

goods any person is willing to send along. It would be a blessing if the customs house officers could be dismissed upon better business than the anti-social acts on which they are now engaged. There is no need to direct production on prescribed lines to foster exports for this or that given market and it is suicidal to hit at consumers forcing them to suffer privation. If trade were allowed to flow freely, with sound money measuring and financing all the transactions of the parties engaged, they in free and unfettered competition with one another, the amounts of imports and exports would adjust themselves. No question of there being too dangerously much of the one or too dangerously little of the other could possibly arise. And granting that State bulk purchases no longer interfered with that freedom, the political vocabularies would be shed of the jargon about "dollar shortages."

We were led into the fool's paradise, the spirit of which was expressed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his notorious declaration to the effect that if in any special area unemployment became apparent he would "with a song in his heart" provide generous funds to cure it. The expenditure of money was to make a flourishing society, with work for all, comfort and succour for all, and how the money was to be come by did not much matter. Taxation has been piled high, the national debt has been mounted (it rose by more than £3,000 million in the first two years of the peace to 31st March, 1947), and the printing press turning out pound notes has had a lively run. Plenty of money, no matter how obtained, the virtue and the magic was in the spending of it. The magic, yes—and the disillusionment.

THE CENTENARY OF "WALDEN"

THESE crises at all events help to keep politicians in the limelight. Their nostrums may conflict, but all their exhortations imply that without their Plans, or at any rate their directions, we are lost. And so far they have certainly "got away with it." Yet previous example does not confirm such pretensions. These claims to omniscience, these dubious appeals to passive obedience under the name of patriotism—who is likely to read them a hundred years hence? Yet after a hundred years people still read Thoreau, who never had the slightest desire to govern anyone and who showed by example how easily men might free their minds, at least, from the domination of all pretentious people, politicians or others.

The V.I.P.'s might forgive a man who abused them. That would be a tribute to their importance. But Thoreau showed himself supremely unimpressed by them—even in prison. It is not surprising that a note of wounded vanity can be detected in almost all subsequent comment on Thoreau by the best-sellers of political and literary ideas. No generosity is shown even to his private life. Thoreau succeeded in withstanding those temptations to which even a Wordsworth succumbed. Had he done so in obedience to some ecclesiastical authority he would no doubt have been acclaimed a saint; but as he subordinated body to spirit in obedience to his own conscience the transcendental purity of his life is condemned as "unnatural," disqualifying his judgment on questions of human importance. To those, however, who consider independent search for truth as the only permanent basis for human progress—even in a crisis—it might be just as useful to re-read *Walden* as to listen to the repetition of current economic clichés. It is certainly much more stimulating.

The crisis is the graver because of the measures the Government is taking which will only perpetuate its causes. The Minister of Agriculture, using his powers of decree, has promulgated a new Corn Law providing increased subsidies to the farmers and higher prices for food, a "long term," well-protected and guaranteed market. These aids will go where they have always gone, to increase the price and the rent of land. Well may we hear the interests toasting a "long crisis," as their forebears toasted a long war in the days of Napoleon. For the rest, there is no reversion of the policies the Government has heretofore pursued, of monetary manipulation, subsidies, creation of debt, trade barriers, grievous taxation and the extension of State controls. The further regimentation of personal life and action which it has announced is only instilling into the body politic more of the insidious poison which is a prime cause of its ills. The control over these added compulsions and prohibitions will require added staffs of officials and it is to them and the police inspectors that Mr. Herbert Morrison's new "go to it" injunction applies rather than to the ordinary citizen, who in these days is a declining proportion of the population.

The alternative to all that is Liberty. It is inconceivable (though there are some crazy enough to assert it) that if the free market were restored, if the Government were to take its hands off industry, and if private initiative was allowed full scope, free from all monopoly and privilege, the country would go to perdition.

Our policy we have submitted and we call upon all who are with us to give it their utmost support. With them lies the hope and the chance of the Good Society.

Although he graduated at Harvard, Thoreau, contrary to the apparent aim of such institutions, left the university with as great a desire to learn as when he entered its doors. Others used their degrees as aids to a career. He determined to "adventure upon life" itself. "It is plain that the education of man has hardly commenced," he observes, "there is so little genuine intercommunication. It is time that we did not leave off our education as soon as we become men and women; it is time that villages were universities."

In the fortunate America of that time, with its adventurous measure of land-freedom, it was possible for a man to maintain himself by working, not continuously, but intermittingly, but not monotonously, but at a variety of occupations. Instead of "venturing to live only by aid of the Mutual Insurance Company," Thoreau relied upon himself and was by turns surveyor, pencil-maker, gardener and lecturer. It is true that the material scale of his living allowed few luxuries and no ostentation; but it gave him something he valued far more: leisure, and the opportunity to exercise the higher faculties of mind and spirit. "None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what we should call voluntary poverty," he declares. "The rich man is always sold to the institution which makes him rich. They who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property. Of a life of luxury the fruit is luxury. There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle

thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically. It is not enough that we are truthful; we must cherish and carry out high purposes to be truthful about. Read not *The Times*. Read the Eternities. Conventionalities are at length as bad as impurities. Is there any such thing as wisdom not applied to life?"

With his cheerful, courageous disposition Thoreau might have lived a tranquil life—provided he could have compromised with the shams and duplicities of society to the extent that even a good man like his friend, Emerson, was ready to compromise. But of this Thoreau was incapable. He found himself the subject of a government which legalised slavery and, in Mexico, waged an aggressive war. To condemn injustice by speech, to pass resolutions, to petition authorities—and then to obey the law; this seemed to him a betrayal of one's conscience. He boldly asserted the duty of civil disobedience. The common reverence for authority was in reality a weakness not a virtue. After all, this thing called government was even at its best no more than an "expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone. Government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of the way. Trade and commerce, if they were not made of india-rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and if one were to judge these men wholly by the effect of their actions and not partially by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on the railroads."

He found that there were thousands "*in opinion*" opposed to slavery and the war, and yet, in effect, *doing* nothing to put an end to them." These men were ready to "wait, well disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret." But, said Thoreau, "if the injustice is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. For eighteen hundred years the New Testament has been written; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light which it sheds on the science of legislation? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognise the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The true patriots, reformers in the great sense, serve the State with their consciences as well as their heads, and so necessarily resist it for the most part."

And so Thoreau was imprisoned for refusing to support, by paying taxes, a government which supported injustice. The acute embarrassment of the authorities, confronted by the resistance of only one man, of known integrity of character and not seeking power, might arouse exciting tactical considerations in the minds of some men of later times. "If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose." It is significant that our own teachers tell us so little of the examples in our own history where reform has come from the refusal to pay taxes.

After Harper's Ferry, Thoreau wrote a *Plea for Captain*

John Brown, which it is difficult to read, even at this distance of time, without emotion. Its influence must have been immense, but the author did not live to see the result. In March, 1862, at the end of a factual letter to a friend, he says, "You ask particularly after my health. I suppose I have not many months to live; but, of course, I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing." It was his last letter.

So passed this "rash," "crazy," "whimsical egotist."

Where Thoreau touched the distribution of wealth he suffered the disadvantage which all more celebrated philosophers—with one great exception—have suffered: ignorance of a clear understanding of natural law. But, if it remained for Henry George to show how the richest flowering of individual talent and spirit might be developed in harmony with social life, we are not the less grateful for the vigorous, manly, generous integrity of soul which the influence of Thoreau has fostered and maintained. If only we had with us even a small company of men of genius as "rash" as he how much *safer* we would feel!

F. D. P.

ATTLEE, CHURCHILL AND WINDMILLS

The following is translated from VEJEN FREM, the Road Forward, of August 16th.

IN the first World War the "little solicitor from Wales," the half-Liberal Lloyd George was England's great man and he had ability. When the peace came the Labour Party gained strength and (later) England had its first Labour Government, with the brave three-quarter Socialist, MacDonald, as head of the State.

In the course of a few years MacDonald got himself and his party so thoroughly involved in the mess of State Socialism that even his old party colleagues turned their backs on him. That was a pity for MacDonald. He had his attractions and he meant so well. The experiments with State Socialism brought the Conservatives into power.

During the second World War the former cavalry officer, Winston Churchill, became England's strong man. With his raised forefinger, his broad face and smoking his big cigar, he resembles a bold ship's captain rather than the hussar lieutenant which he originally was. But for England he was a good man in a bad time.

After the peace the Labour Party set out upon another go at State Socialism. Major Attlee stepped into Parliament as Prime Minister and took charge. But he could not, any more than MacDonald, prove the wizard and conjure much out of nothing. He makes the same brave attacks upon windmills. He also plays the part of the knight of the woeful countenance. For him it is a personal triumph and brief satisfaction that the Conservative opposition is in the same case and can think of no expedient for England's economic ills than to apply plasters in a slightly different way.

In Attlee's crisis speech in the House of Commons on August 7th there was not one rational proposal, there was no proposal at all except that he was to have absolute powers (that is to say, dictatorship)—for what? Only on one thing was there general agreement, namely, that England, like Denmark, now has far too many officials, hundreds of thousands of civil servants who are merely quill drivers and obstructors of production. But State Socialism, dictatorship and the power of officialdom fit