relation to the process. At certain periods and places, indeed, the process has been carried notably further without any of them than it is now carried with all of them. When we learn to regard them intelligently, when we persuade ourselves that their benefit is potential and relative, not actual and absolute, then we are in the way of intelligently and quickly applying them to the furtherance of true civilization; but as long as we unintelligently regard them as absolute goods in themselves, we shall merely fumble with them.

THE FREEMAN, 134-6

Of course, the great trouble, the notable weakness of our civilization is that from first to last, no one cares for the theory of anything. . . . We are opportunists—in politics, in commerce, in education, and in morals. . . . Sometimes I think I should like to move to any country where there was a sense of logic and lucidity, and some kind of relief from the everlasting hypocrisy with which we cover our failure in both and our lack of interest in both. Our failure in logic and lucidity is our most damaging inheritance from the Anglo-Saxon stock, and our miserable canting hypocrisy about it is the most contemptible. I even think I could go to Prussia and be hammered around by the police awhile, if only they didn't pretend they were doing it for the glory of God or to make the world safe for democracy or some other loathsome humbug.

SELECTED LETTERS, 93-4

The sight of them set me once more to wondering why there is always most fuss made over an evil or injustice at the time when it is least prevalent. We were well on our way to becoming a sober people when the great cry for prohibition arose. The demand for "women's rights" became urgent when women were treated better than they had ever been, and when they were worst treated there was no demand. The same is true of

the demand for justice to the proletariat. I could never understand why this is so, but it seems to be a general rule.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 102

One can go from New York to Chicago in four hours, and the morning papers of either town can be read in the other at noon, and this is supposed to be a valuable achievement—but why? One goes from a vacuous dishevelled life in Chicago, and the newspapers merely inform one that such is the kind of life lived in both places. I doubt greatly that the sum total of human happiness is increased by increasing facilities for keeping the human body in rapid motion; or that the capacity for enjoyment is enhanced; I should say rather the opposite.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 114-5

There is no social engineering that can radically renovate a civilization and change its character, and at the same time keep it going, for civilization is an affair of the human spirit, and the direction of the human spirit cannot be reset by means that are, after all, mechanical. The best thing is to follow the order of nature, and let a moribund civilization simply rot away, and indulge what hope one can that it will be followed by one that is better. This is the course that nature will take with such a civilization anyway, in spite of anything we do or do not do. Revolts, revolutions, dictatorships, experiments and innovations in political practice, all merely mess up this process and make it a sadder and sorrier business than it need be. They are only so much machinery, and machinery will not express anything beyond the intentions and character of those who run it.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 117

I merely observe that I have never been able to see "society" otherwise than as a concourse of very various individuals about which, as a whole, not many general statements can be safely made. The individual seems to be the fundamental thing; all the character society has is what the prevailing character of the individuals in its environment gives it. MEMOIRS, 306



I have no idea how the problem of these two American minorities will finally be settled. I regret to say my conviction is that they will be dealt with in the traditional manner, with immediate results which one does not care to contemplate; that is to say, they will not be settled at all. I know, however, that the problem of no minority anywhere can be settled unless and until two preliminaries are established. First, that the principle of equality before the law be maintained without subterfuge and with the utmost vigour. Second, that this principle be definitely understood as carrying no social implications of any kind whatever. "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following," said Shylock; "but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you."

These two preliminaries demand a much clearer conception of natural as well as legal rights than I think can ever prevail in America. The French have this conception well established. If I choose to associate with Negroes, and they choose to have me do so, whatever the terms of the association may be, I am within my rights and so are they. If I insist on other Negroes forming like associations, I exceed my rights; if Negroes insist on others of my race forming them, they exceed their rights. The doctrine of equality does not carry any competence in the premises to justify either the Negroes or myself. The most agreeable and improving social relations which I have enjoyed of late in America have been with a coterie of Jews living in Pennsylvania. If they had found me unacceptable and had excluded me, the doctrine of equality would have suffered no infringement; nor would it if a Negro-hotel-keeper or Jewish restaurateur had turned me away; nor if the white proprietor of a theater had refused to let it for a performance by Negro or Jewish actors and actresses. The principle of equality carries no implications of this kind, and the attempt to foist them on that principle is an error of the first magnitude.

MEMOIRS, 255-6

Mankind had been striving after forms of organisation, both political and social, too large for their capacities; believing that because they could organise a small unit like the family, the

village, even the township, with fair-to-middling success, they could likewise successfully carry on with a state, a province, a nation. Just so the lemmings on their migrations, finding themselves able to cross small bodies of water, think, when they come to the ocean, that it is just another body of water like the others they have crossed; and so they swim until they drown. Season after season, they make these attempts, unable to learn that the thing is impracticable. Likewise, age after age, mankind have made the attempt to construct a stable and satisfactory nationalist civil system, unable to learn that nothing like that can, in the nature of things, be done.

MEMOIRS, 256

The behavior of Western society in the last two decades is a simple matter of *prius dementat*, orderly, regular, and to be expected. It presages calamity close at hand, due to the fact that society's structure is built on a foundation of unsound principles.

MEMOIRS, 241

The trouble with the "Western civilization" that we are so proud of and boast so much about, is that it makes such limited demands on the human spirit; such limited demands on the qualities that are distinctly and properly humane, the qualities that distinguish the human being from the robot on the one hand and the brute on the other.

JOURNEYMAN, 120

A nation's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that it possesseth; that it is the spirit and manners of a people, and not the bewildering multiplicity of its social mechanisms, that determines the quality of its civilization.

JOURNEYMAN, 126-7

I could see how "democracy" might do very well in a society of saints and sages led by an Alfred or an Antoninus Pius. Short of that, I was unable to see how it could come to anything but an ochlocracy of mass-men led by a sagacious knave. The collective capacity for bringing forth any other outcome seemed simply not there. To my ideas the incident of Aristides and the Athenian mass-man was perfectly exhibitory of "de-

mocracy" in practice. Socrates could not have got votes enough out of the Athenian mass-men to be worth counting, but Eubulus easily could, and did, wangle enough to keep himself in office as long as the corrupt fabric of the Athenian State held together. As against a Jesus, the historic choice of the mass-man goes regularly to some Barabbas.

MEMOIRS, 131

*Homo sapiens* is so remarkably sapient about the incidence of natural law in the physical world, and so resourceful about adapting himself to it—why, then, is he so impenetrably stupid about recognising the incidence of natural law in the spiritual world, and about accommodating his plans and doings to its inflexible operation? When *Homo sapiens* discovered that electricity always follows the path of least resistance, it took him no time at all to perceive that the thing to do was to arrange a path for lightning to follow, and then stay out of that path. The habits of electricity are a recondite matter, but *Homo sapiens* was equal to discovering and dealing with them intelligently. Why is he apparently unequal to discovering and dealing intelligently with the natural laws which can bear so disastrously upon the social institutions which he attempts to form?

MEMOIRS, 165

In response to an urgent social demand, a revolutionary regime was set up in France in 1789. At the outset it was backed and promoted by men of far-seeing intelligence, including a good part of the aristocracy. . . .

Then at the moment when the revolution became a going concern, Epstean's law brought in a waiting troop of political adventurers whose interest was not social but *institutional*.

Their views of the social demand which brought the revolutionary organisation into being were shaped by that interest. As Benjamin Franklin put it, they were of the sort whose sense of political duty is, first, to themselves; second, to their party; and third (if anything be left over) to society. . . .

Then Gresham's law struck in. As the numbers of this latter group increased, their interest became the prevailing interest, and their view the prevailing view. Social interest

was rapidly driven out, and as almost always happens in the case of political revolutions, those who represented it were lucky if they escaped with their lives.

Then finally the law of diminishing returns took hold. As the institution grew in size and strength, as its confiscations of social power increased in frequency and magnitude, as its coercions upon society multiplied, the welfare of society (which the original intention of the revolution was to promote) became correspondingly depleted and attenuated.

These three laws dog the progress of every organisation of mankind's efforts. Organised charity, organised labor, organised politics, education, religion—look where you will for proof of it, strike into their history at any point of time or place.

MEMOIRS, 165-6

So the popular idea of democracy postulates that there shall be nothing worth enjoying for anybody to enjoy that everybody may not enjoy; and a contrary view is at once exposed to all the evils of a dogged, unintelligent, invincibly suspicious resentment.

The whole institutional life organised under the popular idea of democracy, then, must reflect this resentment. It must aim at no ideals above those of the average man; that is to say, it must regulate itself by the lowest common denominator of intelligence, taste, and character in the society which it represents.

EDUCATION, 51

Whether by one means or another, I was somehow prepared to see, as when I was still quite young I did see, that in our society the purview of legal, religious, and ethical sanctions was monstrously overextended. They had usurped control over an area of conduct much larger than right reason would assign them. On the other hand, I saw that the area of conduct properly answerable to the sanctions of taste and manners was correspondingly attenuated. One could easily understand how this had come about. Law is the creature of politics, as among others Mr. Jefferson, Franklin, and John Adams had clearly perceived, is always determined by an extremely low order of self-interest and self-aggrandisement. Changing the legal

maxim a little, *Est boni politici ampliare jurisdictionem*, as we everywhere see. Again, when Christianity became organised it immediately took on a political character radically affecting its institutional concept of religion and its institutional concept of morals; and the same tendencies observable in secular politics at once set in upon the politics of organised Christianity. Thus the area of conduct in which men were free to recognise the sanctions of taste and manners was still further straitened.

The consequence was that the one set of sanctions atrophied, and the other set broke down; thus leaving human conduct bereft of any sanctions at all, save those of expediency. In other words, each person was left to do that which was right in his own eyes. What with Bentham on one side and the hierarchs of law, religion, and morals on the other, American society had got itself cross-lifted into a practical doctrine of predatory and extremely odious nihilism. When the sanctions of law, religion, and morals broke down through persistent misapplication to matters of conduct quite outside their purview, the sanctions of taste and manners had become too frail and anaemic to be of any practical good. For obvious reasons the resulting state of our society seems beyond hope of improvement. Attempts to galvanize the sanctions of law, religion, and morals for further misapplication are ineffectual; and ineffectual also must be the attempt to root the saving criteria of taste and manners in an ethical soil laid waste by the Benthamite doctrine of expediency. MEMOIRS, 31-2

One of the most offensive things about the society in which I later found myself was its monstrous itch for changing people. It seemed to me a society made up to congenital missionaries, natural-born evangelists and propagandists, bent on re-shaping, re-forming and standardising people according to a pattern of their own devising—and what a pattern it was, good heavens; when one came to examine it. It seemed to me, in short, a society fundamentally and profoundly ill-bred. A very small experience of it was enough to convince me that Cain's heresy was not altogether without reason or without merit; and that conviction quickly ripened into a great horror of

every attempt to change anybody; or I should rather say, every *wish* to change anybody; for that is the important thing. The attempt is relatively immaterial, perhaps, for it is usually its own undoing, but the moment one *wishes* to change anybody, one becomes like the socialists, vegetarians, prohibitionists; and this, as Rabelais says, "is a terrible thing to think upon."

MEMOIRS, 25-6

I would say that a nation exists where there is a sense of participation in a common spiritual heritage, and a will to improve that heritage for the benefit of those to whom it shall be in turn passed on.

FREE SPEECH, 102

A society that gives play only to the instinct of expansion must inevitably be characterized by a low type of intellect, a grotesque type of religion, a factitious type of morals, an imperfect type of beauty, an imperfect type of social life and manners. In a word, it is uncivilized.

FREE SPEECH, 99

Our society has made no place for the individual who is able to think, who is, in the strict sense of the word, intelligent; it merely tosses him into the rubbish heap. . . . Intelligence is the power and willingness always disinterestedly to see things as they are, an easy accessibility to ideas, and a free play of consciousness upon them, quite regardless of the conclusions to which this play may lead.

FREE SPEECH, 137

The word *manners*, unfortunately, has come to be understood as a synonym for deportment; it includes deportment, of course, but it reaches much further. Properly speaking, it covers the entire range of conduct outside the regions where law and morals have control.

RIGHT THING, 187

Now, the experienced mind is aware that all the progress in actual civilisation that society has ever made has been brought about, not by machinery, not by political programmes, platforms, parties, not even by revolutions, but by right thinking.

EDUCATION, 123

. . . mankind's five fundamental social instincts—the instinct of workmanship, of intellect and knowledge, of religion and morals, of beauty and poetry, of social life and manners. A civilized society is one which organizes a full collective expression of all these instincts, and which so regulates this expression as to permit no predominance of one or more of them at the expense of the rest; in short, one which keeps this expression on continual harmony and balance.

FREE SPEECH, 17-8

Our civilization, rich and varied as it may be, is not *interesting*; its general level falls too far below the standard set by the collective experience of mankind.

RIGHT THING, 69

The civilization of a country consists in the quality of life that is lived there, and this quality shows plainest in the things that people choose to talk about when they talk together, and in the way they choose to talk about them.

RIGHT THING, 25

## Art

Current discussions of the philosophy of art remind us that, according to Goethe, a little common sense will sometimes do duty for a great deal of philosophy, but no amount of philosophy will make up for a failure in common sense. It is usually the case that as analysis becomes closer and philosophizing becomes more profound, there is a tendency to obscure certain broad general fundamentals which to the eye of common sense are always apparent; and thus very often the complete truth of the matter is imperfectly apprehended. A great deal of what we read about the arts seems in some such fashion as this to get clear away from the notion that the final purpose of the arts is to give joy; yet common sense, proceeding in its simple, unmethodical manner, would say at once

that this is their final purpose, and that one who did not keep it in mind as such, could hardly hope to arrive at the truth about any of the arts. Matthew Arnold once said most admirably that no one could get at the actual truth about the Bible, who did not enjoy the Bible; and that one who had all sorts of fantastic notions about the origin and composition of the Bible, but who knew how to enjoy the Bible deeply, was nearer the truth about the Bible than one who could pick it all to pieces, but could not enjoy it. Common sense, we believe, would hold this to be true of any work of art.

When Hesiod defined the function of poetry as that of giving "a release from sorrows and a truce from cares," he intimated the final purpose of all great art as that of elevating and sustaining the human spirit through the communication of joy, of felicity; that is to say, of the most simple, powerful, and highly refined emotion that the human spirit is capable of experiencing. This, no doubt, does not exhaust its beneficence; no doubt it works for good in other ways as well; but this is its great and final purpose. It is not to give entertainment or diversion or pleasure, not even to give happiness, but to give joy; and through this distinction, common sense comes immediately upon a test of good and valid art, not infallible, perhaps, but nevertheless quite competent. It is, in fact, the test the common sense of mankind always does apply, consciously or unconsciously, to determine the quality of good art. Great critics, too, from Aristotle down, have placed large dependence on it. One wonders, therefore, whether more might not advantageously be made of it in the critical writing of the present time.

A work of art—a poem or novel, a picture, a piece of music—may affect the average cultivated spirit with interest, with curiosity, with pleasure; it may yield diversion, entertainment, or even solace, not in the sense of edification or tending to build up a permanent resource against sorrows and cares, but in the sense that its pleasurable occupation of the mind excludes sorrow and care for the time being, somewhat as physical exercise or a game of chess or billiards do. But all this is not the mark of good art. Good art affects one with an emotion of a different quality; and this quality may be rather



easily identified, provided one does not make a great point of proceeding with the stringency of a philosopher in trying to define it. Joubert said that it is not hard to know God, if one will only not trouble oneself about defining him; and this is true as well of the profound and obscure affections of the human spirit—they are much better made known in the experience of the devout than in the analysis of the philosopher.

THE FREEMAN, 109-10

The old system of personal patronage seems conducive to getting the best out of composers. I can imagine Prince Esterhazy telling Papa Haydn that some of the boys were likely to be around for dinner Thursday night, and he wanted them to hear a little real stuff that they could go away and talk about, for they were the kind that knew a good thing when they heard it. The modern composer, even though some Maecenas may be staking him, must after all write for a popular audience, indiscriminate and nondescript. Prince Esterhazy provided Haydn with more than a living; he provided him with the *imprimatur* of a discriminating and influential audience.

JOURNAL, 281-2

The sale of a book, however, at least in this country, is no guarantee of its good quality, but rather the opposite.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 22

One's time for reading is so limited that it seems one might best spend it upon what one knows is good rather than take chances on what one is not sure of.

SELECTED LETTERS, 17

The mere bulk of what one reads amounts to very little by comparison with the value of assimilating what one reads, even though it be not very much.

SELECTED LETTERS, 18

I deteriorate with astonishing rapidity when separated from my books, and am never aware that I have done so until I come back to them; I deteriorate in temper as well as in other

ways, for I miss the peculiarly powerful sustaining and calming power of literary studies.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 41

The unmistakable mark of degeneracy which stood out on the period's attempts at artistic production was an intense and conscious preoccupation with the subjective. As Goethe remarked, all eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective, while in all great eras which have been really in a state of progression, every effort is directed from the inward to the outward world; it is of an objective nature. I have always believed, as Goethe did, that here one comes on a true sense of the term *classic*. Work done in the great progressive eras—the work of the Augustan and Periclean periods, the work of the Elizabethans, of Erasmus, Marot, Rabelais, Cervantes, Montaigne—one accepts these as classic, not at all because they are old, but because they are objective and therefore strong, sound, joyous, healthy. Work done in an era of decadence is subjective, and therefore with the rarest and most fragmentary exceptions pathological, weak, bizarre, unhealthy. Indeed as Goethe suggested, in the interest of clearness one might very well make a clean sweep of all terms like *classic*, *modernist*, *realist*, *naturalist*, and substitute the simple terms *healthy* and *sickly*.

MEMOIRS, 184

History, Aristotle says, represents things only as they are, while fiction represents them as they might be and ought to be.

Aristotle's remark has stood always as my first canon of criticism applicable to creative writing. . . . My second canon bears on the question: What is fiction for, what is its true intention, its proper function? This second canon was very well put in terms by Prince Alexander Kropotkin when he advised his brother to read poetry. He said, "Poetry makes you better." I imagine that Prince Kropotkin would have made no difficulties about including prose as well as verse under his term. . . . He put the fact exactly, however. A work of the creative imagination which makes you better fulfills the true intention of such literature, and one which fails to do this fails of its true intention.

Any creative work which one reads with attention will make one forget one's troubles for the time being, as will a hand at bridge or billiards or watching a lively comedy on the stage. Some works do this and do no more; in the reaction from them their total effect comes to nothing. Others do this, and their total effect is enervating. Others again do this, but they are so conceived that the reading of them elevates and fortifies the spirit, they are spiritually dynamogenous, they make one better. . . .

Again, the effect of keeping good company in literature is exactly what it is in life. Keeping good company is spiritually dynamogenous, elevating, bracing. It makes one better. Keeping bad company is disabling; keeping indifferent company is enervating and retarding. In literature one has the best company in the world at complete command; one also has the worst.

MEMOIRS, 191, 193-4

If realism means the representation of life as it is actually lived, I do not see why lives which are actually lived on a higher emotional plane are not so eligible for representation as those lived on a lower plane.

MEMOIRS, 200

Culture is knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world; in other words, culture means reading, not idle and casual reading, but reading that is controlled and directed by a definite purpose. Reading, so understood, is difficult, and contrary to an almost universal belief, those who can do it are very few. I have already remarked the fact that there is no more groundless assumption than that literacy carries with it the ability to read. At the age of 79 Goethe said that those who make this assumption "do not know what time and trouble it costs to *learn* to read. I have been working at it for 18 years, and I can't say yet that I am completely successful."

MEMOIRS, 194

The essence of culture is never to be satisfied with a conventional account of anything, no matter what, but always instinctively to cut through it and get as close as you can to the real-

ity of the thing, and see it as it actually is. Culture's methods are those of exercising the consciousness in a free and disinterested play over any object presented to it, unchecked by prepossession and uncontrolled by formula. . . . Our definition, then, may be made more precise—perhaps as precise as any that can be made—if we put it that culture, considered as a process, means acquiring a vast deal of useless knowledge, and then forgetting it.

FREE SPEECH, 194-5

The approach to culture is laborious and discouraging, and the natural man dislikes work and is easily discouraged. Spiritual activity is too new a thing in the experience of the race; men have not been at it long enough to be at ease in it. It is like the upright position; men can and do assume the upright position, but seldom keep to it longer than necessary—they sit down when they can. The majority have always preferred an inferior good that was more easily acquired and more nearly immediate, unless they were subjected to some strong stimulus which for collateral reasons made the sacrifices demanded by culture seem worth while.

RIGHT THING, 76-7

It must never be forgotten . . . that culture has not for its final object the development of intelligence and taste, but the profound transformations of character that can only be effected by the self-imposed discipline of culture.

RIGHT THING, 89

There never was a time of so many and so powerful competitive distractions contesting with culture for the employment of one's hours, and directly tending towards the reinforcement and further degradation of the natural taste for the bathos. One has but to think of the enormous army of commercial enterprisers engaged in pandering to this taste and employing every conceivable device of ingenuity to confirm and flatter and reassure it.

RIGHT THING, 86-7

I should say, too, that there would be relatively little difficulty in finding subsidies to almost any extent for promising individuals, although it is true, I think, that our rich men do not

as yet go in as much for this form of patronage, which is the oldest, and still seems to get the best results, as they do for the institutional form. For my part, I wish they would do more for it. I know that if I were a rich man I would do precious little endowing institutions, and content myself with nosing out individuals of the right sort, and endowing them.

RIGHT THING, 237-8

I have often thought that the most unfortunate thing about children's literature is that it is written for children; when one ceases to be a child one has hardly anything left to go on with as a permanent asset.

MEMOIRS, 46

The great literary artist is one who powerfully impresses a reader with an attitude of mind, a mood, a temper, a state of being, without describing it. If he describes it—if, that is, he anywhere injects himself into the process—the effect is lost.

FREE SPEECH, 97

## *Liberty*

Like the general run of American children, I grew up under the impression that mankind have an innate and deep-seated love of liberty. This was never taught me as an article of faith, but in one way and another, mostly from pseudopatriotic books and songs, children picked up a vague notion that "the priceless boon of liberty" is really a very fine thing, that mankind love it and are jealous of it to the point of raising Cain if it be denied them; also that America makes a great speciality of liberty and is truly the land of the free. I first became uncertain about these tenets through reading ancient accounts of the great libertarian wars of history, and discovering that there were other and more substantial causes behind those wars and that actually the innate love of liberty did not have much to do with them. This caused me to carry on my observations upon

matters nearer at hand, and my doubts were confirmed. If mankind really have an unquenchable love of freedom, I thought it strange that I saw so little evidence of it; and as a matter of fact, from that day to this I have seen none worth noticing. One is bound to wonder why it is, since people usually set some value on what they love, that among those who are presumed to be so fond of freedom the possession of it is so little appreciated. Taking the great cardinal example lying nearest at hand, the American people once had their liberties; they had them all; but apparently they could not rest o'nights until they had turned them over to a prehensile crew of professional politicians.

So my belief in these tenets gradually slipped away from me. I cannot say just when I lost it, for the course of its disappearance was not marked by any events. It vanished more than thirty years ago, however, for I have consciously kept an eye on the matter for that length of time. What interested me especially is that during this period I have discovered scarcely a corporal's guard of persons who had any conception whatever of liberty as a *principle*, let alone caring for any specific vindications of it as such. On the other hand, I have met many who were very eloquent about liberty as affecting some matter of special interest to them, but who were authoritarian as the College of Cardinals on other matters. Prohibition brought out myriads of such; so did the various agitations about censorship, free speech, minority-rights of Negroes, Jews, Indians; and among all whom I questioned I did not find a baker's dozen who were capable of perceiving any inconsistency in their attitude.

MEMOIRS, 313-4

There never will be even a decent political sense developed in this country until we breed a race of people who are as ready to go to the mat for justice in behalf of what they do not believe in as in behalf of what they do believe in.

JOURNEYMAN, 43

Americans have been too thoroughly conditioned to serf-mindedness to care two straws about freedom, whereas economic security exactly suits them, and they will cheerfully

sacrifice all their other prospects in this world and all their hopes for the next, in their determination to get it.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 32

As a matter of fact, there are precious few people who are at all interested in the *principle* of freedom; and in my experience, those who profess and call themselves liberals are least interested in it and most ignorant about it. Such interest in freedom as I have seen boils down to a mere resentment of some inconvenience, usually trivial.

JOURNAL, 163

The practical reason for freedom, then, is that freedom seems to be the only condition under which any kind of substantial moral fibre can be developed.

RIGHT THING, 173

## *Religion and Philosophy*

Every one of us incurs a greater debt to some other than he can ever repay. God meant it so, I think, to teach us our solidarity. If you are in debt to me, I do not realize it; but the sense of it will move you to pass the gift along to many another with big interest. I am in debt to many people—so very many.

SELECTED LETTERS, 20

While one would not willingly encourage hardness of heart, one must allow something, I think, for a possible light touch of morbidness in one's sentiment toward human sorrows, both individual and social. It is easy to get a bit too much worked up over distresses lying in one's purview—distresses, I mean, which with the best will in the world one cannot possibly alleviate, and with which perhaps one cannot even sympathize intelligently, since one has never experienced the like oneself. . . .

There is an old saying which I think has a lot of good sound

Christian doctrine in it, that there are two classes of things one should not worry about; the things one can help, and the things one can't help. If you can help a thing, don't worry about it; help it. If you can't help it, don't worry about it, for you do no good, and only wear yourself down below par. The spiritual distresses of individuals are in the nature of things quite incommunicable to any good purpose. We are not structurally equipped to burn anyone's smoke but our own. I say again that this is no deprecation of sympathy, but only an observation of the very limited range of sympathy's effective operation. One can be all in favor of the weak brother, and still refrain from an exercise of sympathy that obfuscates his sense of responsibility and really tends to keep him weak. . . . Giving one's life for others is the best thing that one can do, but there is more than one way of doing it. Maintaining a rational attitude, free from morbidness, toward other people's troubles that are in their nature irremediable by any outside agency and also, strictly speaking, incommunicable—this enables one to do best for oneself and thereby to do best for others; and the man who for the sake of others preserves his own integrity of spirit and personality inviolate, I hold to be the noblest Roman of them all.

JOURNEYMAN, 114-6

Getting back to God because you are puzzled or scared or weak in the knees is poor stuff, to my notion. May be better so than not at all, but I'm not sure.

SELECTED LETTERS, 140

It is surely a fair question whether a competent practice of religion calls for quite as much apparatus, metaphysical and physical, as the main body of organized Christianity has constructed and is trying, none too successfully, to keep in running order.

SNORING, 39-40

Some of the Roman Catholic theologians are more to my mind. "All things keep continually running out into mystery," said St. Thomas of Aquin, seven hundred years ago. . . . Like Mr. Jefferson, I have always been content to "repose my head on



that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent Creator has made so soft for us, knowing how much we should be forced to use it." . . .

The part of Christian literature which I found most acceptable was the work of writers who had applied an enlightened common sense, combined with an enlightened fervour, to "the divine impossibilities of religion," and who drove most directly at practice. . . . Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* gave me a thoroughly satisfactory account of Christianity's nature and function. His conception of religion as "morality touched by emotion" satisfied me. The object of religion, as I saw it, is conduct; and whatever mode or form one's religious persuasions may take, if it bears fruit in sound conduct it is *ad hoc* sound religion. . . .

Aware that the mode of my own religious persuasions was most imperfect and must always be so, I felt great tolerance towards other modes, even those which were based on what seemed to me sheer superstition. As Flaubert says that politics are for the *canaille*, so with equal truth Joubert says that superstition is the only basis of religion which the lower order of mind is capable of accepting. In so far, then, as superstition alone is effectual in working on that order of mind to bring forth sound conduct, I regard it as respectable and not to be meddled with. . . .

When Smith amplifies Luther's definition by saying, "Where we find wisdom, justice, loveliness, goodness, love, and glory in their highest elevations and most unbounded dimensions, that is He; and where we find any true participations of these, there is a true communication of God; and a defection from these is the essence of sin and the foundation of hell,"—when Smith says this, one feels that he has gone as far with a prescriptive system of dogmatic theology as it is safe to go; and he goes no farther. Taylor also, with his mind on metaphysical credenda, gives warning that "too many scholars have lived upon air and empty nothings, and being very wise about things that are not and work not." *And work not*—there he comes back, as these men are always coming back, to the basic ground of practice, of conduct; and how great is the reason why they should, for as Whichcote says, "men have an itch rather to make religion

than to practice it." Conduct is the final thing, and dogmatic constructions which fail to give proof of themselves in bringing forth conduct are worse than useless.

The history of organised Christianity is the most depressing study I ever undertook, and also one of the most interesting. I came away from it with the firm conviction that the prodigious evils which spot this record can all be traced to the attempt to organize and institutionalize something which is in its nature incapable of being successfully either organised or institutionalised. I can find no respectable evidence that Jesus ever contemplated either; the sort of thing commonly alleged as evidence would not be substantial enough to send a pickpocket to gaol. By all that is known of Jesus, He appears to have been as sound and simon-pure an individualist as Lao-Tse. His teaching seems to have been purely individualistic in its intent. One would say He had no idea whatever of its being formulated into an institutional charter, or a doctrinal hurdle to be got over by those desirous of being called by His name. If there is any reputable evidence to the contrary, I can only say with Pangloss, "It may be; but if so it has escaped me."

I do not find any evidence that Jesus laid down any basic doctrine beyond that of a universal loving God and a universal brotherhood of man. There is no report of His having discussed the nature of God or laying stress on any other of God's attributes, or that He ever said anything about them. He also exhibited a way of life to be pursued purely for its own sake, with no hope of any reward but the joy of pursuing it; a way of entire self-renunciation, giving up one's habits, ambitions, desires, and personal advantages. The doing of this would establish what He called the Kingdom of Heaven, a term which, as far as any one knows, He never saw fit to explain or define. His teaching appears to have been purely individualistic. In a word, it came to this: that if every *one* would reform *one* (that is to say, oneself) and keep *one* steadfastly following the way of life which He recommended, the Kingdom of Heaven would be coextensive with human society. The teaching of Jesus, simple as it was, was brand-new to those who listened to it. Conduct, "morality touched by emotion," put forth as the whole sum of religion, was something they had never heard of.

Simple as the teaching of Jesus may have been, it was also very difficult. Following the way of life which He prescribed is an extremely arduous business, and my opinion is that those who can do it are, and have always been, relatively few; even those able to understand the terms of its prescriptions would seem to be few. If the record be authentic, Jesus appears to have been clearly aware that this would be so. Yet there is abundant evidence that Jesus was not merely offering an impracticable counsel of perfection, for the thing has been done and is being done; mainly, as is natural, in an inconspicuous way by inconspicuous persons, yet also by some like St. Francis and others among the great names one meets in the history of Christian mysticism, whom circumstances rendered more or less conspicuous. . . .

Concerning the legends of miracle and mystery which have grown up around the historic figure of Jesus, I notice with interest that my attitude of mind is exactly what it was when as a three-year-old child I encountered the New England Primer's doctrine of original sin. For example, I would not affirm or deny that Jesus was born of a virgin mother; I would merely raise the previous question, How can any one possibly know anything about it? Or, if I had been at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, and Arius had told me that Jesus was not an integral part of the Godhead, I would have asked him how he knew that; and if Athanasius had told me that He was, I would have asked him the same question. I have seen too many miracles and mysteries in the course of my life ever to take "the high priori road" of affirmation or denial with respect to any.

What impresses me about such matters, however, is not so much the paucity of evidence available concerning them, as that, for all I can see, they are essentially immaterial, adventitious. All the credenda to which Gresham's Law has committed organised Christianity seem to me not nearly so difficult in their improbability as in their pointlessness. I do not see that they have any bearing upon practice. If it were proven beyond doubt that Epicurus was born of Athene's brain and came into the world like Gargantua, by way of his mother's ear, I do not see how the fact could effect either the soundness of his philosophy or its applicability. So likewise if all the mass of or-

ganised post-Pauline Christianity's metaphysics were proven true or false tomorrow, I do not see that one's view of the historic Jesus and His teaching would be in the least affected. . . .

The only apologetic for Jesus's teaching that I find in any way reasonable is the one which Jesus Himself propounded—experience. His way of life is not to be followed because He recommended it, or because He was virgin-born, or was a part of the Godhead, or could work miracles, or for any other reason than that experience will prove that it is a good way, none better, if one have but the understanding and tenacity of purpose to cleave to it; neither of which I have, and I believe very few have. Here once more is where the hard gritty common sense of the Jew comes out, in his instinctive recourse to the apologetic of experience: "*Oh taste and see* how gracious the Lord is." It was also the signal merit of the Cambridge Platonists that they recognized experience as the sum-total of Jesus's own apologetic. . . .

I was much interested in some further conversation with Edward Epstean on the subject of religion, tending to show that organised Christianity has made somewhat a mess of its conception of sin and of what to do about it. The point of our talk took me back to Mr. Beard's remark which I have quoted, about the stultifying ineptitude of orthodoxy's cringing approach to God as in the prayers we all repeat and the hymns we all sing. Mr. Epstean's view was based on his Pauline assumption of the dichotomous man, the man of "the two selves," one divine and the other bestial, and he thought that progress on the way of life recommended by Jesus is better made by an energetic strengthening of the former than by direct efforts to repress and weaken the latter. Whether or not the basic assumption be sound, I believe that the method is eminently sound, and that in laying stress on the opposite method organised Christianity has brought a great deal of avoidable enervating and rather cruel distress upon those of its adherents who took its pretensions seriously.

"When God created man," Mr. Epstean said, "He was not out to create a race of competitors, nor could He have done that without upsetting the whole run of His universe; at least, we can't see how He could, and we do see that He very evi-

dently didn't. He created man part divine, part bestial, and the two elements have been at war within the individual ever since. When the bestial side gets the better of it for the moment, as it will every now and then, and you go wrong, don't bother over repenting and nagging yourself about it. Let it go,—forget it,—to hell with it!—and put your energy harder than ever on building up the divine side. Don't try to repress the bestial side. Repression is negative, enervating. Put all your work on the positive job, and you can afford to let the bestial side take its chances."

I am not so clear in my mind as I once was about the dichotomous man; Mr. Cram has made some serious difficulties for me on that score. But this does not affect the validity of Mr. Epstean's view, considered as a matter of method. As such, I think it may be regarded as the one in all respects most consistent with the general discipline contemplated by Jesus' teachings.

MEMOIRS, 288; 292; 294; 295; 297-8; 299-300; 301; 302-3

Maybe there is no authoritative answer from the Church to these here now modern problems, but there is a dam' authoritative answer from the Church's supposititious Head, and if anyone asks you, I can show it. Ain't no modern problems—they are all as old as the hills. Tawney's game seems to be adapting the Church to modern society, instead of the other way around. I don't get that stuff—never did—we've been all through it for half a century. Society, modern or ancient, is only a lot of folks, and the Church has no rightful message to Society—if it has I don't know it. We are overdoing "Society" a lot. The only practicable reform I know of is reform of yourself, and that's where the Church comes in. As for teaching economics and sociology in the seminaries, I think nothing of it. Let's have all the economics there is from the economists—and let's have religion from the Church, eh, what?

SELECTED LETTERS, 143

If I were asked to name the most striking spectacle observable in my time, I should say it was the long round-trip voyage which science made away from metaphysics and back again to

the most egregious mess of metaphysics that ingenuity could devise. . . .

Science went on with its investigations of matter and force, consciousness, space and time, like the donkey after the carrot, but the carrot apparently as far away as ever. When one was through with atoms, molecules, ions, electrons, protons, and so on, where was one, what had one actually got? Now I see that one great mathematician goes a bit ahead of Boscovich by resolving matter, not into centres of force, but into "groups of occurrences," and thinks that matter as an actuality, a thing-in-itself, may not exist at all. Another savant thinks that matter is a characteristic of space, while still another suggests that space is a characteristic of matter. Another sage has decided that space has a definite diametrical limit, beyond which there is no space, no matter, not only no anything, but literally no nothing.

I am far from setting myself up as a judge of these deliverances, but in all diffidence I maintain that in their totality they amount to as fine an exhibit of metaphysics as anything the Schoolmen can show. In the course of their efforts to express the inexpressible, define the indefinable, and imagine the unimaginable, these master minds have made the metaphysical grand tour and are back once more in the old familiar port of the Middle Ages, safe and sound.

MEMOIRS, 289-90

Perhaps one reason for the falling-off of belief in a continuance of conscious existence is to be found in the quality of life that most of us lead. There is not much in it with which, in any kind of reason, one can associate the idea of immortality. Selling bonds, for instance, or promoting finance-companies, seems not to assort with the idea of an existence which cannot be imagined to take any account of money or credits. Certain other of our present activities might be imagined as going on indefinitely, such as poetry, music, pure mathematics, or philosophy. One can easily imagine an immortal Homer or Beethoven; one cannot possibly imagine an immortal Henry Ford or John D. Rockefeller. Probably belief cannot transcend experience. If we believe that death is the end of us, very likely it is

because we have never had any experience of a kind of life that in any sort of common sense we could think was worth being immortal; and we know we have had no such experience. As far as spiritual activity is concerned, most of us who represent this present age are so dead while we live that it seems the most natural thing in the world to assume that we shall stay dead when we die.

JOURNEYMAN, 86-7

Yet I don't blame the ministers for their point of view. They can't see anything but the repressive side of morality. They always want to shut something up—the saloons, theaters, Sunday baseball, and so on. My idea is always to open something. I want to start something instead of stopping everything.

SELECTED LETTERS, 28-9

If there be such a thing as the survival of personality, I think it is a very wise provision of nature that our limitation of knowledge about it is just what it is. If survival were proved positively, most of us would feel little incentive to put a proper valuation on our present life, or to make proper use of it. If non-survival were proved, on the other hand, the temptation to make a very bad use of our present life would be too hard for most of us to resist. As it is, our intimations of survival are strong enough to affect our attitude and keep us interested, but not strong enough to lead us to any positive knowledge either way; and this seems to me the best arrangement conceivable, if conscious survival be a fact.

LETTERS, 68

My findings are too simple and commonplace for anything like that. If it were obligatory to put a label on them, I should say, with Goethe's well-known remark in mind, that they amount merely to a philosophy of informed common sense. To know oneself as well as one can; to avoid self-deception and foster no illusions; to learn what one can about the plain natural truth of things, and make one's valuations accordingly; to waste no time in speculating upon vain subtleties, upon "things which are not and work not";—this perhaps is hardly the aim of an

academic philosophy, but it is what a practical philosophy keeps steadily in view.

MEMOIRS, 304-5

## Miscellany

Cicero was right in saying that a person who grows up without knowing what went before him will always remain a child. One may know it thoroughly, too, in an academic way, and still remain a child. Knowledge has to be reinforced by emotion in order to be maturing.

JOURNAL, 144

Wholesale indiscriminate travel is merely a levelling and vulgarizing influence.

JOURNAL FORGOTTEN, 212

The worst thing I see about life at the present time is that whereas the ability to think has to be cultivated by practice, like the ability to dance or to play the violin, everything is against that practice. Speed is against it, commercial amusements, noise, the pressure of mechanical diversions, reading-habits, even studies are all against it. Hence a whole race is being bred without the power to think, or even the disposition to think, and one cannot wonder that public opinion, *qua* opinion, does not exist.

JOURNAL, 245

Why should one *learn* to depend on some new *thing*, when the inevitable burden of *things* is already very great?

SELECTED LETTERS, 39

I could never read Carlyle, but I admire him for his cussedness and his crusty readiness to say just what he thought about anybody and anything, and why he thought it, and to put forth his opinions good and hot. I wish there were a few more like him writing nowadays. One gets an awful surfeit of mush-and-milk in the current writing about public affairs. It reminds me of the preacher who told his people that "unless you repent, as it



were, and, as one might say, have a change of heart, you will be damned—so to speak—and, in a measure, go to hell.” There was none of that sort of bilgewater in Carlyle’s pronouncements.

JOURNAL, 266

One marvels continually at man’s ingenuity in devising means of communication, and at the utter futility of the uses to which he habitually puts them.

JOURNAL, 293

Newspaper-reading is a pure habit; it argues nothing for the extension of either our interest or our sympathies. My belief is, too, that it is as bad and debilitating a habit as one can form. Either one is or is not taken in by what one reads. In the first case, one is debauched; in the second, one is outraged.

JOURNAL, 27

We may find out that there is a great deal of unsuspected fun in entertainment that we work out for ourselves. I have seen very young infants turn away from expensive toys to see if they could find an old nail or a piece of string or something that they could manipulate more on their own, and use a little inventive power on.

JOURNAL, 48

One notices the effect produced on the children by regular association with high-minded and highly-cultivated elders. One especially notices the effect produced on them by hearing good conversation carried on in good, pure, competent English.

JOURNAL, 38

Epictetus was born in slavery, and did a slave’s work; Marcus Aurelius ruled the greatest of empires, and did a ruler’s work. At one point of time and place or at another, amid the most discouraging circumstances and under utterly alien conditions, the Talmudic Oversoul will come back; it comes back unaccountably by any reason we can find for it to do so, but back it does come.

MEDITATIONS, 24

The question of *who* is right is a very small one indeed beside the question of *what* is right.

SELECTED LETTERS, 19

Really, when one thinks of it, what a preposterous thing it is to put the management of a nation, a province, even a village, in the hands of a man who cannot so much as manage a family! Friar John of the Funnels uttered golden speech when he asked how he could be expected to govern an abbey, seeing that he was not able to govern himself. *Absurdum quippe est ut alios regat qui seipsum regere nescit* was a good legal maxim in the Middle Ages, and it remains forever as a maxim of sterling common sense.

MEMOIRS, 309

My second qualification was the belief that a good executive's job is to do nothing, and that he can't set about it too soon or stick at it too faithfully. In our early days, when someone asked me how something ought to be done, I would look at him in a vacant kind of a way, and say I didn't know—hadn't thought about it—couldn't just say, at the moment—how would you do it? So-and-so. Well, probably that's all right—you might take it up with the other people and see if they have any ideas. In this way they soon stopped looking to me for directions. I never gave any directions or orders; sometimes a suggestion but only as the other staff-members made suggestions, provisionally, and under correction from anyone who had anything better to offer.

MEMOIRS, 169

A salesman for the great house of Bagstock and Buggins, wine-merchants in the City ever since Charles I was beheaded, is a very different breed of cats from a high-pressure salesman of mass-produced gimcrackery. Bagstock and Buggins have always had about as much trade as they can carry comfortably, and their clients are their old hereditary friends, whose tastes and wishes they know as well as they know their own merchandise. So, when the salesman goes out he is aware that the House is distinctly less interested in his drumming up new clients than in his taking proper care of those he has.

MEMOIRS, 178

I learned early with Thoreau that a man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone; and in view of this I have always considered myself extremely well-to-do.

MEMOIRS, 321

My invincible objection to suicide is, if I may put it so, that it seems to me so distinctly one of the things that a person just does not do.

MEMOIRS, 326

Wherever I went in Europe I was truck by the persistence of the old original idea that America, and especially the United States, has no reason for existence except as a milch cow for Europe. People there were apparently born with this idea, as they might have been in the days of Columbus and Balboa. I observed it not only in the higher walks of society, but also in the lower. I observed also that Americans do not quite understand this persuasion, which is why I speak of it here. As far as I could see, there was no meanness about it, no spirit of grafting or sponging, or of bilking a rich and easy-going neighbour. It seemed rather to be the simple, natural expression of a sort of proprietary instinct. The general harmony and fitness of things required that America's resources should at all times be at the disposal of Europe for Europe's benefit. Especially it was imperative that when Europe got in any kind of scrape, America's plain duty was to take the brunt of it, and to stand by when the scrape was settled, and clean up the debris at American expense.

MEMOIRS, 251

Respect for life is at the vanishing-point, and respect for the dignity of death has disappeared.

MEMOIRS, 243

We are discovering that the way to a desirable thing can be made altogether too easy.

SNORING, 40

But even so, it was a cheering and hope-inspiring experience to touch the fringes of a well-to-do, prosperous, hard-working society which does not believe in too much money, too much land, too much impedimenta, too much ease, comfort, schooling, mechanization, aimless movement, idle curiosity; which does not believe in too many labor-saving devices, gadgets, gimcracks; and which has the force of character—fed and sustained by a type of religion which seems really designed to get results—the force of sterling character, I say, to keep itself well on the safe lee side of all such excesses.

SNORING, 42

It is a commonplace that the persistence of an institution is due solely to the state of mind that prevails toward it, the set of terms in which men habitually think about it. So long, and only so long, as those terms are favourable, the institution lives and maintains its power; and when for any reason men generally cease thinking in those terms, it weakens and becomes inert.

THE STATE, 146

The net profit of my first few years of life appears to have been a fairly explicit understanding of the fact that ignorance exists. It has paid me Golconda's dividends regularly ever since, and the share-value of my small original investment has gone sky-high. This understanding came about so easily and naturally that for many years I took it as a commonplace, assuming that everyone had it. My subsequent contacts with the world at large, however, showed me that everyone does not have it, indeed that those who have it are extremely few. . . .

Thus in my early manhood I learned to respect ignorance, to regard ignorance as an object of legitimate interest and reflection; and as I say, a sort of unconsidered preparation for this attitude of mind appears to have run back almost to my infancy. Moreover, when I got around to read Plato, I found that he reinforced and copper-fastened the notion which experience had already rather forcibly suggested, that direct attempts to overcome and enlighten ignorance are a doubtful venture; the notion that it is impossible, as one of my friends puts it, to tell anybody anything which in a very real sense he does not already know.

MEMOIRS, 16-7

It is a mark of maturity to differentiate easily and naturally between personal or social opposition, and intellectual opposition. Everyone has noticed how readily children transfer their dislike of an opinion to the person who holds it, and how quick they are to take umbrage at a person who speaks in an unfamiliar mode or even with an unfamiliar accent.

RIGHT THING, 38

Experience has made it clear beyond doubt or peradventure that prohibition in the United States is not a moral issue; it is not essentially, even, a political issue; it is a vested interest.

EDUCATION, 140

I suppose you can't play every instrument in the orchestra,—you can't be a philosophicker and a politicker at the same time. That has always been a favourite theory of mine and I believe 'tis true.

SELECTED LETTERS, 81

## *Pantagruelism*

When you kindly asked me here, I was a little afraid to come, because I felt that an audience like this would more or less expect me to get at Rabelais by his professional side, and I am not able to do that. I know nothing about the practice of medicine today, let alone how it was practiced four hundred years ago. I have always been pretty healthy, or I might know more, but I am contented. Probably you have noticed how contented ignorant people are. I am not sure that Aristotle is right in that fine sentence of his about all mankind naturally desiring knowledge. Most of them would rather get along without knowing anything, if they could, because knowing things is hard work. I often wish I knew less than I do about a great many things, like politics, for instance, or history. When you know a great deal about something, you have hard work to keep your knowledge from going sour—that is, unless you are a Pantagruelist, and if you are a professor of politics, like me, nothing but Pantagruelism will ever save you. Your learning goes so sour that before you know it the Board of Health comes sniffing around, asking the neighbours whether they have been noticing anything lately. Maybe something of that sort is true of medicine, too, but as I said, I do not know about that. Pantagruelism is a natural sort of preservative, like refrigeration; it keeps the temperature right. Some people put too much bad antiseptic stuff into their learning—too much embalming-fluid.

There seems to be no doubt that Rabelais's professional standing was high. According to all testimony, he must have been one of the most eminent and successful practitioners in

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This speech was delivered before the Faculty of Medicine at Johns Hopkins, October 28, 1932, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the publication of Rabelais's *Pantagruel*.

Europe. For two years he was at the head of the great hospital at Lyon, perhaps the foremost in France, and I think also the oldest in continuous service. It is about a thousand years old. It was moved once, from one quarter of town to another, and it has been dusted up and renovated every now and then, but it still stands where Rabelais found it. Some fragments of structure which belong to his day are said to exist, but I could not identify them. The whole affair looked pretty old to me, but I imagine it is probably all right. I should not care to be a patient there, but I should not care to be a patient anywhere.

Rabelais did some good things at that hospital. In two years he ran the death-rate down three per cent. It is not easy to see how he did that. One might suppose that the death-rate would be pretty constant, no matter what diseases the patients had. Rabelais had an average of about two hundred patients, sleeping two in a bed, sometimes three, in air that was warmed only by an open fire, and with no ventilation worth speaking of. It must have been a little stuffy in there sometimes. Rabelais examined all his patients once a day, prescribed medicines and operations, and superintended a staff of thirty-two people. He managed everything. His salary was about forty dollars a year, which was high. His successor got only thirty. I believe he had his board thrown in. The hospital was rich, but the trustees capitalized its prestige. They thought a physician ought to work for nothing for the honour of it. Probably you never heard of any trustees like that, so I thought I would mention it.

The thing he did that interests me most was to beat that hospital out of five dollars. He did it in his second year there, nobody knows how, nobody can imagine how. I think that is more extraordinary than reducing the death-rate. Any man who could beat a French hospital corporation out of five dollars need not worry about the death-rate. He could raise the dead. The French auditor of the hospital was frightfully depressed about that five dollars. He left a marginal note on the account, saying that it seemed to be all wrong, but there it was, and for some reason apparently nothing could be done about it. The incident makes me think of Panurge and the money-changers, in the sixteenth chapter of the Second Book, where Rabelais says that whenever Panurge "changed a teston, car-

decu, or any other piece of money, the changer had been more subtle than a fox if Panurge had not at every time made five or six sols vanish away visibly, openly, and manifestly, without making any hurt or lesion, whereof the changer should have felt nothing but the wind."

Rabelais held a more important position, even, than this one at Lyon. For twenty years he was personal physician to two of the ablest and most prominent men in the kingdom, Cardinal Jean du Bellay and his brother Guillaume. Both of them were always ailing, always worn down by heavy labours and responsibilities in the public service. They were in pretty constant need of the best medical skill, and could command it; and Rabelais was their chosen physician and confidential friend.

Then, too, there is his record at the University of Montpellier, which you historians of medicine know better than I do, and know how remarkable it was, so I need not go into it. The University of Montpellier always made a great specialty of medicine. It was like the Johns Hopkins in that. Except for a few years when Toulouse was ahead of it, I believe the Faculty of Medicine there was said to be the best in France. It is interesting to go in and look at the pictures of the sixteenth-century professors. Rabelais is there, and Rondellet, who some think was the original of the physician Rondibilis, in the Third Book. I am none too sure of that, but it does not matter. That sort of question never matters. Rondibilis is the same, no matter who his original was, or whether he had any. What of it? Think of scholars like F. A. Wolf and Lachmann tying themselves up for years over the question whether Homer was one man or eighteen. What difference does it make? You don't read Homer for any such notions as that. You read him to keep going, to keep your head above water, and you read Rabelais for the same reason.

Scurron, Rabelais's preceptor at Montpellier, has his picture there, and so has Saporta, whom Rabelais mentions as a fellow-actor in the comedy of *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. They had college dramatics in those days, too. Anatole France rewrote this comedy from the synopsis of it that Rabelais gives, and Mr. Granville Barker put it on the stage for us. I wish we could see it oftener, instead of so many plays that



are only slices out of our own life, and usually out of the dull-  
est and meanest part of our own life, at that. . . .

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Rabelais makes some running comments on physicians and their ways that interest a layman. Some physicians are fussy. They want to regulate everybody and lay down the law about what is good for everybody, and especially about what is *not* good for anybody. They begrudge you any interesting food and anything interesting to drink. Then pretty soon another batch of little rule-of-thumb doctors comes along and tells us the first batch was all wrong, and that we ought to do something different. They were just like that in Rabelais's day, too. A friend of mine has been calling my attention to some dietary rules laid down in that period—why, according to those rules, you would say it was not safe to eat anything. This sort of thing even got under Gargantua's skin, you remember. He told Friar John that it was all wrong to drink before breakfast; the physicians said so. "Oh, rot your physicians!" said Friar John, "A hundred devils leap into my body if there be not more old drunkards than old physicians." Friar John went by what philosophers used to call "the common sense of mankind." He believed that the same thing will not work for everybody, and that seems to have been Rabelais's idea too. Rabelais mentions two or three diets in the course of his story, and they seem very reasonable and sensible. He thought that Nature had some resources of her own, and he was willing to let her have something to say about such matters. The little whimsical doctors of his time would not let Nature have any chance at all, if they could help it. They laid out the course that they thought she ought to follow, and then expected her to follow it. Sometimes she did not do that, and then the patient was out of luck.

Of course, you may lay down some general rules. Rabelais knew that. For instance, he says it was sound practice for Gargantua to eat a light lunch and a big dinner, and that the Arabian physicians, who advised a big meal in the middle of the day, were all wrong. There is sense in that. It is a good general rule. But then, you have to remember that one man's light lunch is another man's square meal. Also, something depends

on what you have for breakfast, and when you get it, and what you have been doing during the morning. If you have ever been around a French restaurant at lunch time, you have probably noticed Frenchmen getting away with a pretty hefty square, and it is a great sight to see the way they dig into it. As Panurge said, it is as good as a balsam for sore eyes to see them gulch and raven it. Well, if you had a French breakfast that morning, it is a fair bet that you would be doing the same thing. A French breakfast disappears while you are looking at it. Then again, Gargantua was a huge giant, and his light lunch would founder an ordinary stomach. It would be worse than an old-style American Sunday dinner. When he was a baby, it took the milk of 17,913 cows to feed him. No ordinary baby could do anything with that much milk. So, you see, you have to allow for exceptions to your general rule, after all, probably quite a lot of them.

By the way, did you ever hear that our term Blue Monday came out of those Sunday dinners? The mayor of one of our Mid-Western cities told me that. He said he never had such a frightful time with reformers and the moral element in his town as he did on Monday morning. They ate their heads off every Sunday noon, and when they came to on Monday morning, they were full of bile and fermentation and all sorts of meanness, and that made them want to persecute their neighbours, so they would run around first thing to the mayor's office to get him to close up something that people liked, or stop something that they wanted to do. Every Monday morning he knew he was in for it. It was Blue Monday for him every week.

I have often wondered how much of this sort of thing is behind our great reform movements. One of them, you know, was started by a bilious French lawyer. He was a fearful fellow. Most people have no idea of the harm he did. He was a contemporary of Rabelais, and they were probably acquainted. He was down on Rabelais, and did as much as anybody to give him a bad name. That was because Rabelais would not join in on his reform. That is always the way with these bilious reformers. You have to reform things their way, or they say you are a scoundrel and do not believe in any reform at all. That

is the way the Socialists and Communists feel nowadays, when we do not swallow their ideals whole, and yet maybe we want things reformed as much as they do. Rabelais wanted to see the Church reformed. He was hand in glove with Erasmus on that. But he was a Pantagruelist, so he knew that Calvin's way and Luther's way would not really reform anything, but would only make a botch of it. Well, we see now that it all turned out just as he knew it would. Swapping the authority of a bishop for the authority of a book was not even a theoretical reform, and all it did practically was to set up a lot of little Peterkins all over Christendom, each one sure he was the only one who knew what the book meant, and down on all the others, fighting and squabbling with them and saying all sorts of hateful things about them. Rabelais knew that was sure to happen, and knew that kind of reform was just no reform at all. So he would not go in with Calvin, and Calvin, being a good bilious reformer, abused him like a pickpocket. Calvin was an enormously able man, but his liver was out of commission. It is a strange thought, isn't it, that if somebody had fed Calvin eight or nine grains of calomel at night every week or so, and about a quarter of a pound of Rochelle salts in the morning, the whole tone of Protestant theology might have been different. It almost makes mechanists of us.

Rabelais had much the same sort of notion about reform in medicine. His position on that has puzzled a great many people. That is because they look at him in a little, sectarian, rule-of-thumb way. He was for going back to Galen and Hippocrates, cleaning off the glosses on their texts, and finding out what they really said. Well, then, some say that shows he was a hide-bound old Tory in medicine. On the other hand, he made dissections and lectured from them, which was a great innovation. He went in for experiments. He laughed at some ideas of Democritus and Theophrastus, and in the seventh chapter of the Third Book you find him poking fun at Galen himself.

Well, then, others say, he was a great radical, and he has even been put forward as the father of experimentation in medicine. All that is nonsense. To the Pantagruelist, labels like radical and Tory mean just nothing at all. You go back to the classics of a subject for the practical purpose of saving yourself

a lot of work. You get an accumulation of observation, method, technique, that subsequent experience has confirmed, and you can take it at second-hand and don't have to work it all out afresh for yourself. Maybe you can improve on it, here and there, and that is all right, but if you don't know the classics of your subject, you often find that you have been wasting a lot of time over something that somebody went all through, clear back in the Middle Ages. What is there radical or Tory about that? It is just good sense.

I think Americans are peculiarly impatient about the classics of any subject. In my own line, I know, I next to never meet anybody who seems to have read anything that was written before about 1890. That is one reason why we get done in so often by other people, especially in business and finance. You take a good thing wherever you find it—that was Rabelais's idea.

If somebody worked it out satisfactorily for you forty years ago, or four hundred, or four thousand, why, you are just that much ahead. You have that much more chance to work out something else, some improvement maybe, or something new. Knowing the classics matures and seasons the mind as nothing else will, but aside from that, in a practical way, it is a great labour-saver. When I was at Ems a couple of years ago, one of their experimenters had just discovered that the Ems salts helped out a little in cases of pyorrhea. That was known four hundred years ago. It is mentioned in a report on the springs, written in the sixteenth century. Then it was forgotten, and discovered again only the other day.

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But I must stop this sort of thing, and speak about Pantagruelism. I hear you have a good many Pantagruelists here in Baltimore, and that does not surprise me, because there used to be such a marvelous lot of germ-carriers in this university. If you caught Pantagruelism from Gildersleeve or Minton Warren or William Osler, there was no help for you. You had it for life. There was a big quarantine against Baltimore on account of those people. That was the most expensive quarantine ever established in the world. It cost the American people all their culture, all their intelligence, all their essential

integrity, their insight, their dignity, their self-respect, their command of the future, to keep Pantagruelism from spreading.

We did it, though. The country is practically free of Pantagruelism now. There is less of it here than in any other country I know. Hardly anyone ever heard of it. Probably you know how the great exponent of Pantagruelism is regarded. Why, only the other day when I was talking to a few people informally about Rabelais, a man came up to me afterward and said he was sorry his wife was not there. He had left her at home because he thought she might have to hear some improper language. That was his idea of Rabelais, and he was a professor in one of our colleges, too. Just think of a miserable little coot like that. When you look the situation over and see the general part that this country is playing in the world's affairs, and see what sort of thing she has to play it with, you begin to think that quarantine cost too much.

Pantagruelism is not a cult or a creed or a frame of mind, but a quality of spirit. In one place Rabelais says it is "a certain jollity of mind, pickled in the scorn of fortune," and this is one of its aspects: an easy, objective, genial, but unyielding superiority to everything external, to every conceivable circumstance of one's life. It is a quality like that of the ether, which the physicists of my day used to say was imponderable, impalpable, harder than steel, yet so pervasive that it permeates everything, underlies everything. This is the quality that Rabelais communicates in every line. Read the Prologue to the Second Book, for instance—better read it aloud to yourself—well, there you have it, you can't miss it, and if it does not communicate itself to your own spirit, you may as well give up the idea that you were cut out for a Pantagruelist.

And at what a time in the world's life was that Prologue written. It was a period more nearly like ours than any other in history. The difficulties and temptations that the human spirit faced were like ours. It was a period of unexampled expansion, like ours; of discovery and invention, like ours; of revolution in industry and commerce; of the inflation of avarice into a mania; of ruinous political centralization; of dominant bourgeois ideals—not the ideals of the working bourgeois, but those of the new bourgeois of bankers, speculators, shavers, lawyers, job-holders; and it was a period of great general com-

placency toward corruption. This is one thing that makes Rabelais particularly a man of our own time. The quality of spirit that he exhibits was brought out under circumstances almost exactly like ours, and contact with it helps us to meet our own circumstances in the way that he met his.

Pantagruelism means keeping the integrity of one's own personality absolutely intact. Rabelais says that Pantagruel "never vexed nor disquieted himself with the least pretence of dislike to anything, because he knew that he must have most grossly abandoned the divine mansion of reason if he had permitted his mind to be never so little grieved, afflicted, or altered on any occasion whatsoever. For all the goods that the heaven covereth and that the earth containeth, in all their dimensions of height, depth, breadth, and length, are not of so much worth as that we should for them disturb or disorder our affections, trouble or perplex our senses or spirits."

You see, the Pantagruelist never admits that there is anything in the world that is bigger than he is. Not business, not profession, not position. The case of the American businessman is much discussed now, as you know. What has the typical American businessman come to? He thought his business was bigger than he was, and he went into slavery to it and let it own him, and he was proud to do that, he thought that meant progress, thought it meant civilization, and he thought because his business was so great that he must be a great man; and he kept letting us know he thought so. He was like the misguided girl who had lived with so many gentlemen that she thought she was a lady. Well, then, a pinch comes, and now we are all saying the businessman is only a stuffed shirt, that there is nothing inside his shirt but wind and fungus. We see that the big men of business have had to have a tariff wall around them, or get rebates from the railways on their freight, or get some other kind of special privilege, and that they were not great men at all, for almost anybody with the same privilege could have done as well.

Then think of the people in politics, the jobholders and jobhunters. There are a lot of them around just now, telling us what ought to be done and what they are going to do if they are elected. The trouble with them is that they think the job is

bigger than they are, and so they destroy the integrity of their personality in order to get it or to hold it. Why, by the time a man has connived and lied and shuffled his miserable way up to the point where he can be an acceptable candidate, there isn't enough of him left to be a good jobholder, even if he wants to. The Athenians blamed Socrates, you know, because he wouldn't have anything to do with politics; he would not vote or go into any campaigns or endorse any candidates—he let it all alone. He was a great Pantagruelist, one of the greatest, so he told the Athenians that what they were blaming him for was the very reason why he and his followers were the best politicians in Athens. That closed *them* out. He was such a good Pantagruelist that finally the boys had to get together and poison him.

Pantagruelism is utterly unselfconscious; it works like a kind of secondary instinct. Have you ever noticed how Rabelais's wonderful art comes out in the relations between Pantagruel and Panurge? Pantagruel liked Panurge, was interested in him, amused by him, tolerant of all his ingenious deviltry, but never once compromised his own character. On the other hand, he was never priggish, never patronizing or moralistic with Panurge, not even in their discussion on borrowing and lending. His superiority was always unselfconscious, effortless. I think the delicate consistency that Rabelais shows on this point is perhaps his greatest literary achievement; and the climax of it is that Panurge, who was never loyal to anything or anybody, was always loyal to Pantagruel.

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But Pantagruelism is not easy. In the Prologue to the Third Book we come on another characteristic which is the crowning glory of Pantagruelism. Rabelais has been talking about the blunders of an honest-minded Egyptian ruler, and some other matters of the kind, how well-intended things are sometimes misapprehended, and so on, and then he says that by virtue of Pantagruelism we are always ready to "bear with anything that floweth from a good, free, and loyal heart." Maybe that is easier for you than it is for me. I don't mind saying frankly and very sadly that my Pantagruelism breaks down oftener on that than on anything. On this point Pantagruelism is like

Christianity. I have often thought that I might have made a pretty consistent Christian if it had not been for just that one thing that the blessed Apostle said about suffering fools gladly. How easily the great Pantagruelists seem to do that! But it only seems easy; it really is very hard to do. How easily, how exquisitely Rabelais did it! I wish I might have him in New York so he could hear some of my friends talk about the great transformations that are going to take place when Mr. Roosevelt is elected or Mr. Hoover is reelected. I always walk out on them, but Rabelais would not. He would play with them a while, and probably get some results, for they are really first-rate people, but all that sort of thing seems beyond me.

The quarantine I spoke of a moment ago appears to be pretty well lifted. We are not quarantining against much of anything, these days. Now, in conclusion, may I ask if it ever occurred to you to think what a thundering joke on the country it would be if this university should quietly, without saying anything about it, go back to its old contraband business of disseminating Pantagruelism? For that was its business. You got good chemistry with Remsen, and mathematics with Sylvester, and semitics with Paul Haupt, and a degree at the end of it, and all that sort of thing, but mark my words, before time gets through with you it will show that the real distinction of this university was that it exposed you to Pantagruelism day and night. Let us dream about it for a moment. Suppose we say you sold your campus and your plant—they may be an asset to you, but they look to me like a liability; suppose you threw out all your undergradaute students—and this time I am very sure they are a liability; suppose you went back to the little brick houses where Huxley found you, and suppose you got together a dozen or so good sound Pantagruelists from somewhere and shut them up there with your graduate students, your bachelors and masters. What a colossal joke it would be! The country has virtually ruined itself in the effort to stamp out Pantagruelism. All its institutional voices have been raised in behalf of ignoble, mean, squalid ideals, and telling us that those mean progress, those mean civilization, those mean hundred-per-cent Americanism. Now that the country has got itself in such distraction from following this



doctrine that none of the accepted prophets have a sensible word to say, I repeat, what a joke it would be if the old original sinner should go back and begin corrupting the youth again.

Then suppose you should use a little selective pressure on your student body. You know, some people—excellent people, admirable people—are immune to Pantagruelism. You had some of them here in the old days, like President Wilson and Mr. Newton Baker. They were fine folks, good as gold, most of them, but no good at all for your purposes. Well, suppose when these immune people come around, you tell them after a while that they would probably do better up at Harvard, or maybe Yale. Yes, Yale is the place for them. There is an Institute of Human Relations up there, and these immune people are usually strong on human relations. Did you ever notice that? When Mr. Wilson and Mr. Baker got going on human relations, there was no stopping them. So you might off-load your immune people on Yale, and they could go to the Institute. They would probably find a director there—I mean, a Dean—and plenty of card-indexes and stenographers, and one thing or another like that that are just what you need to study human relations with; and meanwhile you could be getting on with Pantagruelism.



# *The Genial Mr. Nock*

Edmund A. Opitz

Bring together the shades of Erasmus, Shakespeare and Goethe and try to imagine what they would do. Play poker? Visit the Stock Exchange? Absurd! They would talk together. The precious converse of noble minds is the most truly human of all human relations, and demands at least as much artistry as Kreisler brought to the Mendelssohn Concerto. It need not be argued that Albert Jay Nock belongs on the same plane as the aforementioned to assert that he was of their spirit and that he did bring a considerable finesse to any discussion. Nock loved good talk; kindled by a responsive companion he was a brilliant conversationalist. He loved good food as well, but a meal was primarily a means of lubricating the flow of ideas. To the table he brought a mind trained and tuned to concert pitch, a mind well stocked with ideas gleaned from great literature and broadened by wide experience here and on the continent.

Nock's ideas were perhaps not so original as he was, but he had made them his very own; his thinking ran along lines quite at variance with the familiar channels scooped out by the popular pundits of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Having framed his convictions independent of any school or party, he was able to view the intellectual passions and battles of the day with clinical detachment. Consequently, he appeared to many of his contemporaries as a man of monumental prejudices, almost an anachronism.

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This essay originally appeared in the November 1982 issue of *The Freeman*, the journal of The Foundation for Economic Education.

Convictions or prejudices, Nock orchestrated his brilliantly, and would on occasion—I am told—discourse over food barely touched while his dinner companion downed a hearty meal. “Lingering over the table,” writes Felix Morley, “we touched on many subjects, all of them irradiated by the light of his brilliant mind and mellowed by the warmth of his personality.” “Ideas never failed him,” Ellery Sedgwick adds. “Others have their storehouses of learning, but Nock’s mental files were available on the instant. The classics, all of them one might say, French memoirs, learning polite and impolite, everything neatly classified and pigeonholed.”

All this is as it should be. In “The Decline of Conversation,” an essay in the collection entitled *On Doing the Right Thing*, Nock remarks that “The civilization of a country consists in the quality of life that is lived there, and this quality shows plainest in the things people choose to talk about when they talk together, and in the way they choose to talk about them.” In good conversation there is a symphonic quality, themes and variations, a blending and harmony of widely ranging minds which take delight in ideas for their own sake, minds able to play freely over and around ideas without prepossession and willing to follow an argument wherever it leads them. In a debate there’s a loser, but in a discussion there are only winners.

Nock projected some quality—we’d call it charisma today—which caused those in his company to surpass themselves. “You find yourself coming out with things you didn’t know you had it in you to say,” recalls a friend.

### ***A Living with Others***

Conversation is “a living with others,” the dictionary tells us, “a manner of life.” It’s a cultivated way of handling leisure, and it has a synergistic effect on the people involved—provided they meet Rabelais’ test, being “free, well-born, well bred, and conversant in honest companies.” For it is the amiable who shall possess the earth, sang the Psalmist (Ps. 37); not the sectaries who see things through the distorting lens of the ego and try to conscript every idea into the service of a faction. The True Believer cannot become a good conversationalist, for “conversation depends on a

copiousness of general ideas and an imagination able to marshal them." It's an intellectual dance of reciprocal inspiration, exhibiting "a power of disinterested reflection, an active sense of beauty, and an active sense of manners." AJN thought of his *Freeman* as a sort of conversation, "a fellowship of fine minds in all parts of the globe."

Nock came into full possession of his powers during his editorship of *The Freeman*, 1920–1924, from his fiftieth to his fifty-fourth year. He had had a solid grounding in the classics at St. Stephens, and his valedictory address to the class of '92 reveals a remarkably disciplined mind for one so young. He went on to earn a graduate degree in theology, then furthered his education informally during the next two decades by reading and travel—steeping himself in the worlds of scholarship, culture, and affairs.

As his inner life ripened the visible man followed suit; slim, poised and assured, impeccably attired—a commanding presence. He became the Albert Jay Nock his friends knew during his *Freeman* days and after; a man of immense reserve, a person around whom legends cluster, a writer whose erudition and prose style earned him a select following—larger now than the corporal's guard he had a generation ago. It was not in him to become a popular thinker and writer; he wrote for the Remnant and tried to do a solid body of work for the future. "The first rate critic's business," he wrote, "is to anticipate the future, work with it, and look exclusively to it for his dividends." The future Nock worked for is catching up with him!

### ***An Autobiography of Ideas***

Nock was a virtuoso in these matters, and we shall not see his like again. But we can follow his development as meticulously set forth by the man himself in *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*. This book (whose title summons up Turgenev) is not an autobiography in the usual sense of that term. Every suggestion that he write a book about his life was rejected with annoyance—until a friend suggested "a purely literary and philosophical autobiography." Nock fell in with this notion because, as he said, "every person of any intellectual quality develops some sort of philosophy of existence; he acquires

certain settled views of life and of human society; and if he would trace out the origin and course of the ideas contributory to that philosophy, he might find it an interesting venture." Thus, the *Memoirs*, "the autobiography of a mind in relation to the society in which it found itself."

Nock closes his final chapter, privacy still intact; but the attentive reader's mind has been subtly invaded, and it would be a dull fellow indeed who could deny that the hours spent with this book were not among his most memorable reading experiences. Nock discourses on education, literature, women, politics, economics, religion and death, and he does so in matchless, eighteen carat English prose, spiked with apt quotations and laced with allusions. Nearly a lifetime of reflection had been spent on each of the topics here aired, and this book is Nock's final statement and testament. It is the book by which he will be finally judged, the one in which he himself took most satisfaction. It is a book to be enjoyed and then mastered; and as the dyer's hand is stained by the medium he works in so does the magic of the *Memoirs* work on a person's whole outlook and philosophy.

### ***His Life and Work Abroad***

Nock's *Freeman* has an enviable reputation in American journalism, ranked as the high water mark by many. After four glorious years it ceased publication with its issue of March 5, 1924, having bade farewell to its readership a month earlier. An item in AJN's final Miscellany column offers a rueful reflection on the contemporary civilization.

Nock notes that deep grooves are worn in the wooden counters of the change booths in the older elevated railway stations, and muses, "There seems something symbolic about them. They are in their way, a testimony to the nature of our civilization; they are our counterpart of the grooves worn in the stone steps of European cathedrals by the feet of innumerable devotees." With this parting shot he left these shores to live and work abroad for long periods during the next fifteen years. These were fruitful years, marked by his brilliant Rabelais scholarship, his classic essay on Jefferson and another on Henry George, his book on the State, *A Journal of These Days*, and numerous articles in magazines like

*Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and *The American Mercury*. World War II brought him permanently back to these shores, where he lived his final years.

A month before his death he wrote to a friend, "I have been really quite ill, feeble and worthless, and have now reached the point of letting the quacks roll up their sleeves and do their worst . . . I'll keep you informed, or some one will, but I foresee I shall not be writing much at length. On his last day Lord Houghton said, 'I am going to join the majority, and you know how I always prefer the minority.' Witty fellow!" The minority lost AJN on the nineteenth of August, nineteen hundred forty five.

It is Nock's attitude toward life that chiefly interests us, the demands he put upon it, his expectations of what it had to offer him, his tactical approach as he sought to avail himself of its bounty. Open the *Memoirs*. It is a fair presumption that the quotation Nock selected for the title page of this book had a special meaning for him. We read the familiar testimony of Sir Isaac Newton: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered around me."

The seashore is broad enough to support a related analogy, having to do with the search for truth. This time imagine that the man at the water's edge is blind. He's just been told that a message of enormous importance from someone he loves is written in the sand in Braille, and that the incoming tide will soon obliterate it. There's no time to spare, so no wasted motion! Loss of vision has keyed up the man's other senses, and the heightened expectancy generated by this crisis situation pushes alertness and sensitivity still higher. But he restrains himself. He knows that if he thrusts his fingers too rudely against the sand his contact with the letters will erase them; so, he gets himself out of the way and deliberately, with the utmost delicacy, eases his hands over the sand until he establishes tactile contact with the Braille, at which point he brings all his finesse into play and lets the message seep through his fingertips.

This points to the attitude or posture of alert-passivity, of interest-affection, which some people are occasionally able to bring to bear. Nock exemplified this kind of receptivity no matter what his immediate preoccupation—writing, reading, editorial work, convivial relations. “They have helped the truth along without encumbering it with themselves,” said Artemus Ward of men of his stripe. Nock was fond of this sentence, for it defined his style, and suited his temperament. Would his style have been different if Nock had been one of Sheldon’s mesomorphs, inclined toward somatotonia? The speculation is vain. He was what he was, and we can say only that bodily make-up and chemistry did not stand in the way of his characteristic approach.

### *The Role for the Intellect*

Most of our contemporaries are arrayed on the other side of the fence. They are what H. G. Wells used to refer to as “gawdsakers.” Nervously apprehensive that the world is about to go to hell in a handbasket the typical Modern runs around yelling “For gawdsake let’s do something!” He has wearily accepted the joyless task of straightening out the cosmos, and the first step is to improve others. The incomparable John Dewey gave us marching orders when he announced a new role for the intellect. No more for us the old delights of knowledge to be enjoyed for its own sake; mankind has come of age, having graduated “from knowledge as an esthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature regarded as a work of divine art, to knowing as a means of secular control . . . [Nature] is now something to be modified, to be intentionally controlled.”

Mr. Nock would have none of this, for he knew that a culture which denies or perverts the claims of intellect and knowledge will pay dearly for it. So, within the limits of his native reserve he took a refined delight in people and things as they really are, to be enjoyed for their own sake. He knew that joy is not only the first fruit of the spirit but the first business of the critic as well; “his affair is one only of joyful appraisal, assessment, and representation,” as he put it in the essay on Artemus Ward. Nock goes on to say, “that for life to



be fruitful, life must be felt as a joy; that it is by the bond of joy, not of happiness or pleasure, not of duty or responsibility, that the called and chosen spirits are kept together in this world."

Underlying an attitude such as this is a profound confidence in the cosmic process. The Universe is biased in our favor so we are entitled to enjoy the scene while nature takes its course. This is not dull passivity; it is akin to the alert-passivity a skilled horticulturalist displays as he nurses along an exotic bloom in order that the plant might become what it really is. The Reformer forgets that only God—or Nature—can make a tree . . . or a society. Society is not some entity that can be gotten at directly to improve it; a good society is a bonus, a by-product of men and women pursuing with some measure of success the life goals appropriate to human nature. If the major social instincts and drives are not given harmonious and balanced expression the society is warped and unlovely as a result.

The social drives in Nock's catalog are five in number, and he indicts modern culture for allowing the claims of only one of them. The claims of intellect and knowledge have been disallowed; likewise the claims of beauty and poetry, religion and morals, social life and manners. Only the instinct for making money and getting on in the world has been turned loose, he charges, and a civilization mired in "economism" is the result. This is a consequence of ideas, wrong ideas, and any cure must begin by repairing our faulty thinking.

Society cannot be improved by working on the level of events; once things have gotten this far they are in the past tense. Reformers work on events, which is why the world is periodically wrecked by those who set out to save it. Talleyrand, watching one such series of events unfold, pointed to the person who had set them in motion and remarked sarcastically: "I knew that man would save the world, but I did not know he'd do it so soon!"

The only enduring reforms are those which take place below the surface of events; that's where the future is being born. And all you can reform there is yourself—provided you start early enough and live long enough. The only thing you can do for "society," Nock contends, is to present it with one

reformed unit. Having sounded this hopeful note, what was Nock to do except declare for superfluity?

### ***Letting Things Alone***

It is not Nock's way to make a point by means of a philosophical disquisition; his teaching method is parabolical. He let people alone and he let things alone, believing that there are forces at work in them which make for integration and growth—if we don't interfere. Interfering comes naturally, however; letting things alone is an acquired skill. A taste for this skill seeps in as we begin to understand how vast are the regions beyond conscious human control and how well things function in those realms.

Turn to the essay entitled "Snoring as a Fine Art" found in the collection bearing that title. General Kutusov commanded the Russian forces arrayed against Napoleon. No question about Kutusov's competence or his courage, but why didn't he provide some action? Why didn't he engage the French army head on and give Napoleon a thorough trouncing? Why did he snore through staff meetings? Well, Nock contends, it was because the General was playing hunches; he "sensed" what the little Corsican was going to do—and that's what Napoleon did! The French made one blunder after another—as Kutusov knew they would—and virtually engineered their own defeat.

The point is that some people have the ability to quiet the conscious intellect and let other parts of the mind supply guidance. Nock is more nearly on his own ground when he cites the instance of Wordsworth. "Wordsworth unquestionably had something; and when he was content to leave that something in charge of his poetical operations—when he resolutely bottled up the conscious and intellectual Wordsworth, and corked it down—he was a truly great poet. When he summoned up the conscious Wordsworth, however, and put it in charge, as unfortunately he often did, the conscious Wordsworth was such a dreadful old foo-foo that the poetry churned out under its direction was simply awful."

Nock does not disparage the intellect and the "knowing" peculiar to it when he writes: "Socrates knew nothing, and was proud of it. He carried the magnificent art of Not

Knowing to the legal limit, and oh, my dear friend, what an incomparably great and splendid art that is!"

It has been pointed out by Michael Polanyi and others that there is a "tacit dimension" in all knowledge, that in any epistemological situation we actually know more than we are consciously aware of. A great diagnostician examines a patient and, in addition to observing specific symptoms, takes in the person as a whole before offering his conclusion. After the conscious intellect has done its job you work from the "gut," the place where you store "useless" knowledge.

### ***Acquiring Knowledge—and then Forgetting It***

The essay entitled "The Value of Useless Knowledge," found in the collection entitled *Free Speech and Plain Language*, draws a sharp distinction between Pedantry and Culture. "The pedant's learning remains too long on the surface of his mind; it confuses and distorts succeeding impressions, thus aiding him only to give himself a conventional account of things, rather than leaving his consciousness free to penetrate as close as possible to their reality, to see them as they actually are . . . Culture's methods," on the other hand, "are those of exercising the consciousness in a free and disinterested play over any object presented to it." And this, Nock affirms, "Means acquiring a vast deal of useless knowledge, and then forgetting it."

Nock is talking about residual knowledge, so thoroughly known that we do not need to attend to it; it attends to us. Analogously, years of training have educated a pianist's fingers to the point where, if he tried to direct them individually over the keyboard, they'd rebel and refuse to play even the simplest melody. It is not to diminish the role of the conscious intellect to point out that there is layer upon layer of mind beyond the intellect, and that for some purposes the intellect must be stilled if we would avail ourselves of this pool of "useless knowledge." When this thought finally sinks in the Social Planner with his "rational controls" will be an extinct breed. Adam Smith's Invisible Hand can be trusted, the market works, there's coherence in the nature of things and its wisdom is put at the service of those willing to cooperate with it.

An essay in *Snoring* invokes the court jester to illustrate the tactic. The jester, because of his outlandish appearance and his wry humor, could say things to the king which would cost the court philosopher his head. Today's counterpart of the fool is the cartoonist and the witty newspaper paragrapher. Nock says he gets more sound sense out of these men than from the editorial writers, for the best of them have "an intuitive sense of the plain natural truth of things," and they deliver it up to us in a mode we can accept. "They arouse no animosities, alarm no pride of opinion, nor do they seek to beat a person off his chosen ground—under their influence his ground imperceptibly changes with him."

Suzanne LaFollette was the editor of *The New Freeman*, which began publication with the issue of March 15, 1930, and ran for a little more than a year. Nock contributed a column called "Miscellany," using the pseudonym Journeyman. These vagrant paragraphs were later collected and published as *The Book of Journeyman*. Nock viewed contemporary American culture with a critical eye, finding little to like in it. He referred to it as an idea-less world. Education, music, manners, religion, business, politics—his raillery played over them all. He surveyed Europe and reflected ruefully that everything about it he admired came out of a philosophy at variance with his own. Besides sound theory, he muses, you have to have the right kind of people to work it, and where are you going to get 'em? We look for a new formula when what is needed is a new vision of the human person, his powers and his potential.

In the course of this survey we've picked up only a few bits and pieces as we've skirted the shore of the main body of Nock material; the next step has to be total immersion. He's to be read, mainly because he's fun to read; even when he's wrong he's delightful. Most of the time he is right, I believe; his judgments are sound. And the spirit and temper which pervade his pages gently nag at the reader until he agrees that "educate" is not a transitive verb. The only education is self-education and Albert Jay Nock has already blazed that trail.

# *Works of Albert Jay Nock*

*The Myth of a Guilty Nation*, 1922

*Jefferson*, 1926, 1960, 1983

*On Doing the Right Thing*, 1928

*The Book of Journeyman*, 1930, 1967

*The Works of Francis Rabelais*, 1931. Edited, with an Introduction by Albert Jay Nock and Catherine Rose Wilson (Introduction published separately as *Francis Rabelais: The Man and His Work*)

*The Theory of Education in the United States*, 1932, 1949, 1969

*A Journey into Rabelais's France*, 1934. Pen and ink illustrations by Ruth Robinson

*A Journal of These Days*, 1934

*Our Enemy, The State*, 1935, 1946, 1973, 1983

*Free Speech and Plain Language*, 1937, 1968

*Henry George*, 1939

*The Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*, 1943, 1964, 1969, 1983

*A Journal of Forgotten Days*, 1948

*Letters from Albert Jay Nock*, 1949

*Snoring as a Fine Art and Twelve Other Essays*, 1958

*Selected Letters from Albert Jay Nock*, 1962

Mr. Nock wrote Introductions to:

*Forty Years of It*, Brand Whitlock, 1914

*How Diplomats Make War*, Francis Neilson, 1915, 1921

*Selected Works of Artemus Ward*, Edited by A. J. N., 1924

*Man Vs. The State*, Herbert Spencer, 1940

*Meditations in Wall Street*, Henry Stanley Haskins, 1940

*The Freeman Book*, published in 1924, includes several pieces by Mr. Nock which appeared in *The Freeman*, 1920–1924

Other books of interest:

*The Mind and Art of Albert Jay Nock* by Robert Crunden, 1964.

*A History of The Freeman* by Susan J. Turner, 1963.

*The Superfluous Anarchist* by Michael Wreszin, 1972.



# Appendix

## Abbreviations

Education	— <i>The Theory of Education in the U.S.</i>
Free Speech	— <i>Free Speech and Plain Language</i>
Journal	— <i>A Journal of These Days</i>
Forgotten	— <i>A Journal of Forgotten Days</i>
Journeyman	— <i>The Book of Journeyman</i>
Letters	— <i>Letters from Albert J. Nock</i>
Man	— <i>The Man Versus The State</i>
Meditations	— <i>Meditations in Wall Street</i>
Memoirs	— <i>The Memoirs of a Superfluous Man</i>
Right Thing	— <i>On Doing the Right Thing</i>
Selected Letters	— <i>Selected Letters of Albert Jay Nock</i>
Snoring	— <i>Snoring As a Fine Art</i>
The Freeman	— <i>The Freeman Book</i>
The State	— <i>Our Enemy, The State</i>