

# Education in a Free Society

*In response to requests for further light on the challenging and, to some, enigmatic statement to the effect that "Jesus was the greatest political economist of all time," which appeared in her article, "Meet Our New Dictator: Mr. Five Per Cent," (FREEMAN for December, 1942) MARGARET HARKINS, Assistant Editor of THE FREEMAN, enlarges upon the matter in the following study.*

*The fact that requests are still being received for extra copies of the issue containing her article, and that many of our readers are interested in a further development of ideas touched on but briefly—because of space limitations—in the earlier thesis, suggests that Miss Harkins, long a student of the social sciences and metaphysics, has uncovered a rich vein of philosophical ore that so-called practical economists have feared to explore lest it yield nothing more than low-grade theory consisting chiefly of star dust.*

*Take no thought for the morrow: saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

★ NINETEEN CENTURIES AGO those words were spoken, we are told, by a remarkable teacher who headed up an adult education group which held a series of summer meetings in the high, hilly lands rising eastward above the Mediterranean sea. This is a warm, semi-tropical country, with the hot desert sands of Arabia lying just below it, and in those days the ideal place in which to conduct a summer school project of this sort was out-of-doors, in a pleasant grove, or on a wooded hillside, sheltered from the heat and the glare of the sun. Among the students who were gathered there to hear this particular lecture was a man who was called Matthew by name. Apparently he made notes, extensive and accurate ones, of what he heard, because after hundreds of years that superb literary masterpiece, *The Sermon on the Mount*, has come down to us, through various translations, in a form that leaves its distinctive qualities unimpaired. Only a highly original lecture, reflecting the unusual personality of the speaker, and the profundity of his thoughts, could, after so many centuries, stand out in such striking contrast to the surrounding portions of what has come to be known as *The Gospel According to Matthew*.

In this particular section of the sermon, the disciples, who were being trained as teachers, were cautioned against an attempt to try to serve two masters of opposite points of view, and serve them both successfully. They were told that the thing could not be done, that it

was contrary to human nature, because the chief interest, or treasure, in life would always bid for the greatest attention. They were told to consider carefully and choose wisely, to seek first things first, and that, having thus aligned themselves with the operation of a natural principle or law, the other things would have to follow. In an earlier part of the lecture they had been warned that a natural law could not be destroyed, or repealed, or changed in any way, but that it must always, under all circumstances, be fulfilled.

Despite Matthew's fine work on that day, and his excellent notes which have been handed down through generations with the seal of authenticity still upon them, the splendid advice contained in them has been too often misinterpreted, misunderstood, or flatly ignored. Thus, after nineteen hundred years, the whole world is torn by conflict, and in the United States a second ration book has been issued to the citizens that they might take thought of the morrow, the food they will eat, the coffee they will drink, and the shoes they will wear. This does not mean that the present rationing system should, or could, be suddenly abandoned. Rationing was originated long, long ago, in the form of an idea, and like all ideas it must follow the natural law. It must come into manifestation. If it is not good, or desirable, it can be cancelled out by one thing only, a better, or more desirable idea of equal or greater interest. Natural law, already in operation for billions of years when the disciples learned about it, is still functioning as predicted. Man's perversities have not changed original principle. The present adverse results merely prove that the suggestion, seek first things first, was abandoned in favor of a counter-suggestion, seek last things first. And why? Because it seemed to men, looking through a glass darkly, that by this very clever short-cut they would satisfy their desires with less exertion. If, according to natural principle, water seeks its own level, then, these *practical* individuals reasoned, the simple remedy was to have only one level. Just how difficult this levelling process might be they failed to anticipate, but the memory of the present war, will remain as a monument to those who tried.

This method of going through life in reverse, so to speak, of seeking last things first, of working from without to within, has apparently afflicted civilization since its earliest beginnings. At the time *The Sermon on the Mount* was given before the disciples, it must be assumed, from the writings, that they had a knowledge of the true interpretation of biblical allegories, particularly of that important parable of Adam and Eve, a remarkable story which reflects a state of mind that existed hundreds of thousands of years ago. It explains in a lucid, never-to-be-forgotten presentation, the functioning of the thought process back of all the adverse happenings that man has ever experienced. The woman Eve, representing the human mind or soul, is said to have eaten some forbidden fruit plucked from the

tree of good and evil, and then tempted Adam, representing the human body, to share in this daring escapade. For a while, for a few short years as time goes here on this earth, there were those who were convinced that Eve ate an apple. Now, however, modern psychologists have restored that worthy fruit to its rightful place in the market-basket of edible delights, and having examined the tree in question, they have discovered that the one and only evil that it yields is fear. Hatred, resentment, poverty, envy, human or social ills of any kind whatsoever, originate in and develop out of fear. Fear, or a belief in the power vested in inharmonious conditions, is all that can shut man out of paradise.

Fear, then, is the motive power that prompts men to seek last things first. The last thing, or the outward, visible manifestation of what was once an idea, becomes the desired thing—just in case something untoward should happen to the first link in the chain. If the parable of Adam and Eve were recast today, in the light of modern developments, a few changes—minor ones—might be made to bring the language down to date. The woman, for example, would no doubt explain her predicament in this manner: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did hoard." And the serpent, straight out of antiquity, would be the very one you met in the grocery store only a few weeks ago—there among the canned fruit and vegetables—whispering: "Buy—buy the last things now—for fear you will always and forever be too late for the first."

The food hoarder is one of the most recent products of fear, but even at the time of The Sermon on the Mount, it seems obvious that this tendency to hoard was so pronounced that it was recognized as a basic, fundamental social evil. All through the sermon there are warnings against this habit—for habit it apparently was, even two thousand years ago. In the affirmative sense the eight Beatitudes constitute a comprehensive blessing for those who do not indulge in this practice. Again and again, across the pages of this historical document, the tragic figures of those who are burdened by great possessions, turn back, away from paradise.

*And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . I say unto you, That ye resist not evil. . . . Take heed that ye do not your alms before men. . . . Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and dust doth corrupt. . . . Give us this day our daily bread.*

Here are but a few of the warnings. Integrity is to be sought first; it matters not the price. All things must be cast aside in its favor. These things must not be hoarded: resentments, self-righteousness, greed, revenge, the desire to "get even," the return of evil for evil. These are the deadly fallacies which, hoarded away, come to light in private quarrels and public strife. Even security, if it be of the outer, mutable type, is subject to corruption. Our bread must be today's bread, not the loaf of yesterday or tomorrow—not the loaf eaten in the fear that tomorrow will not bring its own.

All that is very well, the practical individual may assert at this point, but what about tomorrow's loaf,

now that the subject has come up. Regardless of what happened on a Mediterranean hillside nineteen centuries ago, the world is so short of loaves that tomorrow will bring even more starvation than today.

The truth that the world is short of loaves is a last truth—dependent as always on the first. For a world that permits its land, its one and only source of production, to be hoarded in the beginning will see its bread hoarded in the end. The law is still the law and permits of no short-cuts or improvements. Water still seeks its level; man still seeks to satisfy his desires with the least effort. So it is man who is still deceived; it is man who is still caught in his own wiles of wickedness. To be wicked is to be bewitched, in the dictionary meaning of the term—to be under a spell. What power, then, will lift this spell of fear—this bewitching serpentine influence that strikes without warning?

Again, Matthew's notes supply the answer. For, he tells his readers, when The Sermon on the Mount was ended, the people were astonished at the doctrine which had been set forth. Jesus taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now the scribes, in those days, were responsible for a system of learning which, in some of its worst aspects, has been incorporated in the school system of today. It was a repetitive, parrotting method, devoid of originality, and dependent largely upon outer observances, almost as ritualistic in nature as the present-day acquisition of good marks, fraternity pins, and athletic trophies. But this summer school which Matthew attended was for adults, men who had reached a fine maturity of mind and spirit. They did not have to be bribed with prizes and promises; they enjoyed learning, for they understood that to know is to be free. And to know then, as to know now, was "to have experience of." It did not consist of memorizing something that somebody else knew, or of wishing to know as much as the man across the street. The disciples sought truth in the only place that truth has ever been found in its original dynamic form—within their own consciousness. They knew it was truth because they had experienced it; they had learned to apply it in their daily lives. Their education, then, directed by one who had authority or dominion, consisted in observing the working of that one basic principle. Nothing more was needed, for to know, or "to have experience of" the truth, meant freedom.

No better method has been found, after nineteen hundred years of attempted short-cuts. Education, from within out, is still the only answer. When man learns, through experience, that hoarding is not the easiest way in which to satisfy his desires, he will be automatically released from the spell of fear which prompts him to continue the habit. When he learns that education, as it has been practiced, from without to within, is an education for hoarders, and that hoarders must always remain slaves to their great possessions, he will seek an easier way. He will no longer desire slavery and all it entails. Through experience, he will come to know that the tendency to grab, to hold, to seek the possessions of another, always carries with it the tremendous re-

sponsibility of using aggressive force. Ill-gotten gains must be guarded, for they lie outside the natural protection of justice. Aggression must be in constant operation, for the instant it ceases the possessions will revert to their rightful owners.

There was another point, of vital importance to modern society, which was stressed in The Sermon on the Mount. That was the complete absence of a *laissez faire* attitude on the part of the teacher. The disciples, though they numbered only a dozen, were told to go forth and teach all nations the truths they knew, the truths they had "had experience of." Some of them doubted, the story reveals, but the teacher did not doubt. He did not urge his followers to wait until a few more wars had been fought, or until world conditions were a bit more settled, or until the budget was balanced. And above all, he did not advise them to withhold their

teachings until men and women had become better, more receptive to reason, or until they had suffered more. Then, as now, the only way to begin a free society was to begin. Education in a free society can have only one meaning: an education *in* freedom. It can never be an education *for* freedom, or among the slaves of today who may be released tomorrow. Release, partial or complete, comes instantly when an understanding of freedom comes. Truth is unchanging, eternal, always in existence now. Those who take thought of tomorrow, fearful that it may bring less than today, are dwelling in a never-never land somewhere outside of *now*. Burdened as they are with great possessions which they have hoarded in a futile effort to stave off fear, they must remain shut out until they know, until "they have experience of" the truth that will set them free.

## A Letter from the Director

*Dear Freeman Reader:*

May I say "thank you" to all who have so generously responded to the appeal for funds made in the March issue of THE FREEMAN. It is encouraging to know that we can count on your support, financially and otherwise.

Someone inquired: "Why should a school with an endowment fund ask for contributions?" We all realize that the purpose of an endowment fund, or better still, a capital fund, is to assure permanence to an institution and a continuation of its service. We anticipate that this fund will grow from year to year so that the income derived from it will enable us to widen the scope and usefulness of the School. Without the aid of voluntary contributions, however, the annual income is not sufficient to cover current operations. Further expansion, in the meantime, is curtailed.

Every dollar of your contribution augmented by the income from this fund will be spent for present requirements and future expansion. Our objective is that thousands more should enjoy the advantages

we have all derived as students of Henry George.

Your contributions have aided in opening and operating extension classes in several cities and have made it possible to enroll correspondence students from all parts of the Western Hemisphere. This method of study has tremendous possibilities and the expansion of this part of our school program is limited only by the funds available.

During these trying times, in spite of the difficulties experienced by schools in general, we are pleased to announce a 30% increase in the number of correspondence students over the previous twelve months.

The future will depend upon what we contribute to it.

Confidently yours,

MARGARET E. BATEMAN, *Director*

P.S. Contributions to The Henry George School of Social Science are deductible from your gross income when making your federal Income Tax return.