

Foreword

FOR over twenty years the writings of Frederick Lewis Allen have been among the most popular books assigned for reading in American colleges. These books have been at once a challenge and a boon to teachers: a challenge because they inspire us to ask why more books of comparable value in teaching cannot be found in a great many phases of our history; a boon because they have made the teaching of recent history so much more pleasant.

Many students come to college a bit jaded by their previous history courses and somewhat suspicious of "pure" history, which often smacks to them of pure antiquarianism. At their best they are alertly interested in the problems of their own time—problems of war and peace, of the distribution and uses of wealth, of race relations. They are curious about things that have an obvious personal bearing—matters connected with manners and morals, sex and marriage, careers and leisure. What they look for in their studies is a sense of relevance. Whatever they study, they want clues to life. Sometimes their interest is so thoroughly practical and urgent that it is all too easily satisfied with factitious answers. Often it is insufficiently diluted with that precious thing that Thorstein Veblen called idle curiosity, the pleasure of inquiring and knowing for its own sake.

But for those students whose impatience with antiquarianism has been qualified by a genuine curiosity about human affairs Mr. Allen's books, with their feeling for the concrete and vivid and their firm sense for the relevance of the past, have had an almost unfailing appeal. I

believe that in this respect *The Big Change* will actually outdo in popularity and usefulness *The Lords of Creation*, *Only Yesterday*, and *Since Yesterday*, for its chronological scope is broader and its drive toward an elucidation of fundamental trends in modern American life is far more ambitious.

Chronologically *The Big Change* begins with the turn of the century, but psychologically it begins with those aspects of our national life that the student can observe everywhere and must be concerned with. It is as important that students be aware of changes in the size and significance of the national budget, of changes in styles of living from the age of the big mansion to the age of the big expense account, of the significance of modern mass production, mass communications, and advertising, as it is that they learn about the administration of Calvin Coolidge or the attack on Pearl Harbor. Above all, it is important that they acquire the beginnings of a sense of perspective and that questions be aroused in them about the ways in which their own problems have been shaped by the great developments of the past fifty years. I would hope for more than this, however, from the use of *The Big Change* in our history courses. I hope that its seductive facility with the immediate and the interesting will lure the minds of many students still further backward from the modern period with which it deals into a stronger feeling for the ultimate relevance of remoter places and times as well—and outward from the classroom and the chalky air of pedagogy toward a broader interest in the study of man.

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