

# AJN: Apostle to The Remnant

by EDMUND A. OPITZ

ALBERT JAY NOCK was before the public in one capacity only, as a man of letters. He was in turn clergyman, editor, professor, essayist, biographer, student of fundamental economics—and a superfluous man withal! How he got that way, what ideas went into the formation of his mind, he explained in his *Memoirs*, an unusual autobiography of a distinguished and lonely intellect whose bent for privacy amounted to a passion.

Nock had an ample but refined capacity for enjoying life, even though he believed that, like a citizen of fifth century Rome, he was living in the last days of a dying civilization. Nock believed he was experiencing the "imperatorship and anarchy" Henry George had predicted. But human nature is resilient, and once the pessimist assures himself that doom is certain, then that's settled and cheerfulness breaks in—like the man in the tumbrel en route to the guillotine winking at the pretty girls in the rabble.

AJN devoted himself single-mindedly to the advancement of understanding—his own! Once he had unearthed a precious nugget of truth and put it on display where all who wished might see, he dropped the matter and went on to the next question. Training reinforced temperament to turn him away from even the slightest propaganda efforts; he never buttonholed anybody about anything. "Never argue; never explain," he would say with infuriating detachment. Nock believed, correctly I think, that he had uncovered the plain truth of things in the several areas of his interest, and he painstakingly set forth his elucidations in impeccable English, serene in his faith that this fully discharged his duty. This assumption back of this faith is that truth has an internal energy of its own enabling it, if we don't stand in its way, to cut its own channels and gain acceptance in minds ready for it. Trying to make truth palatable for minds not ready for it is no service to the people involved, for it clogs whatever thought proceses they have; and truth tampered with is truth lost.

The hard truth is what Nock is talking about; truth with the bark on it, truth unsophisticated by even good intentions, undiluted by ulterior considerations. Are there minds ready for this kind of truth? Nock believed that every society has such minds else it would fall apart. Every society is held together by a select few—men and women who have the force of intellect to discern the rules upon which social life is contingent, and the force of character to exemplify those rules in their own living. Nock called these scattered few "the

Remnant" in his brilliant essay, "Isaiah's Job."

Nock does not tell us whence his methodology derives, but we do know that his devotion to the philosophy of Henry George was life-long, and that as a student he read these words: "Social Reform is not to be secured by noise and shouting; by complaints and denunciation; by the formation of parties, or the making of revolutions; but by the awakening of thought and the progress of ideas. Until there be correct thought, there cannot be right action; and when there is correct thought, right action will follow." Nock's book on George appeared in 1939.

It's a lovely notion, runs the thought, but is it practical? will it work? Well, it appears to be working in Mr. Nock's case, although not all the returns are in and one can't say for sure. Albert Jay Nock's reputation while he lived was limited, and none of his books had much of a sale, except his *Jefferson* and the *Memoirs*. Nock's death in 1945 passed relatively unnoticed. But then things began to happen; the posthumous publication of a *Journal*, two volumes of letters and a volume of essays; a new edition of the *Memoirs*, a reprinting of four of his out of print books with a fifth imminent; and formation of The Nockian Society which has just published *Cogitations from A/JN*.

Nock sought to improve the quality of human life, and the forces he set in motion are still at work in those sensitive enough to feel them.

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Albert Jay Nock's birth, The Nockian Society published *Cogitations*, a 93-page collection of his wry and elegant observations on men, manners and civilization. It is available at \$1 from The Nockian Society, 36 South Broadway, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533.

A copy of Nock's essay, "Isaiah's Job," is free on request from the society at the above address.

The general preoccupation with money led to several curious beliefs which are now so firmly rooted that one hardly sees how anything short of a collapse of our whole economic system can displace it. One such belief is that commodities—goods and services—can be paid for with money. This is not so. Money does not pay for anything, never has, never will. It is an economic axiom as old as the hills that goods and services can be paid for only with goods and services; but twenty years ago this axiom vanished from everyone's reckoning, and has never reappeared. No one has seemed in the least aware that everything which is paid for must be paid for out of production, for there is no other source of payment.

From Albert Jay Nock's *Memoirs*