

In Praise of Illusions

By J. A. Edmison

"Dear Recent Graduate: How long will it be before you become a Babbitt?"—such was the rather ominous message that several of us received from the League for Industrial Democracy shortly after we had finished toiling in the academic galleys of the Faculty of Arts. How contemptuously we viewed this at the time. *Babbittism!* Ugh—what sophisticated 100% college graduate would ever become so thoroughly mired in blatant Idealism and superficiality? Shades of Kiwanis and Edgar A. Guest and the Saturday Evening Post and William Jennings Bryan! Oh no—we had relegated all such things to the intellectual ash can by the time we had written off our last second year supplemental.

How secure we fancied ourselves in our new self-sufficiency! We considered ourselves mentally emancipated, freed from the Bastille of convention and tradition. It gave one a smug feeling of superiority. . . . Pity those other poor people, blind as yet to things as they *really* are. They read the newspapers and actually believe them. How absurd! Newspapers are filled with propaganda and do not give honest opinions. Upton Sinclair has told us so and he is an honourable man. . . . The masses, morons that they are, believe in God and a future life and other old-fashioned things. How ridiculous! Clarence Darrow and E. Haldeman-Julius say that there is no God and that dead men rise up never, and they should know. . . . The common folk, (it is pitiful, really) still dream of Romance, and fall in love, and gape at the moon and warble sweet platitudes. Incredible, when you come to think of it. Professor Freud has given us the "low-down" on love, doctors say osculation is unhealthy and astronomers declare the moon to be a dead thing. Hence "*much ado about nothing*". . . . The sporting public, deluded souls, yell like cannibals when a goal is scored or a drop kicked. They won't believe that all amateurs are paid and that all 'pro' games are 'fixed.'

We have this on authority. Good authority? Well, we know it is so anyway.

Then it came about that we were moved with compassion. . . . How can we save the lost mortals out there crying in the intellectual wilderness? How best can we make them realize that things are *not* as they seem, that there are no honest politicians, that religion is the bunk, that marriage is a joke, that Optimism and Service and Cheerfulness are frothy nothings, that there is no God in any Heaven and that all is not well with the world? A formidable programme, it is true—but Don Quixote-like we were ready to face it. Would that we could give them the True Faith; just as we had received it from holy sweet communion with Nietzsche, H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis!

Then came the dawn! This new credo was not so satisfying after all. While a temporary narcotic for the ego, it was not stable, substantial or lasting. It had torn down much and built up nothing. It had deprived us of our faith in Providence, our trust in man, and our interest in human institutions. *Faith, trust, interest*,—intangible qualities these—whose value, like that of good health and friendship, we do not appreciate until they are lost.

Why not then have a few dreams and pleasing illusions? 'Ask the man who owns one', 'No home should be without them'. They are efficient gloom-chasers, they lower the suicide rate and greatly aid the holy cause of matrimony. Let the children have their Santa Claus; 'Billy Sunday', his Genesis; Lothrop Stoddard, his Nordic theory; J. S. Ewart K.C., his Canadian Republic; and McGill students, their vision of a college gymnasium. Let young men's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love. Let every goose be a swan and every lass a queen. For verily I say unto you, one is happier as a doorman in the House of Babbitt than as a throne occupant in the palace of the "*Debunkers*"!

The Importance of Logic

the attitude of true experiment. It is no error of modern science that it looks back to Hume as to a congenial spirit.

Even in speculative philosophy Hume's logic has made for freedom rather than restraint of thought. He said himself that the ancient maxim *Ex nihilo, nihil fit* was no longer an incubus on the mind. It had hampered theology, for it ruled out the possibility of a creation of matter out of nothing. It also compelled men to think of all the living processes as mechanistic. But life, we have come more and more to realise, is the creation of qualities and natures which had no existence before in the conditions of living matter. Evolution means to us the appearance of forms of life from lower forms less complete and perfect. It is, in fact, "something coming from nothing." The philosophers are now agreed upon this way of viewing it, though they differ in their descriptions, some preferring to think of an Emer-

gent Evolution, others of a Creative Evolution. Today, however, the point of departure for all alike is the maxim that something does in very truth come into existence from nothing, one of the cases which the philosophers prior to Hume thought obviously absurd of course many factors have brought about this viewpoint of the present age; but among them we must certainly count the price of reasoning by which Hume showed that it is not absurd and ought not to be excluded from our thinking.

In such logic, then you find the philosopher at his best. He is working for open-mindedness. He holds not to words but to some idea which promises a new intelligence of things. His reasoning is for the sake of that new order, and it is not against anything but false reasons on behalf of the old order. Thus logic is part and parcel of a fine imagination which discerns from afar the possibilities of the future and uses reason to justify them against prejudices of the present day.