


**CRUSADERS FOR
AMERICAN LIBERALISM**

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XXIX. T. R. AND F. D. R.

THE year 1929 put a period to the eclogue of art and radicalism which had been ushered in so excitedly a short decade before. Overnight it became painfully clear that the quest for Cytherea and moon-calf attitudes, to say nothing of simple thoughtlessness on the part of the ordinary citizen, would never suffice for this crisis.

The ex-muckrakers were helpless to explain their point of view, and it is doubtful that they would have been heard if they had tried. Radicals who harbored extreme solutions for industrial ills, who had learned from the Soviets, were alone approved among the desperate. They waxed more confident; they increased their factional battles and redoubled their propaganda. If they spoke in terms drawn chiefly from Europe's experiences, it was because Europe had been unable to blind herself to the realities of class war and now offered the clearest portents of disaster. Again, it was because the gap the World War created between the old America and the new had affected the radical movement as much as every other. Even La Follette's last bid for the Presidency, in 1924, did not stimulate memory; his campaign faded into the limbo of pre-War issues and no one did them honor.

Babbitt lost control of current affairs as surely as the muckrakers had before him. He could not solve the depression; he had scarcely been able to understand prosperity. Obscurely he identified prosperity with the American Way. But the way back—granting that it could be found, or was worth finding—was not to be discovered at a moment's notice; and meanwhile strikes and appeals for relief were distressingly inadequate; worse still, this inadequacy showed that crisis was national, and there was no way of telling how long it would continue to be so.

Public attention was focused upon the laborer: his plight could not be ignored. The middle-class was also in travail, but its sor-

rows struck no popular chord of sympathy. Holding on to their individualism, the "petty bourgeoisie" responded to the situation in just such a fashion as their radical critics could have asked and predicted: they made frantic efforts to save themselves; they made vain prophecies of an upswing; they grasped at straws of reform.

The radicals, with their grasp of economics, with their firm understanding of the needs of labor, were able to command more attention and as the dark days of 1931 and 1932 came they spoke with increasing emphasis and effect. Since the economic fear towered over every other problem and interest, it was not amazing that a shamed and aimless intelligentsia—that part of it which was not indifferent to the deluge: the unpossessed—should have met the radicals' arguments and accusations half-heartedly, and should have felt, some secretly, some openly, that service to the working-class was the least excuse one could offer for existence. So the working-class was idealized at the expense of the middle-class in much the same way as the "progressive" had been idealized a generation before, but with much less realism. On the one hand, the laborer was a crushed, bewildered slave whose sufferings only a coldhearted reactionary could bear; on the other hand, he was the proud, indomitable bearer of the future—of that future when the middle-class opportunist should beware. "Let the bourgeoisie tremble!" Marx had written.

The trials of labor, the futility of panaceas, the trend toward revolution, were expressed in countless volumes of fiction and polemic. Grace Lumpkin, taking up the tale which Edith Summers Kelly earlier had begun in *Weeds*, a superb story of backwoods enslavement, made in her *To Make My Bread* one of the few notable efforts to link her newfound Communist convictions with matters intrinsically American. But her climax, with its overtones of revolt, was the least vivid section of her book. Other writers, more impatient of the past, more contemptuous of the background of American tradition and ideals, wrote fables of revolution that charmed the very audiences whose life-lines they tried to sever.

Meanwhile a second Roosevelt, speaking with a persuasiveness which not T. R. himself could have equaled, announced his determination to save the country. The "Square Deal" had been pushed through with a waving of fists and with invective; NRA

and its "Brain Trusters" now were met with a cry of horror above which one could barely hear the caustic criticisms of the Communists. Still the crisis did not break, and the babel of dissatisfaction mounted. Technocracy had its day. Would-be leaders emerged: Father Coughlin, Huey Long, Townsend, Father Divine, and—wonderful to be told!—Upton Sinclair who, with EPIC, all but carried California against the two party machines. Veblen's "leisure class" was discussed, and also Sumner's "forgotten man," but not so thoroughly as to explain who or what Veblen and Sumner had really been, or socially represented. Hence the leisure class and the forgotten man remained catchwords for debate rather than subjects for consideration. Even Henry George's teachings were not to be heard outside the Henry George School of Social Science. The American Approach, in other words, remained where it had languished before the coming of crisis: in disrepute—considered inadequate for pressing needs.

It would have been false to term the new radicals, or the New Dealers for that matter, muckrakers; and no one thought of doing so. Democracy, with all it connoted, with that realistic concern for American institutions that it presupposed, was not a pivot of thought. There were experts who specialized in middle-class affairs—Schlink and Kallet, J. B. Matthews and Stuart Chase—and it was noticeable that they spoke not for themselves, as the muckrakers had done, but for a constituency, for co-operatives and other consumers' organizations. But there was no phenomenal growth of such organizations, and their spokesmen found themselves driven nearer and nearer extreme radical theory. Such theory held the stage and provided the idiom of controversy.

Streams of books on Russia indicated that the history and possibility of revolution were being considered by thinking groups of Americans. It is not too much to say that the chief characters of the great Communist "experiment" were better personalized, were given more detailed and more careful treatment, by the *littérateurs*—as well as by those many writers who had lost faith in literature—than were many American leaders who were presumably to settle the future of the country. If Judge Gary had been able to say, years before, "We are all Socialists today," it was even truer that Communism, for all that it did not capture a vast following, captured a devout one, and its psychology at-

tracted wide respect, particularly among the brave young people who were most willing to believe that violence was the one way out.

Still, there was relief for the foodless and homeless. Vast agencies attended, although inadequately and without clear purpose, to urgent need. Whereas muckraking had been released in good times and had represented the middle-class on the offensive, it was now the working-class that led the way and won to its cause capable leaders from other social groups. WPA, PWA, ERB were created not for the college hordes and those thrust out of careers in business (these were given the task of administering assistance) but primarily for the unskilled and the semiskilled who would otherwise have starved.

The wheels of industry meanwhile refused to turn, and New Deal critics who appealed to American ideals and upbraided the President as only Theodore Roosevelt had been upbraided, could propose no counter-measures which Hoover had not already tried. The Communists, on the other hand, took the lead in quickening public awareness of mass misery. But if they encouraged discontent, they could not be held responsible for it. The paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty was an objective fact, and if the crisis was not to pass of itself, if reaction was not to be persuaded to make necessary concessions, then certainly there was no way out but revolt.

The fall of the German republic presented a final argument to those who argued the necessity, inevitable or otherwise, of Communism. Hitler was a reality that could be no more ignored than hunger pangs. He derided majority rule even more savagely than did the leaders of the Third International. Since the massed strength of radicals and democrats had been unable to forestall Fascism, Americans asked anxiously, What could? Some blamed the Communists themselves for the German debacle, holding that it was their aggressive determination to have revolution that had precipitated Fascism; but others, particularly among the unemployed and in the unions, could not deny that the Communists had looked first and foremost to the proletariat's needs. Anyway, if no choice but between Fascism and Communism were to present itself, the latter promised more to the dispossessed.

The prospect of revolution, then, was accepted by people who would in other days have been Progressives and Socialists, not merely because of the romantic aura events had given Communism, but because Communism overwhelmed them with its possibilities. The hasty efforts to "Americanize" Marxism were the evidence. Despite the fact that Communism was supposed to be based upon science and history and, of course, upon the working-class, argument on the subject was carried on with feeling and impatience—that is, from compulsion rather than confidence. There was need for convincing, for being convinced, rather than for learning; and, from the point of view of the converts, those who kept themselves free of party entanglements and were reluctant to submit themselves unconditionally to label and discipline merited more contempt than outright foes. It was for the foes that fear was reserved.

It was to be expected that people with Marxist beliefs—or compulsions—should build up influence in the unions, in organizations set up to agitate for relief, and in the relief agencies themselves. Nor did that influence go unrecognized in reactionary circles. Relief and work projects were wrung out of government only over the opposition of political and industrial leaders who were frightened by the prospect of a standing army of citizens dependent upon the government for sustenance. Worried conservatives pointed out—what required no further emphasis—that there was no guarantee that these dependents would ever be reabsorbed into private industry. They foresaw an end of the American spirit of individualism. The official interference in private enterprise which they visualized made T. R.'s administration days look like a time of untrammelled industrial freedom.

It seemed frightful that the government was giving work to avowed enemies of the capitalist system. Responsible administrators tolerated known Communists; they dealt with groups which made only the slightest secret of advocating or tolerating Communism. Government-sponsored bureaus might well become instruments of insurrection, as the Soviets had. Indeed, it was reported that when the President heard the suggestion that if his plans succeeded he would go down in history as the greatest American executive, he remarked that if he failed he might well

be the last one. In any event, there could be no doubt that the agencies he created were hotbeds of unrest.

Relief meanwhile continued to be consistently inadequate, and security for the average citizen seemed as far away as ever. As the Thirties deepened, there was no sign of a turn for the better.

Radical thought, thought roused by repression and despair, surely held its own during those years. For conservatives, radicals were termites undermining the foundations of the state. In their own estimation radicals were formulating the only possible conclusions from the conditions they witnessed. The tenets of "democratic centralism," of absolute adherence to party decisions, which Lenin and his aides hammered out to protect their underground party and to insure united action, dominated the radical circles and made their power felt afar.

Steffens, for one, approved of radical tactics and of the opportunism and double-dealing that marked them in practice. He assimilated just enough Bolshevik theory to round out his life's thought and to make him a critic of those muckraking achievements which he recognized as constituting his claim to remembrance. The end, he believed, justified the means. Unfortunately, and for his Communist friends annoyingly, he also approved of Mussolini's use of this maxim! For Steffens was not to be reduced to the mechanical use of clichés in the manner of unionists and revolutionists who solicited his support. He gave that support, but he preserved a kind of freedom which keeps some men self-contained if not always influential.

To be influential it was necessary to speak in slogans and in conventional modes. One had to lump business and politics into one reactionary mass consisting of "Bourbons" and "counter-revolutionaries." One argued the possibility of a "proletarian" literature, and one "used" reformers and vacillators for "higher goals." Those who criticized as unreal the Communists and neo-Communists portrayed in *The Big Money*, by John Dos Passos, were merely unable to recognize themselves and the psychological pressure to which they had been subjected. For if Dos Passos put robot characteristics in his protagonists, it was not because he had no feeling for character (few other novelists had so much as he) but he saw that his characters had been affected by what could

only be called thought alien and unnatural to their personalities. Such an interpretation of this novel would have been construed as red-baiting in those fevered days; but it was true in the sense that the jargon and gestures of those who led the forces of unrest were not drawn from American soil. The Bolsheviki might or might not be the sole heirs of Marx, but they were Russian, and it was a fact that even those who borrowed from them eclectically were unable to develop an approach natural enough to threaten the strength of the New Deal. The New Deal was strong because it responded only to pressure from American sources. To think otherwise was to dream like *Pravda*, which hopefully printed a photograph of barricades purportedly set up during the San Francisco General Strike.

The cry for bread was not a cry for revolution—not yet, at any rate. If revolution was truly on the way, it marched with shorter steps than revolutionists willingly supposed. As for radical intellectuals, the yearning for revolution arose from the need of filling one's inner void, of experimenting in personal life with a philosophy that challenged the void. One could always hope that such a philosophy would somehow force events to a showdown.

Still there was no business revival. Perhaps business was contemptible, the gross body of American capitalism, but it was nevertheless what Charles Edward Russell had called it—the heart of the nation. With the C.I.O. now secure in the field; with relief agencies that were formed for temporary needs now being incorporated in the government structure; with an economy of scarcity being accepted in practice—unrest should have intensified rather than diminished.

Instead there appeared a revival of interest in democracy—sudden, definite, insistent. In the groping for the democratic tradition shades of Jefferson and Lincoln were vaguely but earnestly invoked. It is true that those radical writers who hurried to meet the new demand were unable to meet it consistently or confidently, for they had just been describing democracy as an abstraction, a trick of speech used by demagogues to confuse the public—as it had often been, indeed. Again, these writers had called for a “working-class history” of the United States, evidently to offset such studies as Dr. Charles A. Beard's. No such history had been

produced, but neither had any other of a vital, democratic quality.

Yet the precedents for this sensational about-face were to be found in the very radicals who had made sport of democracy. John Chamberlain, for instance, had called the book he issued in 1932 *Farewell to Reform*, but he by no means had bade farewell. Radical trends had influenced him just far enough to cause him to revive the memory of Populist and muckraking achievements in order to demolish them. That done, he could not bring himself to a direct advocacy of revolution, but quibbled with the term until it became a new version of reform.

While talk about democracy increased, there was no security for the radical; but in one form or another, there was work to do—or relief, if no work came to hand. And one could not sustain the high expectations of revolt indefinitely. There was accordingly a general entrenchment in whatever *modus vivendi* offered itself.

Relief was not adequate, but it somehow provided for life. The task of the radical became, then, to agitate for further relief, for better and more numerous government projects, for an extension of government participation in industry. And so the agitators who had attached social significance to the personal quest for relief admitted that the quest was, after all, materialistic. As the excitement that raised obscure protestors into well-paying, government-given positions died down, it was plainly to be seen that they had those positions and benefited from them. Since opportunism could not entirely hide itself in such a situation, many others who had cheered and supported messiahs now asked themselves what *they* stood to gain. Revolutionary promises, in short, had materialized no more than those of the blunt and self-seeking conservatives.

Realism came in through other doors, too. War, which in its *What Price Glory?* phase had been a feared generality, now presented itself as real and, according to all signs, inevitable. Hitler was perhaps a madman, but he had armed his nation. Mussolini was not deterred by "moral condemnation" from marching his legions into Ethiopia. The League of Nations mocked Wilson's designs with its very existence. War was close and, as in 1917, cast its shadow into every home.

It was fear, then, that encouraged the trend toward democratic isolation—fear of Fascism as well as Communism. Americans were, of course, no more cowardly than men of other nations, but even

those who had learned that there were worse fates than death—hunger and humiliation—still lacked ultimate convictions favoring war. Behind was 1917 to suggest that men could die in vain, and the prospect of Hitler's fall gave no assurance that he would be followed by a better man. If Hitler was "mad," then Germany was mad. But whatever happened abroad, a few realized that there was work to do at home, and, by contrast, it seemed worth doing.

If the collapse of the Madrid government ended hopes for Europe, the Moscow trials had already completed general disillusion with revolution in America. Whether the confessions were true or false, in neither case did they make dictatorship more attractive. In America the fear that one's skepticism about the trials would class one with Red-baiters, with irresponsible individualists, with anti-unionists, produced a stifling atmosphere in the same radical circles that had once thrived on dissension. And gradually that fear was transformed into a renewed interest in free speech. Hence additional interest in democracy—the right to express personal opinions, to evaluate Fascism and Communism without danger of ostracism, to burst through the walls of doctrine that cramped. Even Communist circles, while their propaganda and organization remained regimented and intact, were stirred sufficiently to add their own eager voices to the chorus, and to affirm (perhaps vainly) that Communism was "Twentieth-Century Americanism."

But if democracy was no idle dream, no futile escape from a reality consisting of militant Fascists and Communists, then it must work today as well as yesterday. Jefferson and Lincoln were mere names; they furnished no guide for eliminating unemployment, war fear, class repression, insecurity, and all the other evils the crisis had brought to the surface. If revolution was not the way out, then reform was: not the reform of fanatics and dilettantes, but reform that would meet head on the obdurate defiance of reactionaries.

If anything was Americanism, this was. But it would not develop of itself. It was important to realize that the radical tide had been vainly spent because it had not concerned itself with the concrete institutions of America. The reformer would not re-

peat that error. He would examine not institutions in the abstract, symbolized by Truth, Equality, and Liberty, but institutions that involved real political, social, and economic practices to which the masses were subject, and that had not yet been proved entirely diseased. Businessmen, he would grant, were better than ogres or idiots, and no manner of insult could prove that they were not. He would see that if Sinclair Lewis's satire had not caused an uprising, the less accurate portraits, the mere invective, of the doctrinaire radicals would be no more successful. He would not venture to condemn the middle-class *en masse*. And as for the proletariat, he would know, as Josephine Herbst had written (and proved beyond her expectations), that pity was not enough, that sacrifice and despair were not enough. Realism that did not stop at epithets, at descriptions of sex experience, at detailing the horrors of poverty, was in order; a realism that respected reality by recognizing facts that did not fit into smug theory, and which affected others beside oneself, needed to be elaborated.

Looking backward, the renovated radical could observe that the muckrakers—so lately despised and forgotten—had possessed this kind of realism and had developed it not from fantastic desires to save the world despite itself, not from fanatical dogmas, but in response to popular demand. They had worked for a public; that is, for money. "Nothing gratis can be much good," David Graham Phillips had said, and if this was a crude, materialistic epigram—deliberately so—it was a valuable corrective to the new conceptions of sacrifice that stemmed from foreign roots and betrayed those who took them most sincerely. Phillips and the other muckrakers had, of course, worked for more than money; they had put the right to live before the right to die. And their concern for housing, pure food, conservation, the fleeced investor, and all the rest had emphasized their feeling that others had the right to live. The muckrakers had *socialized* those issues.

But this kind of work would have to be done again, for the agencies of social control that had been built on the exposés of the muckrakers had lost touch with the public and lagged behind its needs. A new popular literature capable of bridging the chasm between those agencies and the public was acutely needed. First of all, the basic problem of unemployment would have to be re-

solved, and this meant that a new and dynamic criticism of business and government was required, not according to shallow factional differences but directly according to the needs and capabilities of real, human, individual Americans. Such gestures as TVA would not be enough; TVA had been brought into being from above rather than from below, and had given *décor* rather than content to the New Deal. The new reform writer would appreciate that the nation had endured a long lesson, had paid a big bill, and was entitled to nothing less than genuine amelioration.

Easier said than done, the desperate radical could complain. But was this a challenge to be scorned? Those who despised reform—if this was reform—had not shown their superiority to it. Surely they had not exhibited such first-hand familiarity with the factual details about their country as the muckrakers had acquired. These tired radicals had been able to paint no lucid picture of their times; they had only talked of unrest. Since they had surrendered reform to professional reformers, they could be charged with resigning their right to speak for democracy.

Muckraking in its old form obviously was not to be revived. Yet if it was, as Russell thought, the only known instrument for correcting democracy's tendency to veer wildly between anarchy and industrial totalitarianism, then muckraking had never been more necessary. A crisis had never been so long nor gone so deep. And there was 1917 to remember—it was not to be seen "historically." Memories of the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, the "long view," could give no consolation to a people faced with—walking open-eyed toward—catastrophe. If certain naïvetés of the original muckrakers needed examination, their *method*, involving as it did open-eyed analysis, a balanced understanding of the enemies of democracy (not to be achieved under the old class-war psychosis), familiarity with the processes necessary for real as well as radical change—this method was as fresh and usable as ever.

There were, moreover, nuances of comprehension that could be borrowed by the new reform writer from the generation of writers who had followed after the muckrakers, and much was to be learned from the extremists of the Thirties. Out of a wealth of experiments—if so cool and scientific a name could be given to the

tragic experiences of thirty years—a soundly based approach to reform could be evolved.

Yet, curiously enough, it was almost exclusively in the schools that some slight mention of muckraking existence could be heard—as if muckraking had always been a matter for academic summary! One could learn by careful study that it was a phenomenon of the first Roosevelt's administration, that it had flourished for several years and then gone out of style. It had even been known, in instances, to have functioned usefully. For reference, there was Mark Sullivan's *Our Times*.

But muckraking, to repeat, had not died; it had been buried. It had been buried by organized, citable, reactionary interests and by the War, and its best partisans had deserted it. How was one to explain the desertion? There was proof in abundance that the deserters realized muckraking had been the best of them, the most creative part of them. The error was that they had approved mostly of their own work and that of their friends. The principle of muckraking had not always bound them. In contrast with the radicals who followed them, they had been completely individualistic, and that had been their weakness as well as their strength. Even time had not in all instances given them keener appreciation of each other, and when muckraking was done, they had scattered in all directions.

The vital fact that the Thirties needed to know was that the reform writers had not really created muckraking, as some of them believed; they had been merely its pioneers, its outstanding practitioners. Muckraking as an expression of popular will and a means of filling popular need was independent of them, *and could be picked up by any writer who felt capable of carrying on where they had left off.* The prerequisites for the reform writer of the Thirties were three: associate writers, a mass demand for his work, and presses capable of defining and stimulating such a demand.

Signs of that demand there were. It was possible to prepare uninspired catalogues of muckraking achievements, but not to prepare live ones without stirring up issues which had been apparently good for little more than academic dissertations. For muckraking had effected epochal changes. The reader of 1939 was amazed to find that the future of housing, in 1910, was infinitely

more promising than it had been in 1900; that the child-labor, food-preparation, election, prison-regulation, conservation, insurance, and other issues had been immeasurably elevated and popularized by the muckrakers. What, asked the modern reader, happened to all these issues, how had they been pushed so far, and why hadn't they been pushed farther? In a word, what about today?

The muckraking gains themselves were not, of course, beyond discussion. "Progressive legislation" was no more than a phrase without a context. The Constitutional Amendment, for example, that provided for the direct election of Senators, which had caused so much uproar during the muckraking era: there was a general round of congratulations when it was finally won. And now some critics said that it had been turned by politicians into a perfect device for corruption. Responsibility for the election of Senators should be given back to the state legislatures! Again, the food problem, to which had been added the cosmetics problem—it could not be discussed solely in terms of the past; it was still with us. George Seldes, describing in *The Freedom of the Press* the manner in which the Tugwell Bill of 1934 was emasculated, showed that manufacturers were more alert to the danger of interference in their affairs than they were in 1906, and that they accomplished their ends with infinitely less opposition. Sullivan, former muckraker that he was, even published what could only be called a defense of reactionary interests—and the ghost of H. W. Wiley appeared alone at the Senate hearings to remind veterans of what the muckrakers had once advocated.

Muckraking, then, seemed in some quarters to have been ultimately vain. But it might not have seemed so if pessimists had noticed that so long as it was actually functioning it had functioned superbly, had attained objectives deemed valuable according to the best contemporary wisdom. What was significant for the Thirties was that it had to be energized in order to carry on in opposition to those who stood to lose by it. Alfred Kazin believed that "our renewed interest in the American past has been one way of marking time," and beyond all doubt that interest would be no more than that unless it became a means of giving energy and inventiveness to the present. Americans could not mark time indefinitely. And Kazin missed the fact that inventive-

ness could not come from the blue, that a popular thirst for understanding hinted at normal impulses beneath the strange intellectual clothes Americans had adopted. Americans were, in a word, ready for muckraking if muckraking was ready for them.

But muckraking had been culture, too, and in the Thirties it was a plain sign of the need for renewed comprehension of the American past that the "battle of the books" was never fought. Literature of the Twenties disdained American politics and specific social issues; literature of the Thirties considered itself beyond them. Yet muckraking had been the most important agency in its time for the development of American culture. Not all the writings of the muckrakers were on one high level; nor did all the most important ones repay reading. Lincoln Steffens's *The Shame of the Cities*, for example, was of more use to the modern writer than to the modern reader; it was his autobiography that would always appeal to readers of democratic feeling.

Similar examples could be culled from a score of writers; but was it so unimportant for the muckrakers to have furnished sources for future scribes and to have influenced their times? The hectic trials of three decades had not given "classic" new meanings. The fact that Huneker, Percival Pollard, and their acolytes did not accord the muckrakers a proper respect simply proved their limitations. These men were busy acquainting America with the work of Shaw, Stendhal, Hauptmann, Dostoevsky, d'Annunzio. Valuable work, no doubt, they did. But the muckrakers were busy with their own writing; and whose writing was more important, closer to home, and better integrated?

John Chamberlain asked why the muckrakers produced so little of literary value, and it is time to question whether his query was just. Was *Sister Carrie* a lonely beacon of genius in a vast desert? It should be recalled that this book had been criticized, just as though it had been a muckraking production, as uninspired and blundering journalism! And, incidentally, stand-pat critics had shown themselves more willing, once they had adjusted themselves, to accept Dreiser—he was, after all, a Butterick editor in good standing—than to come to terms with the outlawed muckrakers. Pessimism was better than exposure.

Did no literature come out of muckraking? There was the fic-

tion of A. H. Lewis, Jack London, Phillips, Sinclair, Brand Whitlock; there were Finley Dunne, Edwin Markham, Gustavus Myers, Josiah Flynt—to mention a few of the more memorable names, and to pass by such others as O. Henry and Edith Wharton and Ambrose Bierce, who were of the time and not to be credited to movements of the artistic eras. If reform literature had not produced critics and historians capable of evaluating the major works that came in the overflow of exposure, neither had those literatures which followed it done so. Hence impressive writings had been allowed to drift off into strange limbos without benefit of explanation or correction. There was Lewis's *Wolfville* stories, for instance; and David Graham Phillips's *Susan Lenox*, published posthumously, was buried by calumny, bowdlerized, and never republished in its original form—though it continued to sell.

Those who in the Thirties expressed contempt for literature, and who made of criticism a political pawn, were not the ones to speak of muckraking literature, nor for that matter of the new literature which a nation seeking normal conditions would demand. Literature, following its own laws, could not be ordered; it would have to be recognized and encouraged. Probably, it would come unrequisioned, as it had come before.

Literature, however, was only one facet of social need. Certainly the muckrakers needed only their record to prove that they had been more than capable of satisfying their readers. But one had to avoid exaggerating the aims and achievements of the muckrakers. Writers of the Thirties who continued to look for saviors and chose the muckrakers looked in vain. Muckraking was no panacea; the muckrakers had not been medicine men.

When the bounds of muckraking were clearly seen, it was possible to define partially—always allowing for the fact that achievements were not absolute—just what it was the muckrakers had accomplished. They had ushered in modern times. To say this is almost to forget the savage unrest which their work involved, the personal tragedy and philosophic confusion that accompanied it. Men of the muckraking period yearned as wholeheartedly for the millennium as those who followed them. If they knew less of psychology and economic forces than those others, they had fewer excuses for failure and selfishness. For all their social conscious-

ness, they placed responsibility upon the individual. Finally, they achieved tangible results.

Undoubtedly, they fell short of completing their work. They retreated in the face of organized business's attacks, and they broke down completely in their first experience with international affairs. But before that happened they succeeded in uniting the country. America, in 1900, had not been a union. The cultural spadework of the muckrakers synthesized it as surely as did the actual spadework of transcontinental highways.

As Ida Tarbell saw,

I have never had illusions about the value of my individual contribution! I realized early that what a man or a woman does is built on what those who have gone before have done, that its real value depends on making the matter in hand a little clearer, a little sounder for those who come after. Nobody begins or ends anything. Each person is a link, weak or strong, in an endless chain. One of our great mistakes is persuading ourselves that nobody has passed this way before.

In our eagerness to prove we have found the true solution, we fail to inquire why this same solution failed to work when tried before—for it always has been tried before, even if we in our self-confidence do not know it.

We are given to ignoring not only the past of our solutions, their status when we took them over, but the variety of relationships they must meet, satisfy. They must sink or swim in a stream where a multitude of human experiences, prejudices, ambitions, ideals meet and clash, throw one another back, mingle, make that all-powerful current which is public opinion—the trend which swallows, digests, or rejects what we give it. It is our indifference to or ignorance of the multiplicity of human elements in the society we seek to benefit that is responsible for the sinking outright of many of our fine plans.¹

✓ Maturity—that was, after all, the foundation of the muckrakers' achievements. It might well become such a foundation again.

¹ From *All in the Day's Work*, Macmillan Co., New York, 1939. By permission of the publishers.