

WORLD HISTORY

By Dr. Leo Baeck, of Berlin

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Few ages have provided greater support than our own for the theory that the epochs of history recur, despite the individual differences inherent in the historical circumstances and the various states of civilization. The age in which we are now living bears so strong a resemblance, both spiritually and politically, to the last stage of so-called antiquity, that it appears almost as a repetition. Then, as now, there had developed a conception of the world of men which embraced the whole human race, though the geographical and cultural connotations of the term "world" were, of course, diverse. In each case the consequent demand for a leaguering of the peoples and a unification of mankind found its way into ethical thinking and political action. In each case pacifism, with its vision of a far-reaching unity of laws, from which war and violence should be eliminated, began to be a hope for mankind and a political ideal.

Then, as now, however, this tendency, in its basic motive and character, was of a dual and conflicting nature. The one word covers two opposing desires. The same designation is given to the anxiety for peace of those who are surfeited and those who are hungry, those who are content with their possessions and those who look with hope beyond their present state of want.

A man who has all he needs is a willing preacher of the doctrine of pacifism. He does not want any limitation of his property or of the plenitude and enjoyment of that which he calls his own. He is content, and whoever disturbs him in the enjoyment of his wealth and ease is branded as a treacherous enemy of the ideal of peace. In the peace policy and peace programme of victorious powers in both ancient and modern times this need for the protection of inherited and conquered possessions has been, consciously and unconsciously, the determining motive. Enthusiasm for peace was, at bottom, enthusiasm for the consolidation of what had already been acquired. The same process has only too often taken place within the State. The successful classes have always been inclined and prepared to proclaim the urgent necessity of internal peace; the social demands and claims of the lower orders were to be regarded as offences against it. In this case also the idea of peace was not infrequently made the guardian of new or inherited possessions. It almost always happened that those who were in power wanted not only to be in the right as well, but wanted to be in a position to guarantee the peace of the world.

Completely distinct from this, often indeed in conscious antithesis to it, is another kind of pacifism, though it bears the same name. This is the more noble peace desire of those who hunger and hope. They also want tranquillity, not the tranquillity of possession but that of longing; no war, no violence is to oppose their seeking. This longing of those who are poor and look forward to the future draws its strength from the knowledge that it is the same on both sides of the numerous boundaries which have been set up by those who are temporarily in power; that in spite of the multiplicity of languages the same human suffering and deprivation, the same human craving for life and happiness are everywhere raising their voice. Just as those who are in power want also, by virtue of their position, to be in the right, and in fact in outward acceptance always are in the right, since they are able to make the laws, in a similar way, but inwardly and in a very different sense, this consciousness of a great

common fellowship results in a constant feeling of having right on one's side. From this feeling of association and unity, ethical and justified, there springs this other and superior kind of pacifism, whose fundamental doctrine is that power acts as a continual factor for separation, while the will to achieve the true future, which shall be the same for all, contributes to a more and more intimate union; that all war and discord serve only selfish ends, while peace points the path to human happiness. Peace is here the proof and guarantee of longing and the pacifism of those who are hungry is faith in an ultimate purpose, but that of those who are surfeited is a means to an end.

Even this nobler pacifism, however, great as may be the ideals that are bound up with it, lacks one decisive thing—a definite content. It is a faith; and all faith, like all devotion and all enthusiasm, is in itself meaningless and only acquires value through the value of its content. The conception of peace is likewise essentially an empty one, a mere frame, a mere word, and needs a content by which it shall be determined. If the former kind of pacifism is egotistic—for its content is selfishness—the latter is generally empty, misty and vague, a faith which is merely a faith and an enthusiasm which is only an enthusiasm. That is its real defect. For that very reason it remains essentially negative. In addition it is often merely anxiety and fear of the horrors of war, and in this it resembles the egotistic kind. Its programme is therefore, as a rule, the purely negative one of "No War!"

Pacifism, whether it be regarded as a faith or a conception, can only acquire a positive character and a definite meaning through the idea of justice, with its demand for decision and realization. Peace is only the expression of something, and it is as the expression of justice that it acquires its ethical significance. The dealing out of true justice to everybody, every individual and every community, is therefore the unconditional prerequisite which alone gives it content. There is a clear significance in the prophetic saying concerning peace, to the effect that it results from justice; and concerning tranquillity and security, to the effect that they are the work of justice. Peace, internal as well as external, only acquires value and permanency by the demand for justice.

A certain resemblance is observable to mere Christian charity, to that kind of Christian charity which is nothing more. It also is empty without the fulfilled prerequisite of justice, and, in spite of all it does, remains really nothing but a sensation and a vague enthusiasm. Charity sometimes serves, and is not infrequently intended to serve, as a substitute for justice; to silence the demand for justice in the one from whom, but also in the one to whom it is due; and, similarly, pacifism can be a surrogate for justice both to the hungry and the surfeited. It can act as a contributory factor in appeasing and hushing the claims of justice. Without the complete and unambiguous requirement of justice, peace is a mere attractive pretence, and perhaps not even an attractive one, since its ultimate result is to cast a veil of oblivion over the admonitions of actual fact. Without justice it is lacking in realization.

Here we can see the decisive extent to which this true peace idea is a factor in world history. It can indeed be said that by its means world history first acquires value and meaning.

That which is generally looked upon as world history is, in its sum, meaningless and a justification of all historical pessimism. Every end and purpose is nothing but a continual repetition of decline. Every volume of this kind of world history might bear this dark motto on its title-page, for the final harvests that

they describe, the last view they give, are of a field in ruins. As we cast our eyes backwards, we gaze at the wreckage of former empires, of brilliant civilizations, of great attempts to realize the ideal of pacifism. The epitaph is provided by a further prophetic saying, that of Jeremiah, which the sceptic Ernest Renan liked to quote :

"And the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary."

The course of world history, as thus treated, appears to be equally meaningless, for what it shows us throughout the centuries is not the history of a human world, but only the history of different opposing nations. Notwithstanding all the relations, resemblances and repetitions which have been revealed, we only see the parts, which exist for themselves alone. And at bottom it cannot be otherwise. For every nation, like every man, is a world in itself, living its own life, with its limitations and restrictions, and is at the very least fitted and enclosed within the compass of its language. All the different peoples co-exist in a juxtaposition which is usually only there in order continually to be disturbed and destroyed again and to become an opposition. History, when written in this way, is not only meaningless but destructive and makes its way through ruins. It is lacking in constructive and permanent unity.

Every world history which sets out to relate only the history of many peoples and powers, and is therefore merely a history of quarrels, wars and interludes of peace, renounces in reality everything which should act as a common cement, everything which would serve to unify it. That is to say, it renounces everything with which, as a matter of fact, world history is unable to dispense if it is to deserve its name. Unity is not brought about by the summation and combining of individual elements. It is rather always the expression and result of a creative act. The cosmos is thus a unity as the creation of the one God, and an ethical deed, an idea, or a work of art is a unity as the creation of man. It is likewise only by creation that history can possess unity and thereby be world history. Every ethical achievement, every example of intellectual accomplishment, every work of art, everything in fact which is a realization of the profoundest spirit of man, and by its creative work enables the infinite to enter into the finite, which introduces unity, harmony or peace into this world and gives it a meaning—these alone constitute world history.

Every people, every community in which there lives something of all these creative tasks has its share in world history; each of their members who stands out by his leadership and by that which he contributes is a world historical personality; every achievement possesses truly historical importance. And the representation of world history is the representation of the way these tasks have been fulfilled and the effect they have produced, their cessation and re-awakening, their defeats and successes. The history of the great revealing religions is therefore world history in the truest sense. Their history, in so far as it is real history—not their far more comprehensive church history, which only marks a special field of political history—is truly constructive, unifying, and therefore world historical; in other words, the history of peace.

The final consummating act of creation, the harmony in which the whole of mankind will fashion itself and unite, is the ultimate goal. The path to that end, this history of the world, is marked by the recognition and fulfilment of all the tasks which have the goal as their purpose. The outstanding tasks, needs and ideas are those of the true, positive, social messianic justice which find their realization in mankind; for they

create the strongest and most intimate form of human fellowship, which is the expression of human unity. The justice which is only negative and prohibitive serves to protect men and peoples in their juxtaposition, but insistent, positive justice unites men and peoples and is truly historical. World history is, above all, the history of this social and messianic justice.

The prophetic, messianic idea owes its great importance to the fact that it was the first to reveal what true world history is, how it acquired its meaning in the unity of its task, in this true kind of peace, and how its motive force is justice, progress towards the goal of peace. This has been laid down in this article as the ultimate meaning and expression of world history. From this messianic standpoint alone is it possible to adjudge the historical importance of any age and its position in the life of humanity.

THE PROPHET OF SAN FRANCISCO

Posthumous Work by Louis F. Post

This volume,* by a loyal and loving disciple of Henry George from a manuscript completed shortly before the death of the author in 1928, has been handsomely produced by the Vanguard Press, New York. The competency of Louis F. Post for the work here presented would be acknowledged, no doubt, by readers of his previous books, especially his engaging *Ethics of Democracy*, but is particularly suggested by his well-known intimacy with Henry George during the life of that social philosopher and economist. In a notable introduction to the present volume, the late Edward N. Vallandigham says of Mr Post :—

"No living man is so fitted as he to write this record of Henry George, the man and philosopher, and of the movement that took origin from his writings, and from the eloquent message of his living lips. The man and the movement are here in detail, and Mr Post, as a life-long student and exponent of the Georgian philosophy, has in this book set it forth in all its aspects, summed it up as it is found in many volumes, interpreted it, cited opinions of its friends and believers, analyzed and effectively refuted the criticisms of the most distinguished economists who have dissented from Henry George's conclusions."

Besides his keen analysis and explication of Henry George's writings, Mr Post, while disclaiming any intention to write a biography, gives many interesting and delightful reminiscences of his long and intimate friendship with the "Prophet." The book reveals Henry George's individual and family life, his passion for justice and his high spiritual vision. But its most useful service is its clear and competent analysis of the Prophet's social and economic philosophy which has found and is still finding ardent followers in all lands.

The appearance of *The Prophet of San Francisco* should be of real interest to teachers of economics, as to all serious students of the personality and philosophy of a great American, whose intellectual eminence is receiving a constantly broadening recognition in his own, as in other lands. To confirmed disciples everywhere, the book will, no doubt, be welcomed as a happy and an abiding contribution to the literature of the Movement.

* By Louis F. Post, New York. Vanguard Press, \$3.00. Just published.

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