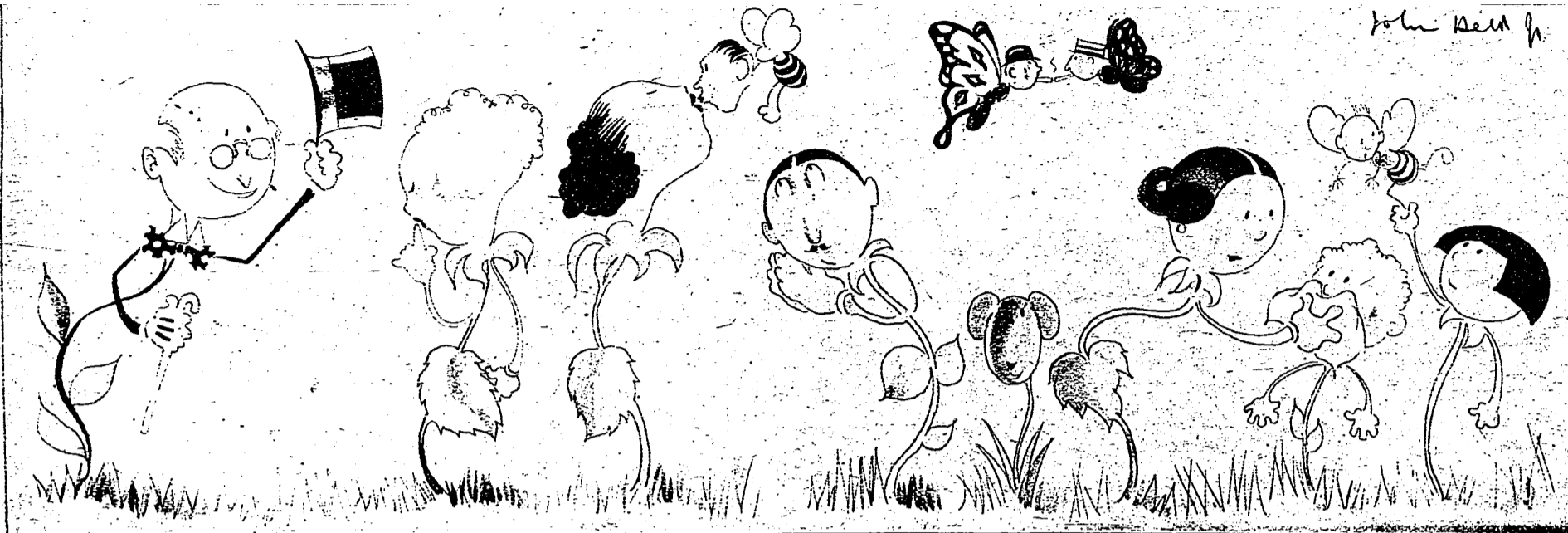


Coming Era of Vegetable Supremacy



"What an idyllic existence theirs would be!"

By HAROLD NORMAN DENNY

BACK in the days before the war, when the knee was still a curiosity and Bushmills highballs were two for a quarter, "viewing with alarm" was a sport almost as restricted in its devotees as polo, though not so fashionable.

It was indulged in chiefly at political conventions, where no one took it very seriously because the viewing was never durable and had to be done all over again every four years. Certain ministerial gentlemen, along with a few professional and semipro. teams of lay moralists, also practiced it at times, but few took them very seriously, either, and the phenomenon was laid largely to the heat. College professors did not bother with it, because of their general confidence that, whatever happened, the old world would continue to revolve in its time-tried way, creaking a little at times, but still revolving.

But since the war, viewing with alarm suddenly has been made safe for democracy. It has become almost as widespread as the income tax. It is being done in our very best circles.

A whole library of what might be termed defeatist literature is growing up, whose burden is that man has become the victim of the civilization he has builded and is in peril of being crushed under its weight; that man, mentally and physically, is an inferior animal to the human beings of Plato's day, for instance, and, having reached his peak, is deteriorating; that the non-white races of the world are girding themselves for a death grapple with the white. Allied with these pessimisms is a tendency, lately become evident, to raise heretical doubts as to whether, after all, our boasted democratic form of government is the best possible safeguard of liberty.

It is all very depressing. It wouldn't be so bad if present-day viewing with alarm was of the ante-bellum variety, but the modern viewers are bringing to their support tables of statistics, race histories and examples which, to a layman at least, seem unimpeachable.

The latest of these, and perhaps the most authoritative as well as the most startling, is Professor William McDougall of Harvard University, with his warning that the American Nation, the torch-bearer of the future, is speeding gayly down the road to destruction, toward "the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind."

Professor McDougall named his book "Is America Safe for Democracy?" but he might very well have called it "Is Democracy Safe For America?" for, though friendly toward our form of government, he marshals facts that indicate, if they

do not prove, that the very virtues of democracy, are hastening America's rush on the downward path.

Very, very briefly, Professor McDougall's thesis is this: The course of every great people has been a parabola—the long climb to a mighty civilization and the descent when the civilization became too complex for the people longer to support, or when the people itself deteriorated. America, the last hope of the white race, is nearing, or has reached, the peak of her development and her population is showing unmistakable signs of deterioration. He presents statistics to show that the most highly intelligent persons are giving the country so pitifully few children that the complete dying out of the higher classes threatens within a brief time. Meanwhile the unfit are multiplying in direct proportion to their unfitness and philanthropists are working might and main to save the offspring of these least desirable types; thus increasing the disproportion of the coming intellectuals and the mediocre and subnormal. And no amount of education, he insists, can make an intellectual of one who does not possess innately some elements of superiority. At the end Professor McDougall tentatively suggests some remedies, such as the endowment of families of the upper grades in proportion to the number of their offspring, but he himself does not appear too enthusiastic as to their practicability. Fancy subsidizing the intellectual classes and ignoring the lower-in democratic America! What an uproar there would be.

Then there is Everett Dean Martin who in his recent book, "The Behavior of Crowds," endeavors to explain how the superior facilities of communication produced by modern invention have made it possible for minor groups, composed largely of people of inferior intellect and held together by the magic of crowd psychology, to impose their wills on whole peoples. He is led to indulge in a somewhat whimsical speculation as to whether or not being governed by one old-fashioned king might not be preferable to being ruled by a hundred million kings.

There is E. A. Ross, professor of sociology in the University of Wisconsin, with his study of the immigration problem in which he says:

"Not until the twenty-first century will the philosophic historian be able to declare with scientific certitude that the cause of the mysterious decline that came upon the American people early in the twentieth century was the deterioration of popular intelligence by the admission of great numbers of backward immigrants."

Others have drawn alarming conclusions on the rise of the feminist movement, believing that its withdrawal from matrimony of thousands

of the most intelligent women will greatly hasten the breeding out of the desirable types of citizens, while the undesirable continue to multiply, and replenish the earth at top speed.

Dr. Ernest Martin Hopkins, President of Dartmouth College, brought out another phase of the same fundamental theme at the commencement exercises of the University of Pennsylvania in June when he pleaded the cause of education as the only power that could keep man the master, instead of the victim, of his civilization.

"Has man explored the realms of science and appropriated knowledge of their potentialities beyond his capacity to control the forces he has released or combined?" Dr. Hopkins asked in his address to the students.

"Are the magnitude and intensity and speed of life today within man's control, or is he a helpless passenger in a world run wild?"

"It is not an agreeable subject for speculation, but if evil cannot be influenced, and minorities cannot be absorbed, what is to be the end? Deadly gases, which give the individual man capacity to destroy whole populations; availability of disease-cultures; genius for mechanical devices by which the culminating of the destructive force of shattering explosives can be delayed and timed at the desired place for the maximum effect—such are the resources of the modern Samson, blinded mentally and spiritually, who would make the pillars built for the support of civilization become its destruction."

This theme—the theme of a world going to ruin; of a whole species, the human species, decaying; with the vine-covered wreckage of our towering cities inhabited sometime perhaps by gibbering anthropoids, descended literally from our proud race—inspires the imagination. What couldn't H. G. Wells do with such a theme?

The psychologists and anthropologists and sociologists, being scientists and not novelists, have stopped far short of the possibilities of their subject. It begs for a Wells to turn his fancy loose and carry the story of a decadent species to its logical conclusion—to a reductio ad absurdum, if you wish. Why, he could even scrap the whole animal kingdom. Indeed, Wells, in his early days before he took to writing purpose novels and world histories, used to play around the edges of this very plot. There was that fascinating pot-boiler of his, "The Time Machine," in which the professor devised a sort of Kantian velocipede on which he could travel backward and forward in time, seeing at first hand the dawn of history and then, speeding forward into the future, witness the events of a million years from now.

Wells had the human species split into two subdivisions, the descend-

ants of the manual laborers and the descendants of the white-collar group of present-day life. The "intellectuals" were delicate, timorous little vegetarians, while the workers were rough creatures who lived underground, performed the labor both for themselves and their dainty cousins above ground, and ate the latter when they could catch them.

What would prevent Wells, or any one else gifted with a vivid imagination, assuming for fiction purposes the utter collapse of mankind, its abandonment by the Cosmic Mind as the type to carry out the great, mysterious purpose of creation? And what type would he have dominate the world when man again had become monkey?

Nature has experimented before and rejected her handiwork, and the scientific viewers with alarm give ample basis for one to conceive of her experimenting and rejecting on and on through the ages until the universe runs down. There were the mastodons and dinosaurs and huge creatures like them which ruled the earth in their day. They reached their peak, were found wanting and were discarded.

Wells might trace out over unnumbered thousands of years the gradual failure of the human species, as Professor McDougall has indicated, the unfit breeding rapidly, in direct ratio to their unfitness, and the fit becoming extinct. He might, to provide a colorful climax, have the whole civilized world go to smash in an orgy of sensuality, and thus delight the International Reform Bureau, which is prophesying something like that if we don't behave.

Or he might attack his story in another way and depict the white race going down to defeat before the onslaught of the black, the yellow and the brown, pouring forth from all the hinterlands of the globe.

And then he would continue with the new dominators of the earth until they, too, reached the limit of their development and slipped back, and the species divided, as in "The Time Machine," into the subspecies, with the members of the muscular, dull-brained one living in caverns or swinging by their tails, as we almost do in the subway already. On some remote plateau would be the feeble, toothless, one-toed intelligentia conversing with all the planets in the heavens by interstellar radio and exchanging with Martians sad reminiscences over the passing of the good old days.

For love interest he might have a romantic affair between the waxen daughter of the chief astronomer and the hairless specialist in the anthropology of Twentieth Century Man. Just to keep this last pair of human lovers from arriving at a culmina-

tion of their affection, thus prolonging the agony of a senile race one more generation, Wells probably would exterminate the whole colony at this point with one of his cataclysms and have done with it—get them off the stage. With this over, the novelist would only have arrived at the crux of his story. For with mankind gone to the dogs, would he not have Mother Nature decide that she had made a mistake in the first place, trying to reach the summit of life with her experiments on the animal kingdom?

Wells would have Nature think back over the failures that had marked her labors from the days of the amoeba, through the stupid, quarrelsome prehistoric whites of the First World War Period on down to the disappearance of the super-intellectuals, and decide that two, possibly three, fatal basic characteristics had marked the animal kingdom from the beginning for failure: The food urge, sex hunger, and perhaps the desire for power and display, though a psychologist very likely would rule that these latter are mere phases of the first two. Nature would find these fundamental handicaps, which grew most acute in man, the cause of innumerable wars and pestilences. The first two, food and sex, she would find hampering man as the king of the animal world at every step in his groping efforts to concentrate his brain powers and think his way toward the goal that the Cosmic Mind had set for him.

And so Wells would have Nature turning her back on wasted aeons and setting out to develop the perfect mind through the vegetable kingdom. He would point out to her that for plants there would be no food problem (or prohibition problem either), for they would have only to sink their roots into the soil to eat and drink their fill. There would be no sex problem to distract them from their silent, profound seeking after Truth, the Thing-Itself, for the bees, the butterflies and the breezes would carry their pollen to them. They would not have to trouble about fine clothes, for nature would dress them more beautifully than men ever were adorned. What an idyllic existence theirs would be! Wells even might endow them with the power of locomotion and form them into a socialistic State.

But perhaps, after all, it wouldn't work out so beautifully, for all the predictions in life have a way of coming out wrong. Very likely the fatter and sturdier super-plants would gain a monopoly of the most nourishing soil, and shocked old Mother Nature might some day find her dicotyledonous rouses creeping up the choicest hillsides to the spots where the pollen was wanted most freely.