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WORLD TROUBLE AND REALISM

BY VERNON KELLOGG

I

THE scientist tries to be a realist. Face to face with phenomena he would like to understand he assures himself that, concerning these phenomena, there are some ascertainable facts to be discovered, some probable conjectures to be made and some wild guesses to be hazarded. He goes first after the ascertainable facts; then he is likely to make some conjectures that seem reasonable, and he may even, if he is of a certain temperament, hazard a few wild guesses. But first he goes after the ascertainable facts.

He may be temperamentally idealist in his outlook on the world. He may be a man of vision—if he is not he will never be a great scientist. His vision may determine for him ideals of human life, personal and social human life, which he thinks human individuals and the human race should strive to attain. But in this striving for ideals he will be realist in method. He will test the methods and measures suggested by other men—and by himself—by his understanding of realities.

Ideal in aim, but realist in method. That is the scientific man. It is not what he studies but how he studies that distinguishes the scientific man from the non-scientific man. The majority of professed or professional scientific men do, to be sure, confine most of their study to the fields of the natural sciences, such as mathematics and astronomy and physics and chemistry and geology and biology. But there are scientific men whose field is in the humanities. There are thoroughgoing scientific students of political economy, political science, sociology, statesmanship, diplomacy, politics in general. But there are not many of them. They can be distinguished from other students or workers or dabblers in these fields by their method, their method of realism.

I have been much interested in reading the earlier papers in this series. They have impressed on me more strongly than ever the fact that science is different from sociology and ethics and religion and philosophy primarily in its method. That is why there are so few real scientific men in the fields of humanistics. It is much harder to apply rigorously the method of science to the study of mankind than to the study of nitrogen and the boll weevil. Human behavior is almost infinitely more varied and complex in its possibilities and manifestations than the behavior of *Amæba*. Human psychology is very much more difficult to get at scientifically than the tropisms of the *Protozoa* and the instincts of the social insects. But if it and human sociology and human economics and human politics (in its comprehensive sense) are to be got at soundly and certainly, it will have to be, some time or another, by the methods of science: not by the short cut methods of reasonable conjecture and wild guess.

Now the world, facing a sea of industrial, economic and political trouble, is dazed not alone by the quantity of the trouble but by the quality of it. It is dazed by the difficulty it is experiencing in trying to understand just why all this trouble should be; just what the essential elements in it are; just what mysterious perversity or weakness of human mental and spiritual make-up brings it about. For the trouble is obviously man-made trouble—unless we accept the fatalistic conception of our being the mere playthings of cosmic forces or influences quite outside our understanding or, at least, control.

But if this trouble is man-made there ought to be possible man-contrived remedies. To devise these it will be necessary to know the real elements of the trouble. And the method of wild guesses or even reasonable conjectures is not the method to adopt in trying to understand matters. We must go first after the ascertainable facts. We must adopt the method of science.

I should like to believe the confident statement that the adoption of the Golden Rule by all of us would immediately solve all of our problems. And then I should like to believe that somebody can get us all to adopt the Golden Rule as governor of our behavior. But I cannot fully believe either of these things. Different ones among us would interpret the Golden Rule differ-

ently, and even Christ could not convince all of His hearers to become His followers.

I should like to understand how Russia could ever get into the impossible state it is in. No reasonable conjecture or even wild guess made before the fact would ever have pictured with any accuracy the present impossible situation—which is nevertheless possible because it now exists. I hardly accept as real the reality that I saw in Russia last autumn. I saw things as seemingly unreal, as topsy-turvy, as Alice saw in Wonderland. But I, and others, did see them and it was on a basis of these ascertained realities that Mr. Hoover, who is a scientific man, acted promptly with the result of saving the lives of several million men, women and children.

On the basis of facts that could be ascertained Mr. Hoover could and did act with the result of ameliorating great and distressing trouble. But he is urged all the time now, on a basis of conjecture and guess, to act, or use his influence to have the American Government act, in other ways that would, if the guess is correct, conjecturally further relieve trouble in Russia. But, consistently scientific, he asks for the ascertainable facts on which to base proper action. He cannot commit himself, or help commit the Government, to action on a basis of guess and conjecture. Indeed, the situation in Russia is an outstanding example of the difficulties of knowing things in the realm of human psychology and human behavior in the way the scientific man insists on knowing them, or trying to know them.

But difficult or not, the solution of the problems of economic and political trouble in Russia and world trouble in general will depend on getting at the realities in a scientific way. There must be a basis of realism for planning and carrying out any activity to ameliorate this trouble. That is what I mean to suggest by the title of my paper.

II

What are the criteria of reality? What tests can we apply to things as they seem to determine things as they are? This is no simple and perhaps no certain matter. But there are some grounds for confidence concerning it. The scientific man has a

test of the reality of things which can be stated rather baldly as the test of betting your life on them. If they stand that test he accepts them as realities.

Philosophers have different attitudes, varying with their "schools", toward material phenomena. There are some who say that the reality of the material things we feel, see, hear, taste or smell lies only in our minds, because it is only the mind perceptions of things that we can certainly know to exist. Few scientific men agree with this. They say that a photographic plate put where it will intercept light waves or a stretched membrane where it will be struck by sound waves will be, respectively, chemically and physically affected by these vibrations in ether and atmosphere. They say further that if one stands on a railway long enough he will first see or hear an approaching reality in the guise of a locomotive, and then, unless he gets off, will feel it. He can bet his life on the reality of this locomotive as revealed to him by his senses. He believes therefore that reality exists outside of mind. He bets his life on it and wins. The philosopher would lose his bet—and life—if he tested his belief to the limit.

The kind of reality represented by the rushing locomotive or by a cyclone or earthquake is reality in the world of nature. But there are catastrophic happenings because of the behavior of human beings in masses, which bring trouble or disaster to themselves or to other people just as the cyclone or earthquake brings disaster. These are realities in the world of human society and civilization. We may also perhaps establish a third category of realities which largely affect human life: realities in the world of morality. As difficult of understanding, compared with the realities of the world of nature, as may be these realities in the worlds of civilization and morality, they nevertheless form a body of actualities that are more or less available to scientific study, study by the scientific method. And it is by that kind of study and by taking the attitude of the realist toward them that any considerable progress can be made toward solving the problems which these realities in the realm of civilization and morality may pose to mankind. An attention to these problems from the point of view and by the method of the scientific realist can lead to

specific recommendations for activity in relation to these problems. Any other method will lead only to generalities, which may excite emotion but do not specifically direct it how to discharge itself in definite behavior.

III

Take, for example, the pressing problem of the debts of the European nations, including the German reparations. Whatever one's feelings, whatever one's desires or hopes, whatever one's probable conjectures and hazarded guesses, there can be, in them alone, no really sound basis for decision and action. The sound basis must rest on the actual ascertainment of facts, of realities as determined by scientific method of study. Sympathy with Belgium and France, suspicion and hatred of Germany, cannot be the fundamental basis of a successful solution of the problem. The basis must be facts of business, economics, politics and psychology. If these facts—which, of course, will not be easy to ascertain but many of which nevertheless can be ascertained—if these facts show that it is not possible for Germany to pay the thirty billions of dollars now represented by her A, B and C reparations bonds, then a solution on the basis of the present arrangement, dictated by too little knowledge of facts and too much influence of conjectures and emotions, is impossible. If, because Germany cannot pay so much to France, Belgium, Italy, Great Britain, *et al.*, these nations cannot pay their debts to the United States, then there is no use in determining our attitude in this matter by feelings, even if these feelings rest on apparent fairness and justice. We must determine our attitude and decision on the basis of the realities. If, despite Germany's inability to pay England and France, England can pay us but France cannot, then no matter about the apparent unfair discrimination on our part as between our two debtors, that discrimination is warranted on a basis of realism. It has been suggested that it would be a *beau geste* on our part to cancel the debts, collectable or uncollectable. If this is done simply as a *beau geste* dictated by emotion it would seem to be an unscientific solution of a great problem. But numerous economists claim that such an action would be of an actual financial or economic advantage to us. If this is a fact,

then a decision on this basis to cancel the debts would be a solution dictated by facts; a solution based on scientific realism.

These statements have an unpleasant suggestion of crass materialism, of ugly sordidness, about them. Does the scientific method of acting on a basis of facts, a basis of scientific realism, leave no place for the ameliorating influence of idealism in the determination of our attitude and action concerning the present world trouble, or any other world trouble to come? It does. For idealism is also a scientific fact. It has a reality in the human mind and heart. It has played and will continue to play a positive and important part in the progressive evolution of human kind.

Altruism, or mutual aid as the biologists call it, has been, and is, an important biological factor in organic evolution, especially in human evolution. The present evolutionary status of the human race has been reached on a basis of mutual aid as well as of mutual fight. It is particularly in the social evolution of man, as contrasted with his strictly biological evolution, that altruism has shown its important and benign effects. And as the evolution of the race through historic and pre-historic times as far back at least as from 25,000 years ago, has been chiefly, if not almost wholly, determined by the factors of social evolution rather than by those of biological evolution, and will continue so to be determined, and as idealism is one of the most outstanding among these factors of social evolution, it is certain—and this certainty is recognized by scientific men—that idealism and its effects are among the realities of human life.

Therefore the canceling of the debts of our European debtors without regard to the immediate influence such an action might have on our own financial or economic situation, an action which we have earlier spoken of as a possible *beau geste* dictated by emotion, this emotion in its turn expressing our idealism, might after all perhaps logically be justified on a basis of scientific realism, for such realism recognizes idealism as a fact. It is a positive influencing factor in human behavior and its indulgence or encouragement as an important factor in guiding us in our actions is a useful thing, because it helps to insure the permanency and augment the strength of this benign element in human evolution. Hence in any search for the fundamental facts on which

we are to base our attempt to solve the problem of present world-trouble, we must take into account the existence of idealism in human nature.

Thus we do not exclude in the scientific or realistic method of studying the present world trouble, to the end of trying to find a solution for the problem it presents, the recognition of idealistic factors contributing either to the trouble or to its amelioration. Only, we must treat them as we treat other realities. We must discover them as specific things and try to understand their significance, just as we discover and try to understand the significance of other categories of facts.

Perhaps the facts, when all, or enough on which to base action, are discovered, will indicate to us not the desirability of a partial cancellation of the German reparations and the complete or partial cancellation of the European debts to the United States, but the setting up of a general moratorium for five, or less or more, years of all war debts. Within this time perhaps the wheels of world industry could get to turning again, and the economic and financial situation of now practically bankrupt nations be restored.

Here are two alternative conjectural solutions for a single great problem; conjectural, but neither one perhaps yet clearly indicated by ascertained facts. The conjectures may be helpful, as hypotheses are to the scientific student; but, also like the hypotheses, they are only stimulants to finding the facts. The facts when found may point to some quite different action.

IV

What is wanted then in this time of world trouble—as in all time—are the facts, and then prompt, vigorous and honest action on their basis. At the Peace Conference there were many expert fact-finders. There was an American swarm of them in the *Hotel Crillon*, a British swarm in the *Majestic*, a Belgian swarm in the *Lotti*, and so on. And these swarms found out and listed many important facts pertinent to the problems involved in the peace settlement. But, unfortunately, the action on the basis of the facts was neither prompt, vigorous nor wholly honest. The action which followed the fact-collecting was not based on the facts found. Considerations of presumed economic and political self-

interest, strong emotions, and points of view derived from conjecture and guess, played a dominant or, at least, too important part in determining the action of the peace dictators. A war to assure peace was followed by a peace that assured war.

There has been continuous war since the end of the Peace Conference. Perhaps, indeed, the pessimists' declaration that war is inevitable is true. But it is not proved. A peace based on realism might not have been followed by war. It was a wrong peace and futile because it was not based on realities; it brazenly flew in the face of realities; it ignored the scientific method.

So we have a worse world trouble than we had before the war. And this worse world trouble will continue to get worse as long as those who attempt its solution overlook the method of realism. It, or phases of it, may be temporarily ameliorated. America has devoted fifty million dollars to the food relief of Russia: a beautiful charity. Five or ten million Russians are alive now because of it, who would otherwise have now been dead. But this beautiful charity has done little or nothing to solve the real Russian trouble—and it has not pretended to.

Well, I have tried to set out a scientific man's reaction to the problem posed by the present world trouble. It is the same reaction that he exhibits in the face of any problem. He feels that world problems and laboratory problems are qualitatively alike, however greatly they may differ quantitatively. And they are to be attacked by the same method of attack. One may be immeasurably more complex than the other; that makes no difference, except in difficulty; the method of attack is the same. It is the method of realism.

VERNON KELLOGG.

[With this article and that preceding it—The Great Enchantment—our series on World Restoration after the World War, which began in the August number, is ended. We are confident that our readers will be gratified, as we are, at the intrinsic merit, the commanding interest, and the helpful suggestion of the articles, which in their reception have more than warranted our high anticipations regarding them.—THE EDITORS.]