

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# TOYNBEE'S STUDY OF HISTORY

### THE SEARCH FOR NEW IDEAS

ONE of our besetting faults is that we are always looking for something new. Since the turn of the century the modern mind has been so surfeited with what are called "new ideas" that it has scarcely digested one before it demands another. Whether it be in science, philosophy, history or the arts—indeed in anything but religion—the appetite for more, and still more, knowledge remains unsatisfied. The physical and material restlessness of the period has its counterpart in the realms of thought. Few ask whether the ideas that have engaged the attention of the thinkers are as fresh as their progenitors imagine. Such a notion as there being nothing new under the sun could not be harbored by the modern mind. Therefore, when receiving what is heralded as an innovation, it seems almost futile to demand the history of it, when the germ of it sprang from a human mind, or how it came to be developed.

There are few ideas that interest the mass of people which have not long genealogies. The original root of so many doctrines that have been promulgated in recent years has its ancestral home perhaps in civilizations which crumbled away before the Christian era began. The curious paradox today is that while in some departments of science (and generally in technology) the urge is to go forward and conquer new domains of nature's secrets, there is running parallel with this tendency a desire on the part of philosophical scientists to retrace their steps and review once again the past.

The booksellers' windows are full of volumes, and the literary reviews contain lengthy criticisms of a work that is called *A Study of History*<sup>1</sup> by Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee. The announcements inform us that one of its attractions is the presentation of a *new* approach to history. Some of the reviews convey the impression that the critics regard it as a unique work in the historical field, and one of them goes so far as to say that it puts *The Decline of the West* in total eclipse. Even so ripe a scholar as Sir Ernest Barker states:

There is nothing in literature comparable to his [Toynbee's] *Study of History* . . . which dwarfs every-

thing of the kind which has ever been published before.

This is praise indeed, and small wonder that the lesser critics should imagine not only that the presentation is new in form but that the ideas have not been developed before.

#### DR. TOYNBEE'S METHOD

The genealogy of Dr. Toynbee's work is a very long one. The ancestral home of comparing the rise and fall of cultures, the laws, the customs, the manners, and most important of all, the religions of peoples, was first built in the days of Herodotus. We need not labor this point of the longevity of Dr. Toynbee's method, for it will suffice our purpose to present in brief a genealogy for it nearer our time.

Let us begin with Giambattista Vico who lived during the last quarter of the seventeenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Then came Jacob Burckhardt. Both of these investigators of the birth and decay of civilizations initiated for the modern a somewhat new approach to an understanding of the history of peoples. In England there were Thomas Arnold and E. A. Freeman, who also followed this method of research in their historical studies. In America the

brothers Henry and Brooks Adams performed similar work, and the latter in his *The Law of Civilization and Decay*<sup>2</sup> gave us in short compass a working hypothesis which the man in the street could read with interest. Then came Oswald Spengler's mighty work.

It seems to this writer that many of the critics who have lauded *A Study of History* have overlooked the fact that Dr. Toynbee pays his respects to Freeman and Spengler, and most of the work reveals his indebtedness to these historians. It is not the length of a study that establishes its greatness, nor is it altogether the amount of learning which goes into it that determines the utility of the effort. Dr. Toynbee's six volumes are at once a forbidding mountain of tremendous research for the contemplation of any reader. The area of civilizations over which our author has extended his investigation will confound the imagination and awe the scholar who has been trained in modern channels of specialization which deal with a period, a dynasty, a personage, or an event.

It is surprising to learn from the advertisement in the first volume that "the sum and substance of a considerable part of the first three volumes of this book was presented orally." Two different courses of lectures were given at the Lowell

Institute, Boston, and at Northwestern University, Evanston. It is not easy to imagine the type of audience to which these addresses were made because the learning is so profound, its range so universal that only a specially selected group in this country could be gathered that would be interested in the way the subject is treated. It is so far removed from the methods of specialization that only pupils raised under the spell of an Acton or a Freeman could take in the immense erudition of the lecturer and apply it to the requirements demanded by the examiners of historical studies.

Spengler's great work is comparatively simple in structure compared with Toynbee's. Moreover, *A Study of History* begs to be read and not heard. It does not seem possible that the ears can take in the volume of learning that gushes forth on page after page. And as for the long and copious footnotes which are an essential part of the chapters, it is difficult enough to take them in during a reading, for they are of such deep interest that they break the continuity of the text itself, and very often the reader has to hark back to find the thread of the main discourse.

A glance at the table of contents of the first three volumes is quite sufficient to make the most earnest student pause. Scarcely a race, a

community, a nation, or a civilization has been overlooked. Who is prepared with whetted appetite for knowledge to encounter such a work? But these are not the only difficulties that are presented to the reader. When he gets into the body of the book, he will find quotations in Greek and in Latin without translation. There are, besides, long excerpts given in French and in German. Most of them, also, without translation. Therefore, to be at ease in studying the volumes, it is necessary to be a classical scholar in the old sense of the term and also to be familiar with the tongues of several different peoples as they are spoken today.

Surely *A Study of History* is caviar to the general. Where is the public for this mighty tome? It cannot be found in the colleges and universities of our country; and if we can credit the evidence that is put before us by such an educator as Sir Richard Livingstone, it is not to be found in the England of today. Therefore, we must conclude that it is one of those exotic works which will appeal to the few remaining catholic minds of the school of Acton. They are the only ones I can think of in the English-speaking world who would be able to follow Dr. Toynbee through the heavily loaded pages he has written.

## TWENTY-ONE SOCIETIES

First, he surveys the historical field and then proceeds to the comparative study of civilizations. The author identifies twenty-one societies of the species to which our western society belongs. He then tells us:

... The next step in a study of history is to put these twenty-one societies through their paces and compare their performances in their geneses and growths, their breakdowns and disintegrations, their universal states and universal churches and heroic ages, their contacts in Time and in Space. First, however, before we begin to carry out a plan of operations which will occupy us almost to the end of this book, it may be well to forestall possible criticisms by debating the prior question: Are these twenty-one societies really comparable at all? For their comparability may be challenged on several different and partly contradictory grounds.

The first and simplest argument against the comparability of our twenty-one societies may be stated thus: These societies have no common characteristic beyond that of all being "intelligible fields of historical study"; and this characteristic is so general and so vague that it cannot be turned to any practical account for our purpose.<sup>3</sup>

This is typical of much of the inquiry and it goes on to such an extent through the volumes that one is tempted to ask why it has been

undertaken. Presumably it is necessary work for the historian who would venture to inquire into "The Nature of the Geneses of Civilizations." Indeed, Dr. Toynbee says:

In setting out to inquire how civilizations have emerged, we have the choice of starting either with the mutation of primitive societies into "unrelated" civilizations or with the emergence of "related" civilizations through secessions of proletariats from pre-existent civilizations.<sup>4</sup>

This is no easy task, for the quest of how a civilization emerges cannot be discovered historically unless we have a fairly clear idea of what system was in vogue before the civilizing process began to take shape. Is it not considered necessary to ascertain how people lived before the state took possession of them? The findings of Sir Henry Maine, who is not mentioned in the first three volumes, give us a fairly clear idea that before the days of conquest and exploitation, communities lived in political and industrial peace and tilled the earth. Hence, the reason for establishing conditions of economic justice upon which early societies existed before the conqueror imposed his system of political and wage slavery.

No less a historian than Lord Acton himself declared that the work of Sir Henry Maine was



indispensable. He wrote to Mary Gladstone saying Maine had "the finest intellect in England,"<sup>5</sup> and that "what pure reason and boundless knowledge can do, without sympathy or throb, Maine can do better than any man in England."<sup>6</sup>

When Maine's works became known, some scholars who had studied them considered that a basis had been provided for another quite different understanding of the beginnings of communities. In *Ancient Law* and also in *Village-Communities* evidence of what had been in India—and in some cases, still prevailed—was given of an economic system that required no government in the modern sense of the term, and the conditions in practice were approximate to those of equality of opportunity.

#### PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES VS. CIVILIZATIONS

Dr. Toynbee realizes that there is a distinct difference between what he calls "primitive societies" and civilizations: But when he deals with the former he mentions

totemism and exogamy; tabus, initiations, and age-classes; segregations of the sexes, at certain stages of life, in separate communal establishments—and some of these institutions are certainly as elaborate and perhaps as subtle as those which are characteristic of civilizations.<sup>7</sup>

But these customs give us not the slightest idea of what the economic basis of life was in primitive societies. Indeed, he sees nothing progressive in them. Whether the people were satisfied or not with the system does not seem to concern our author. He says:

Primitive societies, as we know them by direct observation, may be likened to people lying torpid upon a ledge on a mountain-side, with a precipice below and a precipice above. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Then after a page or two of entertaining similes, in which he loves to indulge, he concludes with the following:

We have now followed out our simile far enough to have ascertained that the contrast between the static condition of primitive societies, as we know them, and the dynamic motion of societies in process of civilization is not a permanent and fundamental point of difference, but an accident of the time and place of observation. . . .<sup>9</sup>

It seems an arbitrary decision to wipe out of consideration the knowledge that we have of the economic conditions of primitive communities, even those in Africa. Surely they are worthy of our examination. The philosophers and poets of classical times gave heed even to legends of Elysiums such as Pindar describes. Of the Ethiopians he says:

They till not the ground, they plow not the wave,  
They labor not, never! oh, never!  
Not a tear do they shed, not a sigh do they heave,  
They are happy, for ever and ever!

Perhaps such a far-fetched description of an economic paradise reminding us of the first state in the Garden of Eden is beneath the dignity of our historian. Yet, Dr. Toynbee, in volume after volume, presents us with the legends of nearly all the civilizations that have passed away and treats them as matters that deserve our serious reflection.

Garstang, the archaeologist, in his *The Story of Jericho*, says:

. . . It seems as though warfare was so little known as to call for no special weapons or organization. Truly this was in those days the "Land of God"; and it was so named by the Egyptians from earliest times.<sup>10</sup>

To this writer the information about Jericho is of vast importance, and the fact that a scientist of Garstang's eminence can tell us of a place where warfare was little known and the locality was called the "Land of God" makes us wonder how the historian can proceed to deal with a civilization until he has carefully examined the evidence now extant of the economic basis of a primitive society.

Civilization is not a system that springs full fledged from the ground. The state—political institutions—is founded in areas where there are men cultivating the land, because the state cannot come into being and thrive without taking part of the produce of the laborers.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF CIVILIZATIONS

No civilization has yet been discovered that did not have its beginnings in conquest. The farther back we go in history, the more abundant is the evidence that the ancient state was reared where agriculture was practiced by defenseless people. Dr. Toynbee quotes Dr. Ellsworth Huntington, sometimes at great length, and toward the end of the first volume there will be found in the additional notes the following statement:

In regard to the origins of agriculture, Dr. Huntington has arrived at the most interesting conclusion that this wonderful piece of human technique has been invented "in every case under essentially the same conditions"—the fundamental condition being the presence of "flood plains where agriculture was feasible for primitive people. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

Such were the conditions in the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Sir Leonard Woolley, in *The Sumerians*, <sup>12</sup> indicates this clearly. And in

the Indian and the Persian poems there are many passages which reveal the onslaught of the armed raiders upon a peaceful community.

Perhaps here it is necessary to give an example of the method of approach our author has adopted. He says:

We have failed to find the immediate object of our search, a permanent and fundamental point of difference between primitive societies and civilizations; but incidentally we have obtained some light on the ultimate objective of our present inquiry: the nature of the geneses of civilizations. Starting with the mutation of primitive societies into civilizations, we have found that this consists in a transition from a static condition to a dynamic activity; and we shall find that the same formula holds good for the alternative mode of emergence of civilizations through the secession of proletariats from the dominant minorities of pre-existent civilizations which have lost their creative power. Such dominant minorities are static by definition; for to say that the creative minority of a civilization in growth has degenerated or atrophied into the dominant minority of a civilization in disintegration is only another way of saying that the society in question has relapsed from a dynamic activity into a static condition. Against this static condition, the secession of a proletariat is a dynamic reaction; and in this light we can see that, in the secession of a proletariat from a dominant minority, a new civilization is generated through the transition of a society from a static condition to a

dynamic activity, just as it is in the mutation which produces a civilization out of a primitive society . . . .<sup>13</sup>

It has taken much time and an expenditure of great learning to reach this point. Still, Dr. Toynbee has not found the fundamental difference between primitive societies and civilizations. Yet, he comes to the conclusion that the geneses of all civilizations—the unrelated and the related class alike—may be described as Mankind on the move. This idea he culls from Jan Smuts, which seems to be too simple an explanation of the genesis of the state—civilization. The Mankind that moved upon a primitive community had no agricultural inclinations. It was a group organized and armed to gain plunder and to reduce the defenseless tillers to a condition of slavery. It may be that Dr. Toynbee has chosen a starting point in his investigation far too late for an understanding of the communities described by Sir Henry Maine.

In this long-drawn analysis there is almost endless variety of a psychological and philosophical kind, but it becomes far too complicated in *A Study of History* for the amateur to follow. For example, Dr. Toynbee leaps from Saint-Simon to Empedocles, and then he takes us to China. These leaps take place on two pages.

When he reaches the land of Confucius, he introduces us to Yin and Yang, and he tells us that "Yin appears to have signified the sign of a mountain or a valley which is in the shadow, and Yang the side which is in the sunshine."<sup>14</sup> Then he discusses the conceptions which Chinese philosophers had of these characters as two different kinds of matter. Yin symbolized water, and Yang fire. Spengler uses the same characters but in a briefer and more effective manner, as does Dr. W. Macneile Dixon in his Gifford lectures,<sup>15</sup> published under the title, *The Human Situation*.<sup>16</sup>

#### MANKIND ON THE MOVE

Notwithstanding the exceedingly interesting variegations of thought and exhibitions of great learning, Toynbee leaves us with the notion that Mankind on the move is the dominating factor in the process of the beginning of a civilization. He says, in opening a new chapter, "The Cause of the Geneses of Civilizations," with a sub-title, "A Possible Negative Factor: *Vis Inertiae*":

We have now ascertained the nature of the geneses of civilizations. They are particular beats of a general rhythmical pulsation which runs through all the Universe. Evidently this is as far as we can go

in understanding how the geneses of civilizations occur. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The age of man and what he was doing until six thousand years ago are matters which cause our author to put to himself extraordinary conundrums. He asks, "If Man was content with his primitive condition so long [300,000 years], what has moved him, during these last six thousand years, to make a score of dynamic efforts to rise above himself and ascend to the level of Superman?"<sup>18</sup>

The answer to this is a negative factor: "the long pause on the primitive level, before the first attempts at civilization were made, is *vis inertiae*."<sup>19</sup> Sheer idleness! Wholesale malingering! Loafing on the job! And, yet, the creature had to feed himself, partly clothe himself, and find a habitation. No matter how prodigal Nature was, he had to devote some time of the day to finding provender, dressing a skin, and making a cave habitable; in principle, doing just what he has to do today. The only difference is that he took greater physical risks, for he spent long years before he knew what to do with the flint, long years before he invented the tool which would save his labor in tilling the earth. Dr. Herrlee Glessner Creel<sup>20</sup> tells us that the Peking Man half a million years ago was



primarily an agriculturist. The remains that were found about him indicate that his sheer inertia must have been broken frequently, for the bones of animals give evidence that he raised stock for his food.

#### THE ECONOMIC FACTORS IN MAN'S EXISTENCE

It would be an endless business to attempt to present an adequate description of the range of Dr. Toynbee's thought and the height and depth of his learning. Yet it is amazing that he can treat with what seems like disdain the economic factors which men at all times have had to consider. Though he places before us excerpts from ancient and modern scholars which give him the clue to some of the secrets that he would discover, he does practically nothing with them. He quotes from Origen as follows:

"God, wishing Man's intelligence to be exercised everywhere, in order that it might not remain idle and without a conception of the arts, created Man with needs, in order that sheer need might force him to invent arts for providing himself with food and providing himself with shelter. It was better for those who would not have used their intelligence in seeking after a philosophic knowledge of God that they should be badly enough off to use it in the invention of arts, rather than that they should be

well enough off to leave their intelligence altogether uncultivated."<sup>21</sup>

Here is the very milk of the historical coconut which our historians have not tapped. Origen, in his controversy with Celsus, presents us with the economic secret which had lain hidden for so long. Man must labor to satisfy his desires and needs, and in this labor he becomes an artist, by providing himself first with sustenance, with the expenditure of the least exertion. Indeed, we might say that every achievement that man has wrought springs from the fact that he was the only animal to learn that he could reproduce his own food.

In the very next quotation to that mentioned above, Toynbee gives us a long paragraph from the French philosopher Volney, who says:

*"L'on s'apperçoit que toute activité, soit de corps, soit d'esprit, prend sa source dans les besoins; que c'est en raison de leur étendue, de leurs développemens, qu'elle-même s'étend et se développe; l'on en suit la gradation depuis les elemens les plus simples jusqu'à l'état le plus composé. . . ."*<sup>22</sup>

From this we gather that Volney understood that needs are the source of man's development. Indeed, he says that it is hunger and thirst, even in the savage, that start the first movements of

the soul and the body. But our author, even after another long quotation from Dr. Huntington, which confirms the findings of Origen and Volney, has merely this to say about it:

The first stage, then, in the human protagonist's ordeal is a transition from Yin to Yang through a dynamic act—performed by God's creature under temptation from the adversary—which enables God Himself to resume His creative activity. But this progress has to be paid for; and it is not God—a hard master, reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed—but God's servant, the human sower, who pays the price.<sup>23</sup>

It is inconceivable how a man of unusual culture can set to work to find the geneses of civilizations and ignore the fact that the basic starting point is economic. Man cannot be understood unless he is regarded as a land animal who must use the source the Creator has provided for his sustenance. All history arises from man's primal activity; in truth, here is the genesis from which the historian must work. However much they may differ in their early development and afterwards, to the cultural rise of the best-ordered state, they all begin in the same way.

In *The Decline of the West* Spengler goes to the root of the matter, and it is of value here to give a few instances which differ profoundly from the

conceptions of Toynbee and other historians. He says: "He who digs and ploughs is seeking not to plunder, but to *alter* Nature."<sup>24</sup>

Here is another:

. . . Hostile Nature becomes the friend; earth becomes *Mother* Earth. Between sowing and begetting, harvest and death, the child and the grain, a profound affinity is set up. A new devoutness addresses itself in chthonian cults to the fruitful earth that grows up along with man. . . .<sup>25</sup>

Think of these shafts of enlightenment: "The peasant's dwelling is the great symbol of settledness. . . . It is *property* in the most sacred sense of the word."<sup>26</sup>

Further on he tells us:

The peasant is the eternal man, independent of every Culture that ensconces itself in the cities. . . . The present-day piety of the peasant is older than Christianity; his gods are more ancient than those of any higher religion. Remove from him the pressure of the great cities and he will revert to the state of nature without feeling that he is losing anything. His real ethic, his real metaphysic, which no scholar of the city has yet thought it worth while to discover, lie outside all religious and spiritual history, have in fact no history at all.<sup>27</sup>

These are only a few examples which indicate the sureness of Spengler's method in laying a foundation for the springtime of a culture.

Toward the close of the first volume Toynbee sums up his findings, which have taken over three hundred closely printed pages, as follows:

At the genesis of every "related" civilization, a challenge from the human environment is given and taken *ex hypothesi*. This challenge is implicit in the relation itself, which begins with a differentiation and culminates in a secession. The differentiation takes place within the bosom of the antecedent civilization when that civilization begins to lose the creative power through which, in its period of growth, it has once upon a time inspired a voluntary allegiance in the hearts of people below its surface or beyond its borders. When this happens, the ailing civilization pays the penalty for its failure of vitality by becoming disintegrated into a dominant minority which attempts to find a substitute for its vanishing leadership in a régime of force, and a proletariat (internal and external) which responds to this challenge by becoming conscious that it has a soul of its own and by making up its mind to save its soul alive. The dominant minority's will to repress evokes in the proletariat a will to secede; and the conflict between these two wills continues while the declining civilization verges to its fall, until, when it is *in articulo mortis*, the proletariat at length breaks free from a ci-devant spiritual home which has been transformed first into a prison-house and finally into a city of destruction. In this conflict between a proletariat and a dominant minority, as it works itself out from beginning to end, we can discern

one of those dramatic spiritual encounters which renew the work of creation by carrying the life of the Universe out of the stagnation of autumn through the pains of winter into the ferment of spring. The secession of the proletariat is the dynamic act, in response to the challenge, through which the change from Yin to Yang is brought about; and, in this dynamic separation between the proletariat and the dominant minority of the antecedent civilization, the "related" civilization is born.<sup>28</sup>

It is such passages that go far to convince me that this work is not meant for the inquiring layman, nor do I think Dr. Toynbee himself imagines that the young student taking a course in history of any period will find it profitable to pour over these pages. The deeper we delve into the investigation, the more certain we are that the audience for it is not a large one. The end really does not come with the last paragraph of the first book, for there follow about 150 pages of annexes, which are explanations and amplifications of what has gone before.

#### VOLUME II: THE CHALLENGE

The second volume is in the main devoted to "the range of challenge and response," referred to in the long quotation given above. This is a crusade that is world wide. Dr. Toynbee in pursuit of his object ransacks the records of primi-

tive folk and civilizations to such an extent that he confounds the desire of the reader to take in the story that is put before him. Why he should have made the task so difficult for himself is hard to understand. It seems as if the enormous meal he has eaten has not been digested. He takes this simile to explain the reason for some of his efforts, but he gains nothing by it. For example, he says:

These passages from myth and history surely demonstrate, between them, that when people are translated—whether in “real life” or in imagination—from conditions of pressure into conditions of ease, the effect upon their behaviour is demoralizing. It may perhaps be retorted that this is a truism, and that we might have spared ourselves the trouble of demonstrating the fact and not have overlooked the obvious explanation. . . .<sup>29</sup>

It might be said that his reference is far too big for his frame, and this impression is confirmed when at the end of many pages of comparisons and contrasts, Dr. Toynbee raises the question of whether the examination has been worth while. Occasionally he becomes as simple as a country clergyman speaking to his village flock. After a long survey in myth and history, he says: “We have now perhaps established

decisively the truth that ease is inimical to civilization."<sup>30</sup>

In the chapter on "The Stimulus of Penalizations," he forecasts a hope for us in this country which will be received by many people with astonishment. He says:

. . . The Syrian slave-immigrants who once brought Christianity into Roman Italy performed the miracle of establishing a new religion which was alive in the place of an old religion which was already dead. It is possible that the Negro slave-immigrants who have found Christianity in America may perform the greater miracle of raising the dead to life. With their childlike spiritual intuition and their genius for giving spontaneous aesthetic expression to emotional religious experience, they may perhaps be capable of rekindling the cold grey ashes of Christianity which have been transmitted to them by us, until in their hearts the divine fire glows again. It is thus, perhaps, if at all, that Christianity may conceivably become the living faith of a dying civilization for the second time. If this miracle were indeed to be performed by an American Negro Church, that would be the most dynamic response to the challenge of social penalization that had yet been made by Man.<sup>31</sup>

If Father Divine discovers this passage there may be huge revival meetings in Harlem.

The second volume ends with a chapter of over 140 pages. The subject is "The Golden



Mean." If Dr. Toynbee had written nothing else but this, his place as a great scholar would have been established firmly. It is packed with essential information, and the students of the decline of Christianity would do well to give it their serious consideration. We shall quote only one paragraph which reveals the discernment of our historian:

With the moral insight of this ninth-century Irish gloss, which conveys in two sentences the theme of Tolstoy's fable of the Two Pilgrims, we may equate the intellectual vigour and originality of the ninth-century Irish Hellenist, philosopher, and theologian, Johannes Scotus Erigena: the giant of the Carolingian Renaissance, whose like was not seen again in Western Christendom until the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century. In his magnum opus *De Divisione Naturae* (*scriptum circa* A.D. 867), Erigena dared to present Philosophy as an independent discipline on an equal footing with Theology, and to declare that where philosophic reason and theological authority conflict, reason and not authority must prevail.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the second volume Toynbee declares, "Growth is what birth implies; and if our study of the geneses of civilizations has now at last reached its term, the study of the growths of civilizations still lies before us."<sup>33</sup>

## VOLUME III: SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Those who have set their faces against the utility of the myth in historical investigations will no doubt be shocked in reading the third volume. On the other hand, those who appreciate the value of the myth will enjoy many of the pages. Yet, the modern historian, whether he likes myth or not, will be surprised to learn that

the myth of the Book of Job and of Goethe's *Faust* has given us an insight into the nature of the geneses of civilizations. We may find that equal light is thrown upon the nature of their growths by the myth of Aeschylus's Promethean Trilogy.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Toynbee considers "the general structure of the two myths is the same." Although there is so much in the work that seems like needless repetition, it is compensated for by the amazing variety of knowledge which the author exhibits, particularly in this chapter, "The Nature of the Growths of Civilizations."

When Toynbee has to deal with the relation between society and the individual, which of course is an exercise that should have been considered very early in the work, he has this to say:

This is, of course, one of the stock questions of sociology, and there are two stock answers to it.

One answer is that the individual human being is a reality which is capable of existing, and of being apprehended, by itself, while the society is nothing but a sum or aggregate of atomic and autonomous individuals who bring societies into existence by coming together and dissolve them by parting company again. The other stock answer is just the opposite. According to this second view, the reality is the society and not the individual: the society is a perfect and intelligible whole, while the individual is simply a part of this whole, who can neither exist nor be conceived as existing in any other capacity or in any other setting. . . .<sup>35</sup>

There are people now publishing ponderous tomes who seem to imagine that the group preceded the individual. History, however, must begin with man and his needs: no man, no community; no community, no state; no state, no civilization. This seems to me the sequence which should be adopted by historians who inquire into the growths of civilizations. In Nietzsche's phrase, appreciated by Spengler: "View the whole fact of Man from a distance."

No one, yet, however, has decided upon this plan. Perhaps when we know more from the anthropologists and the archaeologists and when their findings have been collated, a history of man, embracing his rise and fall, from his spring to his winter in the civilizations that are dead

or dying, may be produced. I take the seasonal terms of Spengler without apology, for Toynbee himself makes good use of them and devotes a large part of the third volume to *The Decline of the West*. His references to it are of peculiar interest to the student, but Dr. Toynbee is guilty of a gross error in translation. It is in this excerpt:

"A civilization is born at the moment when, out of the primitive psychic conditions of a perpetually infantile [raw] Humanity, a mighty soul awakes and extricates itself: a form out of the formless, a bounded and transitory existence out of the boundless and persistent. This soul comes to flower on the soil of a country with precise boundaries, to which it remains attached like a plant. Conversely, a civilization dies if once this soul has realized the complete sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, creeds, arts, states, and sciences, and thereupon goes back into the primitive psyche from which it originally emerged."<sup>36</sup>

In the authorized translation we read: "A culture is born in the moment" *not* "a civilization is born . . ." and in the whole of the paragraph there is no doubt that Spengler is dealing with "culture" and not "civilization." The footnote that Dr. Toynbee appends in explanation of this strange blunder reads as follows:

In Spengler's terminology, a *Kultur* means what, in this Study of History, is called a civilization, so

long as the civilization is in process of growth. *Zivilisation*, which for Spengler is the antithesis of *Kultur*, means the condition into which a civilization (in our sense) falls when it breaks down and goes into disintegration.—A.J.T.<sup>37</sup>

By inserting the word "civilization" instead of "culture," an utterly false notion is conveyed, and the explanation in the footnote does not in any way excuse the liberty that Dr. Toynbee takes.

On the last page but one of this third volume, the author is conscious of the labyrinth into which he has led the reader. He says:

This is perhaps as far as we can follow out the differentiation which accompanies the growth of civilizations without losing our way in a maze of fantasy. We have explored far enough to have established the fact that a differentiation of some kind does take place; and thus we have returned, at the close of this third part of our Study, to the point from which we started at the beginning of the first part. . . .<sup>38</sup>

Were he to dwell on this point again, he realizes that this part of his study would end on a false note. The intrepid reader, however, must not lose heart at this declaration because he has yet to explore more, and still more, baffling mazes of investigation in the volumes to follow.

## VOLUME IV: THE BREAKDOWNS OF CIVILIZATIONS

The main subject of the fourth volume is "The Breakdowns of Civilizations." Once started on such a historical crusade as *A Study of History*, we presume it is necessary to make certain that nothing is overlooked. Some small detail might be a very important cog in the wheel of Fate. But to those who have read *The Decline of the West* and remember the lightning flashes with which Spengler lights up his pages, much of Dr. Toynbee's work will seem rather prosaic, if not dull. It is all solid, profound learning, but there is little literary decoration to lighten the labor of study. We can imagine the toiling student in his earnest endeavor to gather all the information about world history, setting upon the fourth volume with the grim determination to follow to the bitter end. But the first paragraph will not stimulate his desire:

The problem of the breakdowns of civilization is more obvious than the problem of their growths. Indeed, it is almost as obvious as the problem of their geneses. The geneses of civilizations call for explanation in view of the mere fact that this species of societies has come into existence and that we are able to enumerate twenty-six representatives of the species (counting in the five arrested civilizations) that have come to birth up to date, as against four

civilizations that have been abortive. We may now go on to observe that while only four civilizations, to our knowledge, have miscarried, as against twenty-six that have been born alive, no less than sixteen out of these twenty-six are by now dead and buried.<sup>39</sup>

This is not encouraging, for somehow many laymen have had little difficulty in knowing the dead ones and how they came to be buried.

In another long quotation from Spengler, Toynbee persists in the error that we pointed out above. He uses the term "civilization" instead of "culture." But we think if he had read Spengler with more care, he would not have laid this trap for himself. This particular passage reads:

"Every civilization (*Kultur*) passes through the same succession of ages as an individual human being. Every one of them has its childhood, its youth, its manhood and its old age. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

He knows thoroughly well that Spengler is not referring to *civilization*, for it is explained over and over again in *The Decline of the West* that its author does not consider the terms synonymous.

After more than one hundred pages of inquiry concerning the breakdowns of civilizations, we learn that "our inquiry into the cause of the

breakdowns of civilizations has led us, so far, to a succession of negative conclusions."<sup>41</sup> Yet, for a moment Toynbee believes "that the greatest danger to man is man," taking this cue from an old Hellenic philosopher. But immediately he offers us a theory presented by Volney who carries the investigation of the breakdowns of civilizations into the political field. Then, so that you will not arrive hastily at any conclusion, he quotes a passage from St. Cyprian, which is worth whole pages produced by the philosophical historian and which points directly to a social ulcer common to all states:

"You complain of the aggression of foreign enemies; yet, if the foreign enemy were to cease from troubling, would Roman really be able to live at peace with Roman (*esse pax inter ipsas togas possit*)? If the external danger of invasion by armed barbarians were to be stamped out, should we not be exposed to a fiercer and a heavier civil bombardment, on the home front, in the shape of calumnies and injuries inflicted by the powerful upon their weaker fellow citizens? . . . You denounce plague and pestilence, while really the effect of these scourges is to bring to light, or bring to a head, the crimes of human beings: the callousness that shows no pity for the sick, and the covetousness and rapine that are in full cry after the property of the dead."<sup>42</sup>



This is from the same St. Cyprian who said: "No man shall come into our commune who sayeth that the land may be sold. God's footstool is not property." It is disconcerting how our historians overlook the significance of such a remark as this, particularly when they are considering the breakdowns of civilizations. How strange that most of the Early Fathers thought the question of "God's footstool" and who had a right to use it was a matter of supreme importance. Perhaps we may get an inkling of why Toynbee sidetracks this issue, for he says:

Private Property is an institution which is apt to establish itself in societies in which the single family or household is the normal unit of economic activity—whether the family business be agriculture or stock-breeding or shop-keeping or handicraft. In societies whose economic life is organized on this family basis, Private Property is probably the least unsatisfactory system of governing the distribution of material wealth. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Here is one of the greatest stumbling blocks historians encounter in investigations such as the one we are considering. They never stop to ask themselves what is private property. Nor do they think it necessary to differentiate between that which is created—land and all natural resources—and the produce of the laborer. The

Early Fathers—especially Gregory the Great—knew the difference, and they recognized clearly what *can* be owned and what *cannot* be owned.

It has been demonstrated by many economists that land is not property, but the source from which property—wealth—is produced by labor, assisted by capital. It would make all the difference in the world if historians would turn their attention to fundamental economics before they undertake such a trying task as that of finding other reasons for the fall of nations than that which Pliny discovered when he said: "Great estates ruined Italy."

Dr. Toynbee is full of knowledge—so full, indeed, that he does not realize there are simple laymen in this world who can take only just so much erudition. After long chapters on the breakdowns of civilizations and "The Nemesis of Creativity," he concludes that "the recurrent calamity that overtakes mankind is not the breakdown of civilizations but their outbreak."<sup>44</sup> Here he is at one with Spengler, but he does not show that he knows it.

#### DOMINANT MINORITIES AND PROLETARIATS

The fifth volume is devoted to "The Disintegrations of Civilizations," and the chief character in this drama is the proletariat. Dominant

Minorities sometimes play leading rôles in this investigation, which covers much of the ground already traveled. Dr. Toynbee's undertaking has not been simplified to any great extent, nor do the remaining chapters elucidate a progress that will bring us to the goal at last. There is, however, a masterly interpretation of the gospel stories. This is unusual in such a work. It is a pity that it is buried in a volume so many will not have the patience to read.

The chapter entitled "Schism in the Body Social," might be published by itself, for the time is ripe for the clergy of the various churches to pay heed to this exposition of the religious and social decline. The discourse runs to nearly 350 pages—quite long enough for a modern book if it is to make an appeal to priest or layman.

Near the end of the long chapter, "Schism in the Soul," we learn:

This empirical survey, brief though it be, will perhaps have sufficed to bring out the apparent truth that, when philosophies and religions meet, the religions must increase while the philosophies must decrease; and we cannot turn away from our study of the encounter between these respective spiritual discoveries of the Internal Proletariat and the Dominant Minority without pausing to look into the question why it is that this defeat of the philosophies is—as history testifies—a foregone conclusion.<sup>45</sup>

Volume V closes with more than 140 pages of additional notes many of which I should like to deal with if there were space.

#### THE IDEAL OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

If there be a new approach in these weighty volumes, it is in the religious analyses which are scattered through the work. Dr. Toynbee is decidedly at his best in dealing not only with workaday Christianity but its early ideal and man's relationship to God. In saying this there is no intention to belittle the importance of the many other aspects of research to which he has devoted his labor. The pity of it is that he has raised such a towering monument that one's attention is taken away from the subject or the events it is intended to commemorate.

Spengler covers the same ground in his stride, as it were, and because he succeeds in doing it briefly, the reader does not miss the point to be made. With Dr. Toynbee the point is only too often completely submerged by the erudition. Yet, he can be as simple and direct as Spengler himself. Take the following for example: In Volume VI, page 9, he presents us with one of the sayings of Alexander, as it is reported in Plutarch, " 'God is the common father of all

men, but he makes the best ones peculiarly his own.' " Toynbee has this to remark about it:

If this "logion" is authentic it tells us that Alexander's anthropology differed from that of Marx in the fundamental point of resting on an avowed theological foundation instead of professedly hanging in the air. It tells us that Alexander discovered the truth that the brotherhood of Man presupposes the fatherhood of God—a truth which involves the converse proposition that, if the divine father of the human family is ever left out of the reckoning, there is no possibility of forging any alternative bond of purely human texture which will avail by itself to hold Mankind together. The only society that is capable of embracing the whole of Mankind is a superhuman *Civitas Dei*; and the conception of a society that embraces all Mankind and yet nothing but Mankind is an academic chimaera.<sup>46</sup>

So far as the earthly fortune of the human family is concerned, Goethe goes direct to the point when he says, "What is important in life is life and not a result of life."<sup>47</sup> That is it which underlies all the striving: Have you lived your life without considering fame itself, material gain, or indeed the reward of virtue as bestowed by your fellow man? Have you been an individual, no matter how lowly, walking in God's ways and carrying out His law?

It was Goethe, too, who wrote, "Mankind? It is an abstraction. There are, always have been, and always will be, men and only men."<sup>48</sup>

And no one saw that better than the Bishop of Hippo. His *City of God* was not for saints only, but for men. Perhaps this is the symbol of the cross that men have to bear whether they like it or not. Toynbee says:

... The seeker after God who takes this intellectual path is like some climber who gains his first footing on the mountain-side at the point which is not only farthest from the summit but which is also separated from it by the deepest chasms and the sheerest precipices. It is manifestly less difficult—however difficult it still may be—for a human soul which is already in enjoyment of a direct communion with God to enlarge its comprehension of the Divine Nature by grafting a branch of intellectual knowledge on to the living stem of its intuitive religious experience. . . .<sup>49</sup>

Certainly! And present conditions of the so-called Christian life indicate clearly to the observer that knowledge itself is a hindrance. Men, plain men, discovered God long before there were philosophers and theologians. In this respect, intuition was the surest guide, and here Spengler and Bergson join hands with Toynbee.

Farther on in the book we come to the essential that has been somewhat slighted. Toynbee quotes from the *City of God*:

"The peace of the Heavenly Commonwealth (*caelestis civitatis*) is a perfectly organized and perfectly harmonious common participation in the enjoyment of God and of one another in God (*societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo*) . . . . The commonwealth of the irreligious, in which God does not bear rule or receive obedience—an obedience that consists in offering sacrifice to Him alone, so that the mind rules the body, and the reason the vices, with uprightness and loyalty—such a commonwealth will be without the reality of justice. . . .<sup>50</sup>

There is no heavenly commonwealth for men unless it be founded upon God's justice, and the violation of it is a fundamental reason why cultures become civilizations and civilizations disintegrate and crumble away. The Hebrew Prophets saw this clearly, and so did the Early Fathers. Now Dr. Toynbee has submitted to a searching analysis some of the alternatives, mere substitutes, for the way indicated by St. Augustine. He tells us that archaism and futurism "are sure negations of growth, and that is the whole of their tragedy." The other two alternatives, Detachment and Transfiguration, he says,

are both of them reactions to the breakdown of a civilization . . . endeavors to act upon a belief that

there can be no salvation from that sickness of the Soul which the breakdown of a civilization brings to light through any less radical remedy than a change of spiritual clime or dimension.<sup>51</sup>

It is strange that Toynbee nowhere grasps as firmly as Spengler does the significance of the attitude of the mystic's way of communing with God. Perhaps the British mind of even a great scholar is not attuned to a harmony of this nature. And this is what we miss so much in *A Study of History*. Surely there is a heroism in living such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Böhme exemplified. Heroism is not a monopoly of the soldier and the man of political action; and as for sheer business capacity and organizing ability, who can transcend the work of many of the abbots of the great monasteries, who were mystics. I know no qualification they lacked for eligibility on the roll of heroes.

#### THE DESTINY OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Dr. Toynbee's work in the body of the book and also in the last pages on the life of Jesus is one of the most courageous exercises undertaken by a secular historian. Again, we must lament that this essential work is scattered through the volumes and that the great analysis



of what has gone before comes in an annex of the sixth volume.

But what is it all for? What does history say to us? What is the lesson that we must take home to ourselves? Has it all been for naught, or are the cycles and the turmoils of millennia prophetic warnings of a fate that is overtaking us speedily? Is there a Palengenesis for us, the second religiousness that Spengler has so beautifully expressed? Or is history no more than the tattered garment of life rent by lawless men? Dr. Toynbee puts this question in a different way, almost in a form that serious men all over the world are putting to themselves. He says:

But what of the living garment that the Earth Spirit weaves? Is it laid up in Heaven as fast as it is woven, or can we, here on Earth, catch glimpses at any rate of patches of its ethereal web? What are we to think of those tissues that we see lying at the foot of the loom when the weaver, in the course of his tempestuous activity, has been at work unravelling? In the disintegration of a civilization we have found that, though the pageant may have been insubstantial, it does not fade without leaving a rack behind. When civilizations pass from breakdown through disintegration into dissolution, they regularly leave behind them a deposit of universal states and universal churches and barbarian war-bands. What are we to make of these objects? Are they

mere waste-products of the disintegration-process— a tangle of spoiled threads from a piece of tapestry which the weaver, on an impulse of his inscrutable caprice, has willed to unpick before it has been half completed? Or will these debris prove, if we pick them up, to be fresh masterpieces of the weaver's art which he has woven, by an unnoticed sleight of hand, on some more ethereal instrument than the roaring loom that has ostensibly been occupying all his attention and energies?<sup>52</sup>

He then asks, in closing, "And what is the destiny of the universal church in which every higher religion seeks to embody itself?" He is not yet in a position to answer, and the last line of this work is: "Our Study is not at an end; but we have arrived at the verge of the last of our fields of inquiry." With reference to Toynbee's question about the weaving of the Earth Spirit, I would remind him of George Russell's poem, *Continuity*.<sup>53</sup> The last two verses read:

In that wild orchid that your feet  
In their next falling shall destroy,  
Minute and passionate and sweet  
The Mighty Master holds His joy.

Though the crushed jewels droop and fade  
The Artist's labour will not cease,  
And of the ruins shall be made  
Some yet more lovely masterpiece.

Our author has perhaps answered his own question. He has shown clearly enough that life carries on in spite of material defeats and that purpose is ever present, inspiring man to reach new triumphs for his soul's sake. Surely we learn from the history of dead civilizations that so long as a plant can flourish, man will be ready to start anew to build a culture upon the ruins of the old.

A firm faith in the goodness of God and a realization that we are endowed with the highest faculties for what Joseph Butler would call "the preservation of our lives," is the text from which the universal church must preach if it is to save man from himself and direct him in the true way of life. Spengler saw all this, and fundamentally he preached a truer Christian doctrine than anyone does today, save the Pope himself. The secret of Spengler's achievement is to be found in his understanding of how a springtime blossoms from the soulful orchards in early cultures. He knew the essential difference between "intuition" and "intellect," and that is why we overlook his errors, which do not amount to much after all, and join with Eduard Meyer (certainly one of the great figures of modern scholarship) in paying tribute to the cathedralic *Decline of the West*.

In the hope that Dr. Toynbee's future volumes<sup>54</sup> will yield to us a fruitful harvest after all his ploughing and sowing, I would call his attention to a verse from Goethe which Spengler "placed at the head of his book, to mark its fundamental intention":

In the Endless, self-repeating  
flows for evermore The Same.  
Myriad arches, springing, meeting,  
hold at rest the mighty frame.  
Streams from all things love of living,  
grandest star and humblest clod.  
All the straining, all the striving  
is eternal peace in God.<sup>55</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Six vols.; London: Oxford University Press; vols. I, II, III, second ed., third impression, 1945; vols. IV, V, VI, third impression, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> New York: Alfred A. Knopf; new ed., 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone*, ed. by Herbert Paul (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. I, pp. 192-93.

<sup>9</sup> Vol. I, p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> With J. B. E. Garstang; London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1940, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Vol. I, p. 482.

<sup>12</sup> Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 3rd impression, 1929.

- <sup>13</sup> Vol. I, pp. 195-96.
- <sup>14</sup> Vol. I, p. 201.
- <sup>15</sup> Delivered in the University of Glasgow, 1935-1937.
- <sup>16</sup> New York: Longmans, Green and Co., no date.
- <sup>17</sup> Vol. I, p. 205.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> In *The Birth of China* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 43.
- <sup>21</sup> Vol. I, pp. 290-91.
- <sup>22</sup> Vol. I, p. 291.
- <sup>23</sup> Vol. I, p. 293.
- <sup>24</sup> Two vols., trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), II, 89.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>28</sup> Vol. I, p. 336.
- <sup>29</sup> Vol. II, p. 25.
- <sup>30</sup> Vol. II, p. 31.
- <sup>31</sup> Vol. II, pp. 219-20.
- <sup>32</sup> Vol. II, p. 333.
- <sup>33</sup> Vol. II, p. 394.
- <sup>34</sup> Vol. III, p. 112.
- <sup>35</sup> Vol. III, p. 217.
- <sup>36</sup> Vol. III, p. 221. Cf. Spengler, authorized trans. of C. F. Atkinson, I, 106.
- <sup>37</sup> Vol. III, p. 221 *n.*
- <sup>38</sup> Vol. III, pp. 389-90.
- <sup>39</sup> Vol. IV, p. 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Vol. IV, p. 11.
- <sup>41</sup> Vol. IV, p. 119.
- <sup>42</sup> Vol. IV, pp. 121-22.
- <sup>43</sup> Vol. IV, p. 191.
- <sup>44</sup> Vol. IV, pp. 585-86.

<sup>45</sup> Vol. V, p. 557.

<sup>46</sup> Vol. VI, pp. 9-10.

<sup>47</sup> Spengler, *op. cit.*, I, 20.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Vol. VI, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Vol. VI, pp. 166-67.

<sup>51</sup> Vol. VI, p. 169.

<sup>52</sup> Vol. VI, p. 325.

<sup>53</sup> *Collected Poems*, by A. E. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1926, 2nd ed.), p. 240.

<sup>54</sup> The work is planned to be complete in nine volumes.

<sup>55</sup> Spengler, *op. cit.*, I, 140.