

sume the first hypothesis. 'Americanism' in the mouth of General Leonard Wood is not what it means in the mouth of Mr. Hoover. The second hypothesis would involve either the view that the present system is right, because of its intellectual weakness or else that all revolution is wrong. No American, at least, can argue this last view with any plausibility. Or if he urged, as some apparently are willing to urge, that the last revolution capable of defence, at least in America, occurred in 1776, we should have to examine that doctrine with much care; and even if historic analysis led us to accept the assumption, we should find, in the absence of wise response to popular desire, that despite our principles, the revolution would come.

III.

The only safeguard of social structure is criticism; and we must therefore cease to think that wisdom is perpetually resident in any group of men or principles. That is the natural desire of a world tired after a great effort of will and terrified at the forces it has called into being. Truth, like art, is a matter of dirt and sweat. It comes only from the clash of innumerable men and countless opinions. Some fragment may come from a West Indian orphan who finds his way to the staff of a Revolutionary Army, or from a half-starved German Jew who is driven like a hunted deer from the capitals of Europe. The vision is never whole nor is it immediate. It never comes, even in the most inchoate form, save where the mind is free to play untrammelled with the facts of life.

All this is of the inmost stuff of historic experience; but in a time of panic it is history we are most apt to forget. The very vastness of the canvas upon which modern statesmen work, makes, for most, the humble impotent and the unseen unheard. Government has become so technical a science, its purview so extensive, that what it most greatly fears is the disturbance of its routine. Yet it is from such disturbance that half the great discoveries of history have been made. There is no reason to suppose that in the field of economics or of politics, the path of discovery is more narrow than in biology or physics. It is, of course, psychologically inevitable that the emotional penumbra should be more profound where the field of analysis is social; inquiry here comes home more closely to our bosoms. Yet there is a certainty here also that the cause of freedom will prevail which lies embedded in a long historic record.

Our temper may for a moment delay the organization of forces hostile to the present system; assuredly it rather guarantees than prevents their ultimate onset. It brings to the army of the dis-

contented, converts innumerable, whom otherwise it might not win. It gives fame to obscurity and martyrdom to the undeserving. It is a blind weapon which strikes without critical knowledge. Nor is that all. An oppressed cause always solicits support from those without definite beliefs to whom nevertheless the atmosphere of freedom is a precious thing. American radicalism makes its way less, it may well be, because of what is said on its behalf than because its opponents have no answer save prison and the mob. The cultivation of open-mindedness is the only way to temper the victory of the extremists by a wise moderation. The field of social possibilities is bound to be more vast now that the resources of science have been brought to bear upon it. The greatness and the power of our instruments demand a corresponding sense of responsibility in their use. An epoch of panic does not pass into the calm of collective and thoughtful effort by blind refusal to admit the existence of wrong or by denial without inquiry of the rightness of all solutions. Thought is the one weapon of tried utility in a difficult and complex world. Without it we are as sailors on an uncharted sea. But thought has no soul save where it has freedom. Its conquest was the greatest of human achievements. It would be the guarantee of destruction to renounce our heritage.

HAROLD J. LASKI.

On Being Black*

MY friend, who is pale and positive, said to me yesterday, as the tired sun was nodding: "You are too sensitive."

I admit, I am—sensitive, I am artificial. I cringe or am humptious or immobile. I am intellectually dishonest, art-blind, and I lack humor.

"Why don't you stop all this," she retorts triumphantly.

You will not let us.

"There you go, again. You know that I——" Wait! I answer. Wait!

I arise at seven. The milkman has neglected me. He pays little attention to colored districts. My white neighbor glares elaborately. I walk softly, lest I disturb him. The children jeer as I pass to work. The women in the street car withdraw their skirts or prefer to stand. The policeman is truculent. The elevator man hates to serve Negroes. My job is insecure because the white union wants it and does not want me. I try to lunch, but no place near will serve me. I go forty blocks to Marshall's, but the Committee of Fourteen closes

* From a book, entitled *Darkwater*, by W. E. B. DuBois, soon to be published by Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

Marshall's; they say that white women frequent it.

"Do all eating places discriminate?"

No, but how shall I know which do not—except—

I hurry home through crowds. They mutter or get angry. I go to a mass-meeting. They stare. I go to a church. "We don't admit niggers!"

Or perhaps I leave the beaten track. I seek new work. "Our employees would not work with you; our customers would object."

I ask to help in social uplift.

"Why—er—we will write you."

I enter the free field of science. Every laboratory door is closed and no endowments are available.

I seek the universal mistress, Art; the studio door is locked.

I write literature. "We cannot publish stories of colored folk of that type." It's the only type I know.

This is my life. It makes me idiotic. It gives me artificial problems. I hesitate, I rush, I waver. In fine,—I am sensitive!

My pale friend looks at me with disbelief and curling tongue.

"Do you mean to sit there and tell me that this is what happens to you each day?"

"Certainly not," I answer low.

"Then you only fear it will happen?"

"I fear!"

"Well, haven't you the courage to rise above a—almost a craven fear?"

Quite—quite craven is my fear, I admit; but the terrible thing is—these things do happen!

"But you just said—"

They do happen. Not all each day,—surely not. But now and then—now seldom; now, sudden; now after a week, now in a chain of awful minutes; not everywhere, but anywhere—in Boston, in Atlanta. That's the hell of it. Imagine spending your life looking for insults or for hiding places from them—shrinking (instinctively and despite desperate bolsterings of courage) from blows that are not always, but ever; not each day, but each week, each month, each year. Just, perhaps, as you have choked back the craven fear and cried, "I am and will be the master of my—"

"No more tickets down stairs; here's one to the smoking gallery."

You hesitate. You beat back your suspicions. After all, a cigarette with Charlie Chaplin—then a white man pushes by—

"Three in the orchestra."

"Yes, sir." And in he goes.

Suddenly your heart chills. You turn yourself

away toward the golden twinkle of the purple night and hesitate again. What's the use? Why not always yield—always take what's offered,—always bow to force, whether of cannons or dislike? Then the great fear surges in your soul, the real fear—the fear beside which other fears are vain imaginings; the fear lest right there and then you are losing your own soul; that you are losing your own soul and the soul of a people; that millions of unborn children, black and gold and mauve, are being there and then despoiled by you because you are a coward and dare not fight!

Suddenly that silly orchestra seat and the cavorting of a comedian with funny feet become matters of life, death, and immortality; you grasp the pillars of the universe and strain as you sway back to that befrilled ticket girl. You grip your soul for riot and murder. You choke and sputter, and she, seeing that you are about to make a "fuss," obeys her orders and throws the tickets at you in contempt. Then you slink to your seat and crouch in the darkness before the film, with every tissue burning! The miserable wave of reaction engulfs you. To think of compelling puppies to take your hard-earned money; fattening hogs to hate you and yours; forcing your way among cheap and tawdry idiots—God! What a night of pleasure!

* * *

Why do not those who are scarred in the world's battle and hurt by its hardness, travel to these places of beauty and drown themselves in the utter joy of life? I asked this once sitting in a Southern home. Outside, the spring of a Georgia February was luring gold to the bushes and languor to the soft air. Around me sat color in human flesh—brown that crimsoned readily; dim soft-yellow that escaped description; cream-like duskiness that shadowed to rich tints of autumn leaves. And yet a suggested journey in the world brought no response.

"I should think you would like to travel," said the white one.

But no, the thought of a journey seemed to depress them.

Did you ever see a "Jim-Crow" waiting-room? There are always exceptions, as at Greensboro—but usually there is no heat in winter and no air in summer; with undisturbed loafers and train hands and broken, disreputable settees; to buy a ticket is torture; you stand and stand and wait and wait until every white person at the "other window" is waited on. Then the tired agent yells across, because all the tickets and money are over there—

"What d'y'e want? What? Where?"

The agent browbeats and contradicts you, hurries and confuses the ignorant, gives many persons the wrong change, compels some to purchase their

tickets on the train at a higher price, and sends you and me out on the platform, burning with indignation and hatred!

The "Jim-Crow" car is up next the baggage car and engine. It stops out beyond the covering in the rain or sun or dust. Usually there is no step to help you climb on, and often the car is a smoker cut in two, and you must pass through the white smokers or else they pass through your part, with swagger and noise and stares. Your compartment is a half or a quarter or an eighth of the oldest car in service on the road. Unless it happens to be a through express, the plush is caked with dirt, the floor is grimy, and the windows dirty. An impertinent white newsboy occupies two seats at the end of the car and importunes you to the point of rage to buy cheap candy, Coca-Cola, and worthless, if not vulgar, books. He yells and swaggers, while a continued stream of white men saunters back and forth from the smoker, to buy and hear. The white train crew from the baggage car uses the "Jim-Crow" to lounge in and perform their toilet. The conductor appropriates two seats for himself and his papers and yells gruffly for your tickets almost before the train has started. It is best not to ask him for information even in the gentlest tones. His information is for white persons chiefly. It is difficult to get lunch or clean water. Lunch rooms either don't serve niggers or serve them at some dirty and ill-attended hole in the wall. As for toilet rooms—don't! If you have to change cars, be wary of junctions which are usually without accommodation and filled with quarrelsome white persons who hate a "darky dressed up." You are apt to have the company of a sheriff and a couple of meek or sullen black prisoners on part of your way and dirty colored section hands will pour in toward night and drive you to the smallest corner.

"No," said the little lady in the corner (she looked like an ivory cameo and her dress flowed on her like a caress) "we don't travel much."

Pessimism is cowardice. The man who cannot frankly acknowledge the "Jim-Crow" car as a fact and yet live and hope, is simply afraid either of himself or of the world. There is not in the world a more disgraceful denial of human brotherhood than the "Jim-Crow" car of the southern United States; but, too, just as true, there is nothing more beautiful in the universe than sunset and moonlight on Montego Bay in far Jamaica. And both things are true and both belong to this, our world, and neither can be denied.

* * *

High in the tower, where I sit above the loud complaining of the human sea, I know many souls

that toss and whirl and pass, but none there are that intrigue me more than the Souls of White Folk.

Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language. Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler or the colonial composite of dear memories, words and wonder. Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, now furious! They deny my right to live and be and call me misbirth! My word is to them mere bitterness and my soul, pessimism. And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them ever stripped,—ugly, human.

The discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction. The Middle-Age regarded skin color with mild curiosity; and even up into the eighteenth century we were hammering our national manikins into one, great, Universal Man, with fine frenzy which ignored color and race even more than birth. Today we have changed all that, and the world in a sudden, emotional conversion has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful!

* * *

As we saw the dead dimly through rifts of battlesmoke and heard faintly the cursings and accusations of blood brothers, we darker men said: This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this is Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture—back of all culture,—stripped and visible today. This is where the world has arrived,—these dark and awful depths, and not the shining and ineffable heights of which it boasted. Here is whither the might and energy of modern humanity has really gone.

But may not the world cry back at us and ask: "What better thing have you to show? What have you done or would do better than this if you had today the world rule? Paint with all riot of hateful colors the thin skin of European culture,—is it not better than any culture that arose in Africa or Asia?"

It is. Of this there is no doubt and never has been; but why is it better? Is it better because

Europeans are better, nobler, greater, and more gifted than other folk? It is not. Europe has never produced and never will in our day bring forth a single human soul who cannot be matched and over-matched in every line of human endeavor by Asia and Africa. Run the gamut, if you will, and let us have the Europeans who in sober truth over-match Nefertari, Mohammed, Rameses, and Askia, Confucius, Buddha, and Jesus Christ. If we could scan the calendar of thousands of lesser men, in like comparison, the result would be the same; but we cannot do this because of the deliberately educated ignorance of white schools by which they remember Napoleon and forget Sonni Ali.

Why, then, is Europe great? Because of the foundations which the mighty past have furnished her to build upon: the iron trade of ancient, black Africa, the religion and empire-building of yellow Asia, the art and science of the "dago" Mediterranean shore, east, south, and west, as well as north. And where she has builded securely upon this great past and learned from it, she has gone forward to greater and more splendid human triumph; but where she has ignored this past and forgotten and sneered at it, she has shown the cloven hoof of poor, crucified humanity,—she has played, like other empires gone, the world fool!

W. E. BURGHARDT DuBois.

Einstein's Theory of Relativity*

II.

The Law of Gravitation and the More General Theory of Relativity

FOR over two centuries Newton's law of gravitation has served as the model or stock example of a law of nature. All efforts at scientific truth, even in the undeveloped social sciences, have regarded the discovery of similar laws as the ideal of scientific attainment. Any attempt, therefore, such as Einstein's, to modify and improve upon Newton's law must be viewed as having more than a merely technical interest.

The belief in simple and eternal laws of nature back of the persistent irregularity and instability of sensible phenomena, grew out of the ancient Neo-Platonic tradition that to the mind that approaches divine insight the book of nature is written in simple geometric lines. All the great founders of modern science, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton shared this faith. The splendid results which followed their search for simple laws gave their faith the unique position of being the only one to have almost completely escaped serious assaults from the modern critical spirit. For despite their professions of welcome to any one who can challenge their first principles,

philosophers and scientists are made of the same human clay as theologians and lawyers or men of affairs, and have the same organic aversion for the thought which disturbs established and comfortable certainties. But many a faith that has been unassailable by direct frontal attack has been forced to yield or to reorganize by pressure from other quarters; and the faith in simple eternal laws of nature has in fact been undermined on the experimental side by the progressive improvement of our instruments of measurement, and on the mathematical side by the discovery of Non-Euclidean geometry. The former has led to the view that our seemingly absolute laws of nature are but the statistical averages of the behavior of large numbers of inherently variable elements; and reflection on Non-Euclidean geometry has pressed forward the thought that many diverse accounts of our fragmentary experience of the physical world can all claim to be equally true.

Everyone who has ever worked in a laboratory or with instruments of precision knows that the simple laws of nature, so clearly formulated in elementary and popular treatises, are never verified with absolute accuracy. The results of actual measurements always differ. We attribute this universal discrepancy between our theoretic formulae and our actual measurements not to our theory but to the "error" of our instruments. But the fact is that the refinement or improvement of our instruments never eliminates this discrepancy. On the contrary it often compels us to abandon the simple law in favor of a more complicated one. Boyle's law of the simple inverse proportionality between the volume and the pressure of gases has now yielded to the more complicated equation of

* Attention should be called to an obvious inaccuracy in my first article on Einstein's Theory, which appeared in the New Republic of January 21st. In the last line of the first column of page 230 the word *progressively* is entirely misleading. It should have been *regularly*. It would have been better also, if in the succeeding sentence as well as in some preceding ones I had used *becomes* longer or shorter instead of *grows* longer or shorter, as the rate at which a clock marks time is obviously constant when the velocity with which the clock moves is constant.