

It is tempting, as we peer fearfully into the hydrogen abyss, to sigh for the old days when men killed each other individually with battle axes. But these were, in their small way, as destructive as bombs, and the casualties, military and civilian, in the days of tribal or class or religious wars of extermination, were about as high in proportion to population as they may be in the future.

As a matter of fact, stories of the "good old days" are often very insubstantial, even imaginary. Distant pastures, far enough behind, often look especially lush and green.

I have always thought, for instance, of the Elizabethan era as "the great age of the budding glory of England"; as a time of madrigals and Morris dances, Shakespeare's plays and archery on the green, interrupted by the singeing of the Spanish King's beard and voyages with Drake around the exciting new world.

Then I read a paper, a few months ago, by a learned historian of McGill University in Montreal, which characterized this period as one of insecurity, high prices, unstable foreign trade, political uncertainty, fear of invasion, religious unrest and persecution (very much like today). Then the crowning disillusionment. As for Queen Bess herself, he said, "One cannot help feeling that she was inclined to be rather an unethical, dictatorial and irascible old maid".

This is academic freedom gone mad. The professor should be investigated by a committee on un-historical activities!

The sense of historical perspective that comes from education is, however, a useful aid to the understanding and analysis of present troubles and dangers. It helps us to keep a sense of balance and of proportion.

Nevertheless, having taken myself - and offered to you - all the comfort I can out of this thought, I hasten to weaken my own argument by adding that nothing - history or philosophy, no quality of heart or mind - can reduce to any tolerable perspective, the shattering results that may now flow from man's release of the energy of the atom at a time when his social, moral and political progress lags so far behind his scientific leap forward.

Education, however - honest, sincere education, which is to be distinguished from mere knowledge - can help - indeed, nothing else can help so effectively - in reducing the gap between our material and moral development. Yet there have been few words in modern times, apart from "peace" and "democracy", so bandied about and abused as this word "education"; so glibly used, so little understood.

When Abe Martin said that it "takes a mighty smart feller to succeed with a good education", he was, of course, interpreting success in terms of cash value.