

IV

THE BIBLE OF CIVILIZATION

PART ONE

§ 1

In my next two papers I am going to discuss and--what shall I say?--experiment with an old but neglected idea, an idea that was first broached I believe about the time when the State of Connecticut was coming into existence and while New York was still the Dutch city of New Amsterdam.

The man who propounded this idea was a certain great Bohemian, Komensky, who is perhaps better known in our western world by his Latinized name Comenius. He professed himself the pupil of Bacon. He was the friend of Milton. He travelled from one European country to another with his political and educational ideas. For a time he thought of coming to America. It is a great pity that he never came. And his idea, the particular idea of his we are going to discuss, was the idea of a common book, a book of history, science and wisdom, which should form the basis and framework for the thoughts and imaginations of every citizen in the world.

In many ways the thinkers and writers of the early seventeenth century seem more akin to us and more sympathetic with the world of to-day, than any intervening group of literary figures. They strike us as having a longer vision than the men of the eighteenth century, and as being bolder--and, how shall I put it?--more desperate in their thinking than the nineteenth century minds. And this closer affinity to our own time arises, I should think, directly and naturally, out of the closer resemblance of their circumstances. Between 1640 and 1650, just as in our present age, the world was tremendously unsettled and distressed. A century and more of expansion and prosperity had given place to a phase of conflict, exhaustion and entire political unsettlement. Britain was involved in the bitter political struggle that culminated in the execution of King Charles I. Ireland was a land of massacre and counter-massacre. The Thirty Years War in Central Europe was in its closing, most dreadful stages of famine and plunder. In France the crown and the nobles were striving desperately for ascendancy in the War of the Fronde. The Turk threatened Vienna. Nowhere in Western Europe did there remain any secure and settled political arrangements. Everywhere there was disorder, everywhere it seemed that anything might happen, and it is just those disordered and indeterminate times that are most fruitful of bold religious and social and political and educational speculations and initiatives.

This was the period that produced the Quakers and a number of the most vigorous developments of Puritanism, in which the foundations of modern republicanism were laid, and in which the project of a world league of

nations--or rather of a world state--received wide attention. And the student of Comenius will find in him an active and sensitive mind responding with a most interesting similarity to our own responses, to the similar conditions of his time. He has been distressed and dismayed--as most of us have been distressed and dismayed--by a rapid development of violence, by a great release of cruelty and suffering in human affairs. He felt none of the security that was felt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the certainty of progress. He realized as we do that the outlook for humanity is a very dark and uncertain one unless human effort is stimulated and organized. He traced the evils of his time to human discords and divisions, to our political divisions, and the mutual misconceptions due to our diversity of languages and leading ideas. In all that he might be writing and thinking in 1921. And his proposed remedies find an echo in a number of our contemporary movements. He wanted to bring all nations to form one single state. He wanted to have a universal language as the common medium of instruction and discussion, and he wanted to create a common Book of Necessary Knowledge, a sort of common basis of wisdom, for all educated men in the world.

Now this last is the idea I would like to develop now. I would like to discuss whether our education--which nowadays in our modern states reaches everyone--whether our education can include and ought to include such a Book of Necessary Knowledge and Wisdom; and (having attempted to answer that enquiry in the affirmative) I shall then attempt a sketch of such a book.

But to begin with perhaps I may meet an objection that is likely to arise. I have called this hypothetical book of ours the Bible of Civilization, and it may be that someone will say: Yes, but you have a sufficient book of that sort already; you have the Bible itself and that is all you need. Well, I am taking the Bible as my model. I am taking it because twice in history--first as the Old Testament and then again as the Old and New Testament together--it has formed a culture, and unified and kept together through many generations great masses of people. It has been the basis of the Jewish and Christian civilizations alike. And even in the New World the State of Connecticut did, I believe, in its earliest beginnings take the Bible as its only law. Nevertheless, I hope I shall not offend any reader if I point out that the Bible is not all that we need to-day, and that also in some respects it is redundant. Its very virtues created its limitations. It served men so well that they made a Canon of it and refused to alter it further. Throughout the most vital phases of Hebrew history, throughout the most living years of Christian development the Bible changed and grew. Then its growth ceased and its text became fixed. But the world went on growing and discovering new needs and new necessities.

Let me deal first with its redundancy. So far as redundancy goes, a great deal of the Book of Leviticus, for example, seems not vitally necessary for the ordinary citizen of to-day; there are long explicit directions for temple worship and sacrificial procedure. There is again, so far as the latter day citizen is concerned, an excess of information

about the minor Kings of Israel and Judah. And there is more light than most of us feel we require nowadays upon the foreign policies of Assyria and Egypt. It stirs our pulses feebly, it helps us only very indirectly to learn that Attai begat Nathan and Nathan begat Zabad, or that Obed begat Jehu and Jehu begat Azariah, and so on for two or three hundred verses.

And so far as deficiencies go, there is a great multitude of modern problems--problems that enter intimately into the moral life of all of us, with which the Bible does not deal, the establishment of American Independence, for example, and the age-long feud of Russia and Poland that has gone on with varying fortunes for four centuries. That is much more important to our modern world than the ancient conflict of Assyria and Egypt which plays so large a part in the old Bible record. And there are all sorts of moral problems arising out of modern conditions on which the Bible sheds little or no direct light: the duties of a citizen at an election, or the duties of a shareholder to the labour employed by his company, for example. For these things we need at least a supplement, if we are still to keep our community upon one general basis of understanding, upon one unifying standard of thought and behaviour.

We are so brought up upon the Bible, we are so used to it long before we begin to think hard about it, that all sorts of things that are really very striking about it, the facts that the history of Judah and Israel is told twice over and that the gospel narrative is repeated four times over for example, do not seem at all odd to us. How else, we ask, could

you have it? Yet these are very odd features if we are to regard the Bible as the compactest and most perfect statement of essential truth and wisdom.

And still more remarkable, it seems to me, is it that the Bible breaks off. One could understand very well if the Bible broke off with the foundation of Christianity. Now this event has happened, it might say, nothing else matters. It is the culmination. But the Bible does not do that. It goes on to a fairly detailed account of the beginnings and early politics of the Christian Church. It gives the opening literature of theological exposition. And then, with that strange and doubtful book, the Revelation of St. John the Divine, it comes to an end. As I say, it leaves off. It leaves off in the middle of Roman imperial and social conflicts. But the world has gone on and goes on--elaborating its problems, encountering fresh problems--until now there is a gulf of upwards of eighteen hundred years between us and the concluding expression of the thought of that ancient time.

I make these observations in no spirit of detraction. If anything, these peculiarities of the Bible add to the wonder of its influence over the lives and minds of men. It has been The Book that has held together the fabric of western civilization. It has been the handbook of life to countless millions of men and women. The civilization we possess could not have come into existence and could not have been sustained without it. It has explained the world to the mass of our people, and it has given them moral standards and a form into which their consciences could

work. But does it do that to-day? Frankly, I do not think it does. I think that during the last century the Bible has lost much of its former hold. It no longer grips the community. And I think it has lost hold because of those sundering eighteen centuries, to which every fresh year adds itself, because of profound changes in the methods and mechanisms of life, and because of the vast extension of our ideas by the development of science in the last century or so.

It has lost hold, but nothing has arisen to take its place. That is the gravest aspect of this matter. It was the cement with which our western communities were built and by which they were held together. And the weathering of these centuries and the acids of these later years have eaten into its social and personal influence. It is no longer a sufficient cement. And--this is the essence of what I am driving at--our modern communities are no longer cemented, they lack organized solidarity, they are not prepared to stand shocks and strains, they have become dangerously loose mentally and morally. That, I believe, is the clue to a great proportion of the present social and political troubles of the world. We need to get back to a cement. We want a Bible. We want a Bible so badly that we cannot afford to put the old Bible on a pinnacle out of daily use. We want it re-adapted for use. If it is true that the old Bible falls short in its history and does not apply closely to many modern problems, then we need a revised and enlarged Bible in our schools and homes to restore a common ground of ideas and interpretations if our civilization is to hold together.

Now let us see what the Bible gave a man in the days when it could really grip and hold and contain him; and let us ask if it is impossible to restore and reconstruct a Bible for the needs of these great and dangerous days in which we are living. Can we re-cement our increasingly unstable civilization? I will not ask now whether there is still time left for us to do anything of the sort.

The first thing the Bible gave a man was a Cosmogony. It gave him an account of the world in which he found himself and of his place in it. And then it went on to a general history of mankind. It did not tell him that history as a string of facts and dates, but as a moving and interesting story into which he himself finally came, a story of promises made and destinies to be fulfilled. It gave him a dramatic relationship to the schemes of things. It linked him to all mankind with a conception of relationships and duties. It gave him a place in the world and put a meaning into his life. It explained him to himself and to other people, and it explained other people to him. In other words, out of the individual it made a citizen with a code of duties and expectations.

Now I take it that both from the point of view of individual happiness and from the point of view of the general welfare, this development of the citizenship of a man, this placing of a man in his own world, is of primary importance. It is the necessary basis of all right education; it is the fundamental purpose of the school, and I do not believe an individual can be happy or a community be prosperous without it. The

Bible and the religions based on it gave that idea of a place in the world to the people it taught. But do we provide that idea of a place in the world for our people to-day? I suggest that we do not. We do not give them a clear vision of the universe in which they live, and we do not give them a history that invests their lives with meaning and dignity.

The cosmogony of the Bible has lost grip and conviction upon men's minds, and the ever-widening gulf of years makes its history and its political teaching more and more remote and unhelpful amidst the great needs of to-day. Nothing has been done to fill up these widening gaps. We have so great a respect for the letter of the Bible that we ignore its spirit and its proper use. We do not rewrite and retell Genesis in the light and language of modern knowledge, and we do not revise and bring its history up to date and so apply it to the problems of our own time. So we have allowed the Bible to become antiquated and remote, venerable and unhelpful.

There has been a great extension of what we call education in the past hundred years, but while we have spread education widely, there has been a sort of shrinkage and enfeeblement of its aims. Education in the past set out to make a Christian and a citizen and afterwards a gentleman out of the crude, vulgar, self-seeking individual. Does education even pretend to do as much to-day? It does nothing of the sort. Our young people are taught to read and write. They are taught bookkeeping and languages that are likely to be useful to them. They are given a certain

measure of technical education, and they are taught to shove. And then we turn them out into the world to get on. Our test of a college education is--Does it make a successful business man?

Well, this, I take it, is the absolute degradation of education. It is a modern error that education exists for the individual. Education exists for the community and the race; it exists to subdue the individual for the good of the world and his own ultimate happiness.

But we have been letting the essentials of education slip back into a secondary place in our pursuit of mere equipment, and we see the results to-day throughout all the modern states of the world, in a loss of cohesion, discipline and co-operation. Men will not co-operate except to raise prices on the consumer or wages on the employer, and everyone scrambles for a front place and a good time. And they do so, partly no doubt by virtue of an ineradicable factor in them known as Original Sin, but also very largely because the vision of life that was built up in their minds at school and in their homes was fragmentary and uninspiring; it had no commanding appeal for their imaginations, and no imperatives for their lives.

So I put it, that for the opening books of our Bible of Civilization, our Bible translated into terms of modern knowledge, and as the basis of all our culture, we shall follow the old Bible precedent exactly. We shall tell to every citizen of our community, as plainly, simply and beautifully as we can, the New Story of Genesis, the tremendous

spectacle of the Universe that science has opened to us, the flaming beginnings of our world, the vast ages of its making and the astounding unfolding, age after age, of Life. We shall tell of the changing climates of this spinning globe and the coming and going of great floras and faunas, mighty races of living things, until out of the vast, slow process our own kind emerged. And we shall tell the story of our race. How through hundreds of thousands of years it won power over nature, hunted and presently sowed and reaped. How it learnt the secrets of the metals, mastered the riddle of the seasons, and took to the seas. That story of our common inheritance and of our slow upward struggle has to be taught throughout our entire community, in the city slums and in the out-of-the-way farmsteads most of all. By teaching it, we restore again to our people the lost basis of a community, a common idea of their place in space and time.

Then, still following the Bible precedent, we must tell a universal history of man. And though on the surface it may seem to be a very different history from the Bible story, in substance it will really be very much the same history, only robbed of ancient trappings and symbols, and made real and fresh again for our present ideas. It will still be a story of conditional promises, the promises of human possibility, a record of sins and blunders and lost opportunities, of men who walked not in the ways of righteousness, of stiff-necked generations, and of merciful renewals of hope. It will still point our lives to a common future which will be the reward and judgment of our present lives.

You may say that no such book exists--which is perfectly true--and that no such book could be written. But there I think you underrate the capacity of our English-speaking people. It would be quite possible to get together a committee that would give us the compact and clear cosmogony of history that is needed. Some of the greatest, most inspiring books and documents in the world have been produced by Committees: Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the English Translation of the Bible, and the Prayer Book of the English Church are all the productions of committees, and they are all fine and inspiring compilations. For the last three years I have been experimenting with this particular task, and, with the help of six other people, I have sketched out and published an outline of our world's origins and history to show the sort of thing I mean. That Outline is, of course, a corrupting mass of faults and minor inaccuracies, but it does demonstrate the possibility of doing what is required. And its reception both in America and England has shown how ready, how greedy many people are, on account of themselves and on account of their children, for an ordered general account of the existing knowledge of our place in space and time. For want of anything better they have taken my Outline very eagerly. Far more eagerly would they have taken a finer, sounder and more authoritative work.

In England this Outline was almost the first experiment of the kind that has been made--the only other I know of in England, was a very compact General History of the World by Mr. Oscar Browning published in

1913. But there are several educationists in America who have been at work on the same task. In this matter of a more generalized history teaching, the New World is decidedly leading the Old. The particular problems of a population of mixed origins have forced it upon teachers in the United States.

My friend--I am very happy to be able to call him my friend--Professor Breasted, in conjunction with that very able teacher Professor Robinson, has produced two books, *Ancient Times and Mediæval and Modern Times*, which together make a very complete history of civilized man. They do not, however, give a history of life before man, nor very much of human pre-history. Another admirable American summary of history is Doctor Hutton Webster's *History of the Ancient World* together with his *Mediæval and Modern History*. This again is very sparing of the story of primitive man.

But the work of these gentlemen confirms my own experience that it is quite possible to tell in a comprehensible and inspiring outline the whole history of life and mankind in the compass of a couple of manageable volumes. Neither Browning nor Breasted and Robinson, nor Hutton Webster, nor my own effort are very much longer than twice the length of Dickens' novel of *Bleak House*. So there you have it. There is the thing shown to be possible. If it is possible for us isolated workers to do as much then why should not the thing be done in a big and authoritative manner? Why should we not have a great educational conference of teachers, scientific men and historians from all the

civilized peoples of the world, and why should they not draft out a standard World History for general use in the world's schools? Why should that draft not be revised by scores of specialists? Discussed and re-discussed? Polished and finished, and made the opening part of a new Bible of Civilization, a new common basis for a world culture?

At intervals it would need to be revised, and it could be revised and brought up to date in the same manner.

Now such a book and such a book alone would put the people of the world upon an absolutely new footing with regard to social and international affairs. They would be told a history coming right up to the Daily Newspaper. They would see themselves and the news of to-day as part of one great development. It would give their lives significance and dignity. It would give the events of the current day significance and dignity. It would lift their imaginations up to a new level. I say lift, but I mean restore their imaginations to a former level. Because if you look back into the lives of the Pilgrim Fathers, let us say, or into those of the great soldiers and statesmen of Cromwellian England, you will find that these men had a sense of personal significance, a sense of destiny, such as no one in politics or literature seems to possess to-day. They were still in touch with the old Bible. To-day if life seems adventurous and fragmentary and generally aimless it is largely because of this one thing. We have lost touch with history. We have ceased to see human affairs as one great epic unfolding. And only by the universal teaching of Universal History can that epic quality be

restored.

You see then the first part of my project for a Bible of Civilization, a rewriting of Genesis and Exodus and Judges and Chronicles in terms of World History. It would be a quite possible thing to do....

Is it worth doing?

And let me add here that when we do get our New Genesis and our new historical books, they will have a great number of illustrations as a living and necessary part of them. For nowadays we can not only have a canonical text, but canonical maps and illustrations. The old Hebrew Bible was merely the written word. Indeed it was not even that, for it was written without vowels. That was not a merit, nor a precedent for us; it was an unavoidable limitation in those days; but under modern conditions there is no reason whatever why we should confine our Bible to words when a drawing or a map can better express the thing we wish to convey. It is one of the great advantages of the modern book over the ancient book that because of printing it can use pictures as well as words. When books had to be reproduced by copyists the use of pictures was impossible. They would have varied with each copying until they became hopelessly distorted....

§ 2

But the cosmological and historical part of the old Bible was merely the opening, the groundwork upon which the rest was built. Let us now consider what else the Bible gave a man and a community, and what would be the modern form of the things it gave.

The next thing in order that the Bible gave a man and the community to which he belonged was the Law. Rules of Life. Rules of Health. Prescriptions--often very detailed and intimate--of permissible and unpermissible conduct. This also the modern citizen needs and should have: he and she need a book of personal wisdom.

First as to Health. One of the first duties of a citizen is to keep himself in mental and bodily health in order to be fit for the rest of his duties. Now the real Bible, our model, is extremely explicit upon a number of points, upon what constitutes cleanness or uncleanness, upon ablutions, upon what a man or woman may eat and what may not be eaten, upon a number of such points. It was for its times and circumstances a directory of healthy practice. Well, I do not see why the Bible of a Modern Civilization should not contain a book of similarly clear injunctions and warnings--why we should not tell every one of our people what is to be known about self-care.

And closely connected with the care of one's mental and bodily health is sexual morality, upon which again Deuteronomy and Leviticus are most explicit, leaving very little to the imagination. I am all for imitating the wholesome frankness of the ancient book. Where there are no dark

corners there is very little fermentation, there is very little foulness or infection. But in nearly every detail and in method and manner, the Bible of our Civilization needs to be fuller and different from its prototype upon these matters. The real Bible dealt with an oriental population living under much cruder conditions than our own, engaged mainly in agriculture, and with a far less various dietary than ours. They had fermented but not distilled liquors; they had no preserved nor refrigerated foods; they married at adolescence; many grave diseases that prevail to-day were unknown to them, and their sanitary problems were entirely different. Generally our New Leviticus will have to be much fuller. It must deal with exercise--which came naturally to those Hebrew shepherds. It must deal with the preservation of energy under conditions of enervation of which the prophets knew nothing. On the other hand our New Leviticus can afford to give much less attention to leprosy--which almost dominates the health instructions of the ancient law-giver.

I do not know anything very much about the movements in America that aim at the improvement of the public health and at the removal of public ignorance upon vital things. In Britain we have a number of powerful organizations active in disseminating knowledge to counteract the spread of this or that infectious or contagious disease. The War has made us in Europe much more outspoken and fearless in dealing with lurking hideous evils. We believe much more than we did in the curative value of light and knowledge. And we have a very considerable literature of books on--what shall I call it? on Sex Wisdom, which aim to prevent some of

that great volume of misery, deprivation and nervous disease due to the prevailing ignorance and secrecy in these matters. For in these matters great multitudes of modern people still live in an ignorance that would have been inconceivable to an ancient Hebrew. In England now the books of such a writer as Dr. Marie Stopes are enormously read, and--though they are by no means perfect works--do much to mitigate the hidden disappointments, discontents, stresses and cruelties of married life. Now I believe that it would be possible to compile a modern Leviticus and Deuteronomy to tell our whole modern community decently and plainly--just as plainly as the old Hebrew Bible instructed its Hebrew population--what was to be known and what had to be done, and what had not to be done in these intimate matters.

But Health and Sex do not exhaust the problems of conduct. There are also the problems of Property and Trade and Labour. Upon these also the old Bible did not hesitate to be explicit. For example, it insisted meticulously upon the right of labour to glean and upon the seller giving a "full measure brimming over," and it prohibited usury. But here again the Bible is extraordinarily unhelpful when we come to modern issues, because its rules and regulations were framed for a community and for an economic system altogether cruder, more limited and less complicated than our own. Much of the Old Testament we have to remember was already in existence before the free use of coined metal. The vast credit system of our days, joint-stock company enterprise and the like, were beyond the imagination of that time. So too was any anticipation of modern industrialism. And accordingly we live to-day in a world in which

neither property nor employment have ever been properly moralized. The bulk of our present social and economic troubles is due very largely to that.

In no matter is this muddled civilization of ours more hopelessly at sixes and sevens than in this matter of the rights and duties of property. Manifestly property is a trust for the community varying in its responsibilities with the nature of the property. The property one has in one's toothbrush is different from the property one has in ten thousand acres of land; the property one has in a photograph of a friend is different from the property one has in some irreplaceable masterpiece of portraiture. The former one may destroy with a good conscience, but not the latter. At least so it seems to me.

But opinions vary enormously on these matters because we have never really worked them out. On the one hand, in this matter of property, we have the extreme individualist who declares that a man has an unlimited right to do what he likes with his own--so that a man who owns a coal mine may just burn it out to please himself or spite the world, or raise the price of coal generally--and on the other hand we have the extreme communist who denies all property and in practice--so far as I can understand his practice--goes on the principle that everything belongs to somebody else or that one is entitled to exercise proprietary rights over everything that does not belong to oneself. (I confess that communistic practice is a little difficult to formulate.) Between these extremists you can find every variety of idea about what one may do and

about what one may not do with money and credit and property generally. Is it an offence to gamble? Is it an offence to speculate? Is it an offence to hold fertile fields and not cultivate them? Is it an offence to hold fertile fields and undercultivate them? Is it an offence to use your invested money merely to live pleasantly without working? Is it an offence to spend your money on yourself and refuse your wife more than bare necessities? Is it an offence to spend exorbitant sums that might otherwise go in reproductive investments, to gratify the whims and vanities of your wife? You will find different people answering any of these questions with Yes or No. But it cannot be both Yes and No. There must be a definable Right or Wrong upon all these issues.

Almost all the labour trouble in the world springs directly from our lack of an effective detailed moral code about property. The freedom that is claimed for all sorts of property and exercised by all sorts of property to waste or withhold is the clue to that savage resentment which flares out nowadays in every great labour conflict. Labour is a rebel because property is a libertine.

Now this untilled field of conduct, this moral wilderness of the rights and duties and limitations of property, the Books of the Law in a modern Bible could clear up in the most lucid and satisfying way. I want to get those parts of Deuteronomy and Leviticus written again, more urgently than any other part of the modern Bible. I want to see it at work in the schools and in the law-courts. I admit that it would be a most difficult book to write and that we should raise controversial storms over every

verse. But what an excellent thing to have it out, once for all, with some of these rankling problems! What an excellent thing if we could get together a choice group of representative men--strictly rationed as to paper--and get them to set down clearly and exactly just what classes of property they recognized and what limitations the community was entitled to impose upon each sort.

Every country in the world does impose limitations. In Italy you may not export an ancient work of art, although it is your own. In England you may not maltreat your own dog or cat. In the United States, I am told, you may not use your dollars to buy alcohol. Why should we not make all this classification of property and the restraints upon each class of property, systematic and world-wide? If we could so moralize the use of property, if we could arrive at a clear idea of just what use an owner could make of his machinery, or a financier could make of his credit, would there be much left of the incessant labour conflicts of the present time? For if you will look into it, you will find there is hardly ever a labour conflict into which some unsettled question of principle, some unsettled question of the permissible use of property, does not enter as the final and essential dispute.