

The background of the entire image is a photograph of an ancient stone structure, possibly a temple or a fortification, built with large, irregular stones. The structure is partially covered in moss and is surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. The lighting is natural, suggesting daylight.

***JAMES HARVEY
ROBINSON***

***THE MIND
IN THE MAKING:
THE RELATION
OF INTELLIGENCE
TO SOCIAL
REFORM***

James Harvey Robinson

The Mind in the Making: The Relation of Intelligence to Social Reform

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I.

PREFACE

This is an essay—not a treatise—on the most important of all matters of human concern. Although it has cost its author a great deal more thought and labor than will be apparent, it falls, in his estimation, far below the demands of its implacably urgent theme. Each page could readily be expanded into a volume. It suggests but the beginning of the beginning now being made to raise men's thinking onto a plain which may perhaps enable them to fend off or reduce some of the dangers which lurk on every hand.

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NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, NEW YORK CITY,
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THE MIND IN THE MAKING

1. ON THE PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME

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If some magical transformation could be produced in men's ways of looking at themselves and their fellows, no inconsiderable part of the evils which now afflict society would vanish away or remedy themselves automatically. If the majority of influential persons held the opinions and occupied the point of view that a few rather uninfluential people now do, there would, for instance, be no likelihood of another great war; the whole problem of "labor and capital" would be transformed and attenuated; national arrogance, race animosity, political corruption, and inefficiency would all be reduced below the danger point. As an old Stoic proverb has it, men are tormented by the opinions they have of things, rather than by the things themselves. This is eminently true of many of our worst problems to-day. We have available knowledge and ingenuity and material resources to make a far fairer world than that in which we find ourselves, but various obstacles prevent our intelligently availing ourselves of them. The object of this book is to substantiate this proposition, to exhibit with entire frankness the tremendous difficulties that stand in the way of such a beneficent change of mind, and to point out as clearly as may be some of the measures to be taken in order to overcome them.

When we contemplate the shocking derangement of human affairs which now prevails in most civilized countries, including our own, even the best minds are puzzled and uncertain in their attempts to grasp the situation. The world

seems to demand a moral and economic regeneration which it is dangerous to postpone, but as yet impossible to imagine, let alone direct. The preliminary intellectual regeneration which would put our leaders in a position to determine and control the course of affairs has not taken place. We have unprecedented conditions to deal with and novel adjustments to make—there can be no doubt of that. We also have a great stock of scientific knowledge unknown to our grandfathers with which to operate. So novel are the conditions, so copious the knowledge, that we must undertake the arduous task of reconsidering a great part of the opinions about man and his relations to his fellow-men which have been handed down to us by previous generations who lived in far other conditions and possessed far less information about the world and themselves. We have, however, first to create an *unprecedented attitude of mind to cope with unprecedented conditions, and to utilize unprecedented knowledge* This is the preliminary, and most difficult, step to be taken—far more difficult than one would suspect who fails to realize that in order to take it we must overcome inveterate natural tendencies and artificial habits of long standing. How are we to put ourselves in a position to come to think of things that we not only never thought of before, but are most reluctant to question? In short, how are we to rid ourselves of our fond prejudices and *open our minds?*

As a historical student who for a good many years has been especially engaged in inquiring how man happens to have the ideas and convictions about himself and human relations which now prevail, the writer has reached the

conclusion that history can at least shed a great deal of light on our present predicaments and confusion. I do not mean by history that conventional chronicle of remote and irrelevant events which embittered the youthful years of many of us, but rather a study of how man has come to be as he is and to believe as he does.

No historian has so far been able to make the whole story very plain or popular, but a number of considerations are obvious enough, and it ought not to be impossible some day to popularize them. I venture to think that if certain seemingly indisputable historical facts were generally known and accepted and permitted to play a daily part in our thought, the world would forthwith become a very different place from what it now is. We could then neither delude ourselves in the simple-minded way we now do, nor could we take advantage of the primitive ignorance of others. All our discussions of social, industrial, and political reform would be raised to a higher plane of insight and fruitfulness.

In one of those brilliant divagations with which Mr. H. G. Wells is wont to enrich his novels he says:

When the intellectual history of this time comes to be written, nothing, I think, will stand out more strikingly than the empty gulf in quality between the superb and richly fruitful scientific investigations that are going on, and the general thought of other educated sections of the community. I do not mean that scientific men are, as a whole, a class of supermen, dealing with and thinking about everything in a way altogether better than the common run of

humanity, but in their field they think and work with an intensity, an integrity, a breadth, boldness, patience, thoroughness, and faithfulness—excepting only a few artists—which puts their work out of all comparison with any other human activity.... In these particular directions the human mind has achieved a new and higher quality of attitude and gesture, a veracity, a self-detachment, and self-abnegating vigor of criticism that tend to spread out and must ultimately spread out to every other human affair.

No one who is even most superficially acquainted with the achievements of students of nature during the past few centuries can fail to see that their thought has been astoundingly effective in constantly adding to our knowledge of the universe, from the hugest nebula to the tiniest atom; moreover, this knowledge has been so applied as to well-nigh revolutionize human affairs, and both the knowledge and its applications appear to be no more than hopeful beginnings, with indefinite revelations ahead, if only the same kind of thought be continued in the same patient and scrupulous manner.

But the knowledge of man, of the springs of his conduct, of his relation to his fellow-men singly or in groups, and the felicitous regulation of human intercourse in the interest of harmony and fairness, have made no such advance. Aristotle's treatises on astronomy and physics, and his notions of "generation and decay" and of chemical processes, have long gone by the board, but his politics and ethics are still revered. Does this mean that his penetration in the sciences of man exceeded so greatly his grasp of

natural science, or does it mean that the progress of mankind in the scientific knowledge and regulation of human affairs has remained almost stationary for over two thousand years? I think that we may safely conclude that the latter is the case.

It has required three centuries of scientific thought and of subtle inventions for its promotion to enable a modern chemist or physicist to center his attention on electrons and their relation to the mysterious nucleus of the atom, or to permit an embryologist to study the early stirrings of the fertilized egg. As yet relatively little of the same kind of thought has been brought to bear on human affairs.

When we compare the discussions in the United States Senate in regard to the League of Nations with the consideration of a broken-down car in a roadside garage the contrast is shocking. The rural mechanic thinks scientifically; his only aim is to avail himself of his knowledge of the nature and workings of the car, with a view to making it run once more. The Senator, on the other hand, appears too often to have little idea of the nature and workings of nations, and he relies on rhetoric and appeals to vague fears and hopes or mere partisan animosity. The scientists have been busy for a century in revolutionizing the *practical* relation of nations. The ocean is no longer a barrier, as it was in Washington's day, but to all intents and purposes a smooth avenue closely connecting, rather than safely separating, the eastern and western continents. The Senator will nevertheless unblushingly appeal to policies of a century back, suitable, mayhap, in their day, but now become a warning rather than a guide. The garage man, on

the contrary, takes his mechanism as he finds it, and does not allow any mystic respect for the earlier forms of the gas engine to interfere with the needed adjustments.

Those who have dealt with natural phenomena, as distinguished from purely human concerns, did not, however, quickly or easily gain popular approbation and respect. The process of emancipating natural science from current prejudices, both of the learned and of the unlearned, has been long and painful, and is not wholly completed yet. If we go back to the opening of the seventeenth century we find three men whose business it was, above all, to present and defend common sense in the natural sciences. The most eloquent and variedly persuasive of these was Lord Bacon. Then there was the young Descartes trying to shake himself loose from his training in a Jesuit seminary by going into the Thirty Years' War, and starting his intellectual life all over by giving up for the moment all he had been taught. Galileo had committed an offense of a grave character by discussing in the mother tongue the problems of physics. In his old age he was imprisoned and sentenced to repeat the seven penitential psalms for differing from Aristotle and Moses and the teachings of the theologians. On hearing Galileo's fate. Descartes burned a book he had written, *On The World*, lest he, too, get into trouble.

From that time down to the days of Huxley and John Fiske the struggle has continued, and still continues—the Three Hundred Years' War for intellectual freedom in dealing with natural phenomena. It has been a conflict against ignorance, tradition, and vested interests in church and university, with all that preposterous invective and cruel

misrepresentation which characterize the fight against new and critical ideas. Those who cried out against scientific discoveries did so in the name of God, of man's dignity, and of holy religion and morality. Finally, however, it has come about that our instruction in the natural sciences is tolerably free; although there are still large bodies of organized religious believers who are hotly opposed to some of the more fundamental findings of biology. Hundreds of thousands of readers can be found for Pastor Russell's exegesis of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse to hundreds who read Conklin's *Heredity and Environment* or Slosson's *Creative Chemistry*. No publisher would accept a historical textbook based on an explicit statement of the knowledge we now have of man's animal ancestry. In general, however, our scientific men carry on their work and report their results with little or no effective hostility on the part of the clergy or the schools. The social body has become tolerant of their virus.

This is not the case, however, with the social sciences. One cannot but feel a little queasy when he uses the expression "social science", because it seems as if we had not as yet got anywhere near a real science of man. I mean by social science our feeble efforts to study man, his natural equipment and impulses, and his relations to his fellows in the light of his origin and the history of the race.

This enterprise has hitherto been opposed by a large number of obstacles essentially more hampering and far more numerous than those which for three hundred years hindered the advance of the natural sciences. Human affairs are in themselves far more intricate and perplexing than

molecules and chromosomes. But this is only the more reason for bringing to bear on human affairs that critical type of thought and calculation for which the remunerative thought about molecules and chromosomes has prepared the way.

I do not for a moment suggest that we can use precisely the same kind of thinking in dealing with the quandaries of mankind that we use in problems of chemical reaction and mechanical adjustment. Exact scientific results, such as might be formulated in mechanics, are, of course, out of the question. It would be unscientific to expect to apply them. I am not advocating any particular method of treating human affairs, but rather such a *general frame of mind, such a critical open-minded attitude*, as has hitherto been but sparsely developed among those who aspire to be men's guides, whether religious, political, economic, or academic. Most human progress has been, as Wells expresses it, a mere "muddling through". It has been man's wont to explain and sanctify his ways, with little regard to their fundamental and permanent expediency. An arresting example of what this muddling may mean we have seen during these recent years in the slaying or maiming of fifteen million of our young men, resulting in incalculable loss, continued disorder, and bewilderment. Yet men seem blindly driven to defend and perpetuate the conditions which produced the last disaster.

Unless we wish to see a recurrence of this or some similar calamity, we must, as I have already suggested, create a new and unprecedented attitude of mind to meet the new and unprecedented conditions which confront us.

We should proceed to the thorough reconstruction of our mind, with a view to understanding actual human conduct and organization. We must examine the facts freshly, critically, and dispassionately, and then allow our philosophy to formulate itself as a result of this examination, instead of permitting our observations to be distorted by archaic philosophy, political economy, and ethics. As it is, we are taught our philosophy first, and in its light we try to justify the facts. We must reverse this process, as did those who began the great work in experimental science; we must first face the facts, and patiently await the emergence of a new philosophy.

A willingness to examine the very foundations of society does not mean a desire to encourage or engage in any hasty readjustment, but certainly no wise or needed readjustment *can* be made unless such an examination is undertaken.

I come back, then, to my original point that in this examination of existing facts history, by revealing the origin of many of our current fundamental beliefs, will tend to free our minds so as to permit honest thinking. Also, that the historical facts which I propose to recall would, if permitted to play a constant part in our thinking, automatically eliminate a very considerable portion of the gross stupidity and blindness which characterize our present thought and conduct in public affairs, and would contribute greatly to developing the needed scientific attitude toward human concerns—in other words, to *bringing the mind up to date*.

2. THREE DISAPPOINTED METHODS OF REFORM

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Plans for social betterment and the cure of public ills have in the past taken three general forms: (I) changes in the rules of the game, (II) spiritual exhortation, and (III) education. Had all these not largely failed, the world would not be in the plight in which it now confessedly is.

I. Many reformers concede that they are suspicious of what they call "ideas". They are confident that our troubles result from defective organization, which should be remedied by more expedient legislation and wise ordinances. Abuses should be abolished or checked by forbidding them, or by some ingenious reordering of procedure. Responsibility should be concentrated or dispersed. The term of office of government officials should be lengthened or shortened; the number of members in governing bodies should be increased or decreased; there should be direct primaries, referendum, recall, government by commission; powers should be shifted here and there with a hope of meeting obvious mischances all too familiar in the past. In industry and education administrative reform is constantly going on, with the hope of reducing friction and increasing efficiency. The House of Commons not long ago came to new terms with the peers. The League of Nations has already had to adjust the functions and influence of the Council and the Assembly, respectively.

No one will question that organization is absolutely essential in human affairs, but reorganization, while it

sometimes produces assignable benefit, often fails to meet existing evils, and not uncommonly engenders new and unexpected ones. Our confidence in restriction and regimentation is exaggerated. What we usually need is a *change of attitude*, and without this our new regulations often leave the old situation unaltered. So long as we allow our government to be run by politicians and business lobbies it makes little difference how many aldermen or assemblymen we have or how long the mayor or governor holds office. In a university the fundamental drift of affairs cannot be greatly modified by creating a new dean, or a university council, or by enhancing or decreasing the nominal authority of the president or faculty. We now turn to the second sanctified method of reform, moral uplift.

II. Those who are impatient with mere administrative reform, or who lack faith in it, declare that what we need is brotherly love. Thousands of pulpits admonish us to remember that we are all children of one Heavenly Father and that we should bear one another's burdens with fraternal patience. Capital is too selfish; Labor is bent on its own narrow interests regardless of the risks Capital takes. We are all dependent on one another, and a recognition of this should beget mutual forbearance and glad co-operation. Let us forget ourselves in others. "Little children, love one another."

The fatherhood of God has been preached by Christians for over eighteen centuries, and the brotherhood of man by the Stoics long before them. The doctrine has proved compatible with slavery and serfdom, with wars blessed, and not infrequently instigated, by religious leaders, and

with industrial oppression which it requires a brave clergyman or teacher to denounce to-day. True, we sometimes have moments of sympathy when our fellow-creatures become objects of tender solicitude. Some rare souls may honestly flatter themselves that they love mankind in general, but it would surely be a very rare soul indeed who dared profess that he loved his personal enemies—much less the enemies of his country or institutions. We still worship a tribal god, and the "foe" is not to be reckoned among his children. Suspicion and hate are much more congenial to our natures than love, for very obvious reasons in this world of rivalry and common failure. There is, beyond doubt, a natural kindliness in mankind which will show itself under favorable auspices. But experience would seem to teach that it is little promoted by moral exhortation. This is the only point that need be urged here. Whether there is another way of forwarding the brotherhood of man will be considered in the sequel.

III. One disappointed in the effects of mere reorganization, and distrusting the power of moral exhortation, will urge that what we need above all is *education*. It is quite true that what we need is education, but something so different from what now passes as such that it needs a new name.

Education has more various aims than we usually recognize, and should of course be judged in relation to the importance of its several intentions, and of its success in gaining them. The arts of reading and writing and figuring all would concede are basal in a world of newspapers and business. Then there is technical information and the