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## History — Ours

On Friday, April 19th, Mr. Carl Van Doren, whom Mr. Buchanan introduced simply as "Mark's brother," gave us the history of the Western Hemisphere in the record time of an hour and a half. It is rumored that he originally intended it to be merely the history of the United States, but since a number of people expressed incredulity at his audacity in attempting such a task, he thought it wiser to make the subject even larger so that such people would be silent in awe or in contempt. "You can either do it in an hour and a half," he said before the lecture, "or you'll have to fill four volumes."

The history of the Americas, as he told it, divides itself into four different phases up to the present time, and where in the United States we may be said to have achieved a measure of success in our various enterprises, the South Americas have achieved no such success, as their recent history so ably demonstrates. So Mr. Van Doren told of them both, as much for the contrast as for the similarity.

These lands, he pointed out, were discovered and settled long before Columbus ever drew breath, probably by Asiatics from across the Bering Straits, probably by others as well. Historians find indications of diverse civilizations, and the many languages in use when Spaniards and English came indicate that the first settlers came from many lands, even as they do today. In Mexico and Peru, great empires had grown, and a very considerable advance in civilization was evident. In our own country, a number of the Indian tribes had come to be well-governed societies, sometimes even establishing federations of tribes under the same laws.

With the arrival of Europeans, however, these societies vanished with startling rapidity. Mr. Van Doren suggested that it was a clash of ages, iron versus bronze, with the latter made obsolete by the newer, cheaper and every bit as serviceable material for tools and weapons. In South America, the Spaniards, led by adventurers who were sponsored by their King, con-

quered, and set themselves up as rulers, although benevolent ones, since the new government and the Church which came with it did not consider their subjects as rational beings, sparing them from slavery and the agony of the Inquisition. But the Spaniards remained under the laws of their Sovereign across the seas, and they made no attempt to establish a new nation. They pursued their individual whims as they chose.

In contrast to this, Englishmen settled further North who, since they had fled from persecution in their own country, had no expectation of ever being invited to return—indeed, it was not until they began to prosper that Britain took pains to hold and rule them. Having come, then to found a new nation, and having no support from their home, they banded together in colonies, destroying Indian tribes where they had to, bargaining with them where they could. Being their own masters, they developed a kind of self-reliance and independence which was the basis of the revolution which followed. Teamwork was the byword, in contrast to the Spaniards further South who lived secure in the money and power of the Spanish King. Such were the beginnings of our modern history.

Around the middle of the 18th Century, however, Great Britain began to take an interest in her promising little colonies along the Atlantic Coast. Whereas not a hundred years before they had found the Dutch happier at the gain of Dutch Guiana than sorry at the loss of New Amsterdam, the British now found themselves envied for the potatoes, tobacco and corn, to mention only a few, which were at least as rewarding as the sugar that Holland had found. But Britain failed to see how self-reliant her colonies had become and her exploitation, which was clumsily handled, was resented. We had come not as conquerors, but as settlers, and we had not found such large and advanced empires as the Spaniards had. Battles with Indians were small, if terrible, and the dangers from them were scattered. We drove them away or exterminated them almost as fast as



we came, which is a reason why Indians play a larger part in our literature than in our society. The colonies were, then, independent in almost all of their activities, and although they were as yet insignificant, they were growing quickly.

The idea of independence, however, was born in Britain, where a civil war of some proportions was already in existence among those who found George III's desire to return to the ways of the Stuarts rather more than they could swallow. In our own revolution, which coincided with that in Britain, the colonies found themselves divided loosely into two groups. The one, consisting of the British governors and the more prosperous settlers who sided with them, took a somewhat aristocratic attitude towards the rebels, who, although they had no very clearly formulated plan, were quite sure that they would and could be free from the English yoke. To be aristocratic was the Tories' very great mistake, for it served to remind us constantly of our enemy who, being three thousand miles away, was not likely to be well understood by the uninformed. We won the revolution, of which there is no accurate, just chronology, and the Tories moved north into Canada.

In this second phase, our self-reliance had developed into a federation of self-reliance. To our great good fortune we had broken the tie with Britain before fifty years of Napoleonic wars and Nationalism had done their work, for in South America, where the idea of independence came much later, not nearly the same degree of success has been achieved. In our case the Articles of Confederation led directly to the Federal Constitution, which, despite Bolivar's efforts, the South American Republics have never been able to accomplish.

Then in this country, a third phase began to take shape. Having no past, or rather having a past which we wished to forget, we were concerned only with the present and future. This was to our immense advantage in our astoundingly rapid growth, for we took great strides, wasting prodigiously; there was always more to be found—more goods, more land, more money. "Go West, young man," said Mr. Greely, and we did. Having no traditions, and no systems, no business and no tools, we invented them, with the skill acquired through scores of years. After the Civil War, when there was for a time only one political party in existence, we developed that peculiarly American institution, the

Business Man. Where England has her Public Servants; France, the Arts; Germany, the Military, so we have Business Men. They are strangely incongruous in our history, for our history has been one of the removal of power from the hands of the few to the hands of the many, insofar as this could be accomplished, and Business in this country cannot be said to be overly sympathetic to that idea. But they exist, and their power has not yet been measured.

In South America, this third phase is only a shadow of our own. Whereas they are potentially as rich as we, they had no such groundwork for independence and ingenuity as we had, and the problems of transportation and the comparative poverty of their people, now that they were separated from Spain and Portugal were not overcome. Nevertheless, they are growing now, and with our exploitation, they are not more than a hundred years behind us.

We have realized for some time, said Mr. Van Doren, that that road has run out. We know that we have come to another ocean and that there is no more land beyond; our wealth is no longer unlimited, although with foresight, it can remain very great. So that we may be said to be in a fourth phase, a phase where we are beginning to take the responsibility for our greatness. We cannot afford to waste any more, and we cannot think any longer that everything we do is either right, or, if it be wrong, that it will make no difference in our ultimate future. In the last few years we have had a sort of self-examination. An indication of this is the host of historical novels which glut the market and which feed the minds of the people. Bad as they are, they are a sign that we are looking at ourselves with critical, if unpractised eyes, and that we do not like all that we see. A federation is going on in our arts as well, for whereas we have contributed sloppily and hastily to them, with many half-formulated ideas so that they are a tangled hodge-podge, the time is not far off when we will be able to see a culture which makes some sense.

Our Revolution and its subsequent Constitution were, however, only the rehearsal. For we are the logical leaders in the movement towards world government; we have succeeded in federating not just English settlers, but the settlers from many lands, and we can, despite the bad state of politics in this country where clear policies and ideas are seldom brought to the fore,

be instrumental in bringing a federation of the world to be an actual thing. This is our special job; our best instincts, through Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, Wilson and Roosevelt, produce a kind of spontaneous fraternity among mankind. This we have added to England's liberty and France's equality. If we can bring it to the world then we will succeed in being something more than, as Carl's brother has said, "but a moment in slow time."

—J. V. D.

Justly your toys shall be destroyed when you die and your rusty lust, but God is good and shall grant you a new joy—a trustworthy tomb—and an ever mounting amount of room to play in, and aslant by your side he shall plant a gay tree, with one infinite leaf for each finite hour of eternity,

and through that generous giving (beyond all belief!) you may retrieve your branches and scanty living then.

—G. W. J.

### What Did Mr. Abramson Do?

"But he didn't explain it," wailed the freshman, after Mr. Abramson's lecture on the Odyssey. And I wondered then what the freshman meant by explain. How do you explain the Odyssey? Do you describe it as a sort of objectification, in terms of a set of characters and situations, of Homer's subjective experience? Do you describe the poem as a picture of the attitudes and conditions of Homer's time? Do you place it in one of the categories of literary criticism, and consider it as a particular of that species? All these ways of explanation are interesting and instructive, but since they attack the meaning of the poem only obliquely, I don't believe the freshman would regard them as real explanations. What he seemed to mean by explain was this: allegorize. Consider the action and persons of the Odyssey as symbols of Homer's cosmology, his theology, his system of morals, etc. Tell us, Mr. Abramson, what Circe is. We know she is a woman, a magician, but what is she really? Base passion? Material necessity? . . . But in spite of the (perhaps unfortunate) bias of St. Johnnies for this way of reading poetry, Mr. Abramson did not indulge. Instead of dwelling on what Circe really is, he tended to point out certain aspects of Homer's poem which most of us probably had not noticed before.

He did this in several ways. First he asked what the Odyssey is about, and right away he told us. It is about many persons and things, about love and war, life and death, fear and courage, hope, faith, and despair, about boat-building. . . . Then he read the proemium. The proemium pretends to stating what the Odyssey is about, and Mr. Abramson tried to relate it to the rest of the poem, with curious results. For only in Books 9-12 do the events promised in the proemium appear. Books 1-4 contain the search of Telemachus for his father, and Books 13-24 the homecoming of Odysseus. But the story of the wandering of Odysseus is not told directly—it is a tale told by Odysseus himself. The rest of the story is told by Homer, who speaks to the swineherd in the second person. Homer, then, is perhaps the "divine minstrel" of Book 23, retelling at a later date the events he has taken part in, and, as Mr. Abramson suggested, the Odyssey is the story of Odysseus seen by those who expect him. Then the fact that most of the poem is about events participated in by those who stayed in Ithaca seems reasonable, and even squares with the proemium. Homer knows of these homely events, and it is only concerning those events related by Odysseus, whose word is not always to be relied on, that he need invoke the Muse.

"But this sort of thing doesn't explain it." Hmm. There is a question in the mind of this reviewer if it is useful to try to explain all poems in this allegorical way. The Divine Comedy, yes; but the Odyssey. . . . When Mr. Abramson read the proemium, he read it word by word, emphasizing certain words and giving their several meanings. "The order of words," he said, "is very important. Reading word by word gives a different meaning. . . . throws an oblique light on the meaning." And when he recounted the adventures of Odysseus, though he implied that beyond these strange but concrete things Odysseus saw and did, there is some secret meaning, he did this not by blunt allegorization, but by emphasizing some aspect of, say, Lestrygonia, or by pointing out the relationship of the Phaeacians and the Cyclopeans, or by suggesting that the Agamemnon-Clytemnestra story is a foil to that of Odysseus and Penelope. All of this is perhaps merely spade-work for allegorization. But when Mr. Abramson pleads for the constancy of Penelope, he is reminding us that, despite any possible secret doctrines cleverly hidden in the poem,



the Odyssey is first of all a story about persons whose characters and motives should also be understood simply, in the way we try to understand the characters and motives of those we know in the work-a-day world. In doing this, is Mr. Abramson coming dangerously close to a heresy against the Gospel According to St. Johns? And if so, should we shout hallelujah and join him, or close our eyes with holy dread and slink away?

—Gene Thornton.

## Ziff

William Ziff spoke Sunday night of technological developments of war and the logic behind the problem. First he examined the position which talks of the atom as final instrument in war-making to which all others are ancillary. A weapon capable of devastating 20 miles of territory; the disruptive effect caused largely by intense heat; "Pearl Harbor" could be accomplished by rocket assaults, air raid or a number of bombs set off simultaneously by agents in the enemy's key cities; other possibilities are, blow up the ice cap at North Pole, causing the ocean level to raise appreciably and originate huge tidal waves. The influence of this argument is that armies and navies are obsolete. However, there are other agencies of destruction as deadly and advantageous. One is gas, latest poison gases of which are to mustard and Lewisite gas as machine gun to bow and arrow; every living thing in a city can be annihilated by successful gas attack; or bacteriological warfare, most dangerous because it may backfire; the Japs dropped cholera-laden wracks in China which started plagues demonstrating such a program is feasible. Bacteria used against crops and livestock would win a war by attrition and there now exists cultures capable of being epidemic against animals. Factors to reckon with. Scarcity of fissionable material. Bombs can not be mass produced. Only by calling upon her entire technology could Russia, such was the view Mr. Ziff took, bring her program up to ours in ten or fifteen years.

Now the first blow of a new war will be rocket bombardment of the enemy's key centers. The attacked nation has decentralized installations launching a counter attack; the aim is a swift decision; failure means a prolonged war; large nations cannot be terrorized into submission.

## Weekend Regained

Music, as once was thought of women, belongs in the home. Anyone familiar with the elaborate ritual of the concert-goer, who has paid homage with a reluctant shudder to overpublicized Ions, and surfeited himself on heavy diets of nineteenth century works (mostly bombast, cheaply-wrought and completely personal passion), might well rejoice in the refreshing experience of listening in an eighteenth century ballroom (even though most of its charm has passed into history) to music of elegance, clarity, and grace.

It seems difficult to do justice to the performance of Messrs. Kirkpatrick and Schneider without sounding extravagant. Their ensemble was beyond reproach; and only rarely did they lapse from playing that was restrained but vigorous, and technically accurate. Such lapses as there were were well-compensated for by the excellence of their musicianship and the quality of the music played. If we wanted to get fastidious, we might say that Mr. Schneider's bowing in the fast Bach movements didn't give quite the crispness we like (he apparently does not agree with editors who sprinkle these movements with staccato marks), and in slow movements Mr. Kirkpatrick sometimes indulged in slight hesitations before strong beats, then clinging to them and rushing whatever came between, and while players of Chopin probably couldn't make a living without this trick, we aren't at all sure how appropriate it is in Bach and Mozart. Also the harpsichord's somewhat clangish blurr made it difficult to really hear fast contrapuntal passages, and the superior carrying quality of the violin's tone sometimes obscured the melodic line being played on the harpsichord when the latter was actually the more important. However, virtuoso passage work comes off excellently on the harpsichord, sometimes (as in the first movement of the Mozart G Major) is brought forth an intensity we would not have thought possible on so percussive an instrument, and in general its nature is such as to preclude the tasteless romanticized renditions pianists often give us. There are perhaps unsatisfactory things about any instrumental combination that is not that most satisfying of all musical mediums, the string quartet.

In trying to find one thing which might characterize the music played, we decided that it all came somewhere within the gamut of com-



