

Truth Is Where You Find It

By HELENA PLATKIN

Once upon a time I went to an institution for a formal education. I took many courses and accumulated many credits, four in economics. The first semester I got a B; the second semester, an A. I read the textbook dutifully—it was dry stuff. I even did some outside reading. It made the bibliography on my term papers look so well.

In a general way, the institution had the lofty objective of turning out educated men and women who would make the world a better place. Economics I and II did not seem to furnish the spark that would start off this betterment. I put away the book on a lower shelf (it looked aloof next to the flippantly orange-bound SHOW BOAT).

My next venture was in Sociology. This was interesting. Here we thought in terms of human beings instead of abstractions like money, business, management. We even visited a boys' club. Wasn't it appalling the things that boys did in the "gang" stage. You need only understand that a boy's home lacked love and understanding (maybe his mother was too busy scrubbing floors to earn enough just to keep him alive) and you had the "gang" instinct licked. A nice boys' club with athletics and a little culture thrown in was supposed to remedy that. And if a boy got into trouble, an understanding judge would not hold it against him because—well, his home lacked love. Yes, Sociology was getting a little warmer, human.

This course was followed by Psychology. The complexes, psychoses, neuroses, instinct, emotional blocks, frustrations that beset man! Here was the clue to the better world. You learned that if a guy lacked a couple of inches in stature he would compensate himself by a Napoleonic streak. If he were a frustrated artist, he would try to conquer the world. If a woman-hater, he had his mother on a shrine and didn't know it. But we in Psycho. 018 knew it. It was practically in the bag, the pattern for a better humanity. And what brought it about?—Psychology!

The credits mounted, the institution honored me with a diploma, and I was released. For a long while thereafter, my reading followed fancy. It was grand. No term papers, no reports, no book reviews. Just read aimlessly and enjoy it. And then I came upon "PROGRESS AND POVERTY." I need hardly elaborate on the revelations contained in its pages. Here was economics, sociology, psychology, but above all, here was literature, truth and wisdom. All the pompous chapters of Economics I and II—agriculture, business, banking, railroads, labor, population, money, unemployment, taxes, natural resources, public utilities—fell into place like orderly planets revolving around the sun. All the "ologies" on their wobbly pedestals made way for the simple, irrefutable truths of cause and effect. I was so elated I wanted to spot these truths over and over wherever they had been hidden by obscure meanings and pompous terminology. Many paths lead to the truth and I wanted the adventure of trodding them all. I wanted to meet other travelers who were heading for the same destination. I tried very hard to keep up with all the reading I encountered in and out of classes at the Henry George School.

I had made a motley crew of friends. To them I became the butt

of many wise cracks. When I met one of them in the subway I desperately tried to cover my assignment (from *THE RHYME OF REASON* by Holmes) for my logic class. "What's this?" came the taunt. "A compilation of stuff from *THE NEW YORKER*?" Another friend, seeing *THE STATE* by Oppenheimer drooled: "A detective story, eh, the State vs. Who." Hirsch's *DEMOCRACY VERSUS SOCIALISM* brought forth, "Say, I didn't know you were a pink." Another fingered a copy of *THE SCIENCE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY*. "Heavy stuff, isn't it?" "REBEL, PRIEST AND PROPHET" by Bell? Never heard of it. Sounds like a good movie number." "THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM"—Oh, she's a highbrow. Doesn't bother with fiction."

"But I'll get around to some light reading, this summer—perhaps," I resolved. "How can I do so now with a class to prepare for, weekly volunteer work, *THE FREEMAN* to read, *LAND AND FREEDOM*, and squeezed somewhere into the twenty-four hours, the daily newspaper?"

Then summer comes and I do read fiction. A good book, a best seller, "FAME IS THE SPUR" by Howard Spring. Now, this is not going to be a gushy book review. It's a little late for that, for the book's been popular for a couple of years and rumor has it that Hollywood is flirting with it. So I'm going to relax and enjoy the story, no notes to make, no references to look up. But whoa! What's this on page 387? "And someone owns the mountain, someone who isn't God looking down from the Heaven on the mole-hill, someone named the Marquis of This or Duke of That, who never carries a Davy lamp, who never has red lips and white eyes shining in a black mask, but who is lord and master of all this coal, all this petrified vegetation that aeons ago was trampled by mammoths and mastodons and drank in the light of a day before *Homo Sapiens* began to squat on his hunkers. All the old sunlight, transmuted into trees, transmuted into leaf mould, transmuted into coal, is

theirs because they are clever enough to own the fruit of all the sunlight that shone on steaming swamps before the first man uttered his first grunt, clever enough to own the mountain they have never seen, let alone what is going on under it."

I read this over. Why, it's an old thought, so familiar that it has become my own. I read on and stop at page 449.

"They can't see it (Labour) as anything but a handful of working men in the House of Commons, perpetually in opposition, perpetually arguing about an extra ha'p'orth for the poor. . . ."

This in a story! And I thought I was going to get away from it all by indulging in fiction. (Escapism, Psycho 2.) Why, it's one of those paths I'm treading with someone who is seeking the truth! I know the truth now and I can recognize it anywhere. After all, what is a story? And one of the characters answers me on page 626.

". . . it's about all the boys and gels I knew. That was it. That was the essence of any story and the story was much the same whether they were chimney sweepers or golden lads and lasses." ". . . the stuff historians wrote missed the point, that for each one of us history is neither more nor less than what happens to me. And the boys and gels I knew." The time or period, locale or setting are just that much embroidery for truths to shine forth if one but knows them.

On page 528 "FAME IS THE SPUR" takes us back to the time of World War I. "It was not to be endured that at a time of such enormous national peril, the miners should think of striking but there seems no doubt that they would do so." Why I read that in the newspaper only yesterday and this is the time of World War II. Mr. Lewis!

I indulge in a few minutes of reverery over this page. World War II. Good Heavens! What have we done with the interlude between wars? How was it that we lost ourselves so hopelessly and now are stumbling along the same bloody road? We

won. Where is our victory? And our politician hero answers my query several pages later: "When somebody wins, and whoever that may be, the common people—the people in whose name both sides are fighting—will say 'Thank God that's over' and, a good deal poorer and sadder, they'll settle down till another saviour comes along to ruin them. If I could be sure of having one prayer answered, I would pray for this: that for fifty years throughout the whole world, politicians of all breeds would leave the people alone. We might then have a better world, we couldn't have a worse one."

The tale draws to an end. The characters are old and sad and wise. But not entirely disillusioned. Out of their turbulent lives they have shed illusion, expediency, compromise. "No government," says our hero, "can do more than maintain a clear framework within which the essential acts of private life may go on. Even a politician would realize that the more virtue we have, the

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fewer treaties we shall need." ". . . above all," meditates our heroine, "truth, wisdom, beauty, justice, are there, absolute, neither to be implemented nor destroyed by the haggling of politicians."

The story is finished. I don't know how long I shall remember Hamer Shawcross, Ann, Pen, Arnold, Charles, Alice, Lettice I don't know when I shall travel again with an author into the coal mines of the Rhondda Valley, over the moors at Baildon, into the slums of Ancoats Street, dine with nobility, or convene with the House of Commons. But the truth as I have learned it from Henry George I shall recognize anywhere. It is omnipresent and omnipotent and I need only look—to find it.