THE THEORY OF EDUCATION OF ALBERT JAY NOCK

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ABSTRACT

THE THEORY OF EDUCATION OF ALBERT JAY NOCK

by Greta Ingrid Borgstrom

This study is an effort to trace the development of the educational theory of Albert Jay Nock (1870-1945), American scholar, historian, editor and writer. It is based on Nock's published writings.

Nock's educational theories owed much to his own highly individual educational experience. Until the age of fourteen, Nock never attended school. At that age he entered a secondary school and later attended college. In both these institutions, he was thoroughly steeped in that classical tradition which had gradually been abandoned in American education during the late nineteenth century. Upon graduation, Nock gained a master's degree in the classics. After additional theological training, he was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church in 1896. For two years he was a college teacher, and, from 1897-1910, active clergyman. In 1910, Nock left active ministry and became a magazine writer and editor for fourteen years, achieving excellence in writing and editing. From 1924 to his death, Nock was a freelance scholar and writer, gradually recognized as an accomplished essayist, a brilliant historian, and a trenchant social

critic. From 1910, he paid frequent visits to Europe and made his home there from 1924-1938.

Nock's chief concern was the American civilization and its betterment, with education as a key factor in this process. He had ample opportunities to study firsthand American and European universities as a writer and scholar and occasionally as visiting professor. He commented frequently upon educational topics and, from 1926-1931, he took a significant part in the lively educational debate in America, culminating in a series of lectures on "The Theory of Education in the United States" which he gave at the University of Virginia in 1931. They were published as a book (1932) with the same title.

Nock made a sharp distinction between <u>education</u>, concerned with <u>formative knowledge</u>, as opposed to <u>instruction</u> or training, concerned with <u>instrumental or vocational knowledge</u>. He was a staunch defender of the classical curriculum for its formative and maturing value, and saw it as indispensable to progress in civilization. The revolution in curriculum which had taken place in American education towards the end of the nineteenth century, did not represent progress to him; it had a deteriorating effect on civilization. These opinions he expressed already in 1908 and they never changed. He wrote little on primary schools, but obviously favored the so called Froebel type of schools, offering all kinds of opportunities, practical and intellectual, among which the children could freely choose.

Nock's educational theory underwent significant changes. Until the mid-nineteentwenties, he held an ardent faith in popular education as leading to a better civilization, and was hopeful that American education was going to improve. In the later twenties, he came to doubt the value of general literacy as a guarantee for an enlightened citizenry. He also began to see a division in mankind, between a small, educable elite, and the large mass of people, uneducable, but trainable. Their training was a necessary and useful work; it was largely performed in a creditable way in America. The calamity was that the classical curriculum had disappeared altogether and true education was no longer available. Nock proposed the establishment of an experimental college, designed to cater to the elite. By the 1930s, however, despairing even of this, he had convinced himself that American civilization was past hope and would lapse into decay and death. Since the development of Nock's educational theory is closely linked to his own education and his life as a whole, a brief account of his education and career and the development of his general philosophy of life are included in the study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Albert Jay Nock--American writer, critic, and scholar --was widely recognized during his lifetime as one of the most accomplished essayists and social critics of the day. Among his friends and admirers were some of the best minds of the era on both sides of the Atlantic. In his native United States, he belonged to the circle of liberal and radical intelligentzia, which included such men as Charles Beard, H. L. Mencken, and Van Wyck Brooks. In Europe, he counted among his congenial friends such intellectuals as Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw, and Hendrick Van Loon; yet, today Nock seems to be little known even in his own country.

The published biographical material on Albert Jay Nock is scanty. He abhorred personal publicity and vehemently condemned the tendency in modern literary research and biographical writing to dig into the private life of people. He surrounded his own private life with as much secrecy as possible. He refused to give information about himself to such reference works as Who's Who. After his death, the few lines about him in Who Was Who[1] gave only

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[1] Who Was Who in America: 1943-1950 (Chicago, 1950), II, p. 398.

his academic background and a perfunctory list of his books and activities. Current Biography (1944) carried a two-page article on his main literary achievements, but it paid heed to Nock's wish to leave out other biographical data.[1] Twentieth Century Authors (1942) gave him a stepmotherly treatment, incomplete and with obvious errors.[2] Nock had managed to keep even the year of his birth in obscurity. In reference books and library catalogues, it is tentatively given as 1871, 1872, or 1873, generally with a question mark after the figure.

Two years before his death, however, Nock published his memoirs, which, according to the author's intentions, constituted "the autobiography of a mind in relation to the society in which it found itself."[3] It is by no means a complete biography. Dates, years, names of people and places are rarely given, and important happenings and aspects of Nock's life are left out.

If Nock had had his choice, he wrote, he would have been born in Paris in 1810 and would have slipped out of life in the autumn of 1885. He gave two good reasons for

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[1]Anna Rothe, ed., Current Biography 1944 (New York, 1945), pp. 497-500.

[2]Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., Twentieth Century Authors (New York, 1942), pp. 1028-1029.

[3]Albert Jay Nock, Memoirs of a Superfluous Man (New York, 1943), p. iv.

this choice. For one thing, the idea that there is something to live for besides production, acquisition, and distribution of wealth died a slow, hard death in France. Secondly, never had "so many great practitioners of the good life, the truly humane life, been gathered together in one place, as in Paris of that period." Among those whom Nock had in mind especially were: the two giants of literary criticism Sainte-Beuve and Taine; the philosopher and orientalist Renan; the novelists Dumas, Merimée, Daudet, Turgenev; the painters Delacroix and Horace Vernet; the poets de Vigny, Leconte de Lisle, Sully-Prudhomme, de Musset, and the musicians Auber, Meyerbeer, Rossini, and Offenbach.[1]

Having no say in the matter, however, Nock entered this world in America in 1870, and grew up in the post Civil War Gilded Age. Thanks, however, to the unfailing luck which--as Nock in his memoirs repeatedly asserts--followed him throughout life, he spent the first twenty-five years of his life outside the mainstream of society. Not until he had finished a thorough classical education which "more by accident than intention" landed him an advanced degree,[2] did the mood of the time dawn upon him. He surveyed the American scene "with the naïve astonishment

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[1] Ibid., pp. 159-160.

[2] Ibid., p. 97.

of a Rip Van Winkle."[1] Trying to decide where his talent and knowledge might be put to best use, he discovered that in the United States around the turn of the century he was a superfluous man. He had nothing to contribute which society would accept. He felt like a man "who had landed in Greenland with a cargo of straw hats."[2] Like Henry Adams some decades earlier, Nock thus discovered the worthlessness of his education under the prevailing conditions in America.

As soon as possible he left for Europe. He became an expatriate by choice, and until old age, failing health, and World War II put a stop to this kind of life, he migrated between the two continents at shorter or longer intervals. Europe offered him a better environment for the "good" life; the humane and truly civilized life he cherished. In Europe, he found that still some vestiges remained of "the doctrine that man does not live by bread alone."[3]

"For you to love your country, your country has to be lovable." Nock often cited this statement by Edmund Burke in disclaiming any special loyalty to his own country. To him, the America of his adult years was not lovable. Yet, Nock had the civilization of the United States very

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[1] Ibid., p. 100.

[2] Ibid., p. 144.

[3] Ibid., p. 145.

much at heart, and he devoted his life's work to its betterment by constructive criticism and by presenting the values of true civilization, as he conceived it to be, for his countrymen to see and ponder. It was the quality of life that mattered to Nock. Everything else was subordinate.

In Nock's view, true civilization was inseparable from freedom for the individual. This precious possession, granted to the Americans in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, had in his eyes been systematically trampled under foot since the days of the Constitutional Convention. Only by restoring it could the United States become "lovable" and civilized.

The key role of education in this process became increasingly evident to Albert Jay Nock, and he wrote extensively over the years on educational matters, in numerous articles, commentaries, and essays. In 1931, Nock delivered the Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia. For his topic he chose "The Theory of Education in the United States" since "this matter was uppermost in my mind at the moment."[1] These lectures were highly critical of the theory of education prevalent in the United States at the time. They were published the following year in book form.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 87.

[2] The Theory of Education in the United States (New York, 1932).

Nock liked to speak of himself as a student of civilization. With equal right, he might have claimed the title educator in civilization. Essentially, he was an educator in the broad sense of this term during his whole adult life. The chief aim of his entire literary production was to educate his fellow countrymen in the true meaning of culture and civilization. For brief periods, he functioned directly as educator: first, in his twenties as college instructor, and later, occasionally, as visiting professor at American universities. He lectured in this capacity at Columbia University, University of Virginia, and Johns Hopkins University. It is the purpose of this paper to trace the development of Albert Jay Nock's educational theory, as far as this is traceable in his published writings. Nock's educational thought was closely linked to his own education and to his life as a whole. A brief account of his own education and career, therefore, serves well to illuminate his educational philosophy.

CHAPTER I

THE EDUCATION OF ALBERT JAY NOCK: FORMATIVE YEARS[1]

The educational views of Albert Jay Nock were in large measure formed by an early life which combined remarkably a series of representative democratic environments with a series of highly unrepresentative educational experiences.

Nock was born at Scranton, Pennsylvania, on October 13, 1870, of English and French ancestry. His father, the Reverend Albert Joseph Nock, was an Episcopal minister, whose parents had come from England as a young couple. His mother, Emma Jay Nock, was a descendent of the founding father, John Jay. Nock made but one passing reference to

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[1]As mentioned above, p. 1, the published biographical material about Albert Jay Nock is scanty, and consists chiefly of what can be sifted out from his own writings. In 1959, however, "The Evolution of the Social Philosophy of Albert Jay Nock" was made the subject matter of a doctoral thesis, as yet unpublished, by J. Sandor Cziraky at the University of Pennsylvania. This study, presented as "a pioneer effort" in its field, filled in important gaps in Nock's biography, especially in regard to names of people and places as well as dates. The first six chapters of Nock's Memoirs constitute a charming account of his childhood and youth, emphasizing his educational experiences. They have been used as the chief source of this chapter, supplemented with factual data from Cziraky's dissertation.

this in his writings,[1] but was proud that his mother was of pure Huguenot stock. Her forefathers had come over as refugees from France in the 1680s.[2] He also proudly stated that she was a college-educated woman, a fairly rare phenomenon in those days. Albert was the couple's only surviving child. An older sister died before he was born.

When Albert was about five years old, the family moved to Brooklyn, New York. The Brooklyn of those days was a cosmopolitan society. Scotch-Irish, English, Dutch, and German families were thrown in with old American stock, and everybody, according to Nock, remained tolerant of each other's individualities and sometimes oddities. This cosmopolitan character of his childhood surroundings affected Nock "favorably and permanently." Five years later, his father accepted a clerical position in Alpena, Michigan, a frontier town, and, as he wrote, a "first generation affair." The nearest railway was forty-five miles away, and the only communication with the outer world was by steamboat in summer and by a weekly mail-coach or sledge over a poor logging-road in winter. Once the lake became icebound, the town was virtually isolated and thrown upon its own resources, both intellectually and materially.

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[1] Albert Jay Nock, On Doing the Right Thing (New York and London, 1928), p. 184.

[2] Memoirs, p. 3.

Nock appraised his own inner characteristics as being derived from his maternal heritage. He believed that they had provided him a complete affinity with the great spirits of the French Renaissance and those of the Enlightenment as well as with the neo-classic philosophers and writers of nineteenth century France. He also ascribed to his French ancestry--as well as to the spiritual atmosphere of a gentle and pervasive scepticism in which he grew up--his "instinctive leaning towards the agnostic side."

Nock obviously was especially close to his mother, but of his father he wrote fondly as having, like his mother, "a humorous, penetrating and tolerant view of mankind at large."[1] Nock described his appearance as that of his father, but of character traits he traced but one to him: an inordinate love of the English language. Nock's later excellence in the use of English and his unyielding criticism of sloppiness in the writings of others supported this strong emotion.

Thus, Nock grew up in a happy, harmonious, tolerant home. He did not attend school until the age of fourteen. At the age of three, according to his Memoirs, he had already taught himself to read from a torn-out page of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 25.

New York Herald, pasted upside down over a broken window pane in the basement of the house where the family then lived. He read the lines from right to left (as well as upside down), and the ability to read this way stayed with him all through life. By that time he already had some knowledge of Greek and Latin. As his parents did not know any nursery rhymes, his father had instead used Greek and Latin paradigms which Albert had learned to memorize. Nor did he ever listen to any lullaby. His first music memories were connected with opera, and in time he became a great opera connoisseur. He grew up surrounded by music, both his parents being musical and endowed with good, strong voices.

Reading matter which early caught Nock's fancy was Webster's Dictionary. It literally became his "bosom friend,"[1] although it was awkward to handle for the little fellow owing to sheer weight and bulk. He soon became an uncommonly rapid reader and a faultless speller. The Primer never interested him and he never used a spelling book. For the rest of his life, he continued to look upon the dictionary as the most interesting book in the English language.

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[1] Ibid., p. 15.

Thus, by the age of five, when the family came to Brooklyn, Nock was well equipped for literary pursuits. He could pick and chose freely from the family's highly varied library, including his father's professional books. No one either encouraged or discouraged his studies, which were wholly self-directed. He never thought of them as studies; nor did he know what education meant. He looked upon reading as a pleasant indoor pastime. He got the habit of browsing among books on many subjects, but he especially enjoyed magazines like Harper's and Scribner's Monthly, of which his parents had bound volumes from 1871. These magazines gave the young Nock his first notion of culture. They contained much reading material which was not beyond a child's horizon. St. Nicholas, the children's magazine, yielded much less to his eager mind.

Between the ages of eight and ten, Nock studied Greek and Latin under some sporadic supervision from his father, having puzzled out the Greek alphabet on his own. Languages never meant work to him, and he learned quite a few over the years, including German, French, Flemish, Italian, and Russian.

It was thus a quite sophisticated little gentleman who at this time arrived in the newly-settled town of Alpena, Michigan. Its schools were poor--"somewhat worse than none"[1]--so Albert continued his readings in his

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[1]Ibid., p. 63.

accustomed happy-go-lucky manner. He was thus left with plenty of time to get to know the rather ill-assorted crowd of people who had settled in Alpena. There were the lumbermen, largely from Maine--the main street of the town was named Maine Street--as well as others tied to the lumber business in one way or another.

> They were a good lot, too, as far as their lights lead them; self-reliant, hard-working, honest, hating restraint, fiercely independent, yet friendly, kindly, and in many unexpected ways, liberal . . . old-fashioned, free-thinking, free-speaking, free-swearing American. . . . They interested me immensely; I had never seen anything like them, and I studied their ways with delight. Their virtues,--and they were great virtues,--gave our society its prevailing tone of wholesome vigour which I look upon as something uniquely formative in my experience.[1]

Alpena was by no means void of social and cultural values. There were professional people and some others devoted to the arts and cultural interests. The town had a choral society of some distinction and a less competent amateur theatre circle, and Albert took part in both. He also struck up a close friendship with a Polish-German countess, and with an erudite and aristocratic German--"witty, humorous, and philosophical"--functioning as church janitor. He and Albert used to have their sessions in the rear basement of the church. These people had for various odd reasons landed in Alpena. The frontier rule, never to ask anybody about his past, was strictly respected,

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[1] Ibid., p. 57.

so Nock never found out why they were there. From these friends, he learned "not only a great lot of first class conversational German, but also considerable insight into German life and character; and all with virtually no effort."[1] There was also the outdoors, "I was a child of the great outdoors, active, strong, full-blooded, never ill," Nock proudly stated,[2] and he developed a growing interest in baseball which lasted over the years and in time made him a semi-professional baseball player.

Alpena had another great merit which Albert was little aware of at the time, but gradually came to realize and appreciate. The life of its inhabitants was

> singularly free; we were so little conscious of arbitrary restraint that we hardly knew government existed. . . . On the whole, our society might have served pretty well as a standing advertisement for Mr. Jefferson's notion that the virtues he regarded as distinctively American thrive best in the absence of government.[3]

Among those virtues, Nock enumerated independence, self-respect, self-reliance, dignity, and diligence.

This blissful stage could not last forever. Nock's parents intended to send their son to college; so after a couple of years of frontier town freedom, young Albert was obliged to buckle down to some serious study. A reading

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[1] Ibid., p. 60.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

[3] Ibid., p. 60.

course in Greek and Latin classics was assigned to him, "and God wot it was the dullest, drearest, and most unrewarding task I ever set my hand to."[1]

This antipathy was not due to language difficulties. It was the subject matter which was beyond a child's reach. Nock acquired a distaste for these "standard authors" which required a long time to overcome. His earlier readings in these languages had consisted of "human interest" material written in a natural and often humorous vein, dealing with places and people of the antiquity, the way they lived, and what they talked about. But somehow Albert came through this ordeal.

In the fall of 1884, he entered a small boarding school in Peoria, Illinois, where he remained for two school years. This prairie town was, like Alpena, a "first generation affair." It was settled by the German "forty-eighters, the best stock that Europe ever exported here."[2] German customs and culture pervaded the town, and Nock liked it for many reasons. For one thing, he had never before been in a place with so many pretty girls around; for another, music flourished. As an extracurricular activity, he learned how to read music. He also acquired,

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[1] Ibid., p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

"quite unconsciously, the beginnings of a creditable taste in beer."[1]

The school was small and simple. The quarters for the students were frugal; the food likewise. The curriculum was strictly classical; Greek and Roman literature, arithmetic and algebra. The teachers were kind and capable and gradually Nock overcame some of his distaste for the classics. The best quality of the school was to him the atmosphere of freedom that pervaded it. During study hours the students had little supervision or none. Nock in writing his memoirs some sixty years later, praised his extraordinary luck; it had been just the place for him.

After leaving the Peoria school, Nock spent a year and a half at home in Alpena, working sometimes around the sawmills, playing baseball, carrying on his "desultory readings" and taking occasional trips on the steam barges. As was quite common with frontier Americans, he did not like the surrounding wilderness. To him, wild nature was and remained an enemy, and he preferred the cultivated countryside for the rest of his life.

In the fall of 1887, Albert Jay Nock entered the preparatory class of St. Stephen's College, Annandale-on-Hudson, in Dutchess County, New York.[2] It was a small

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[1] Ibid., p. 66.

[2] Called Bard College since 1935, when the name was changed to honor the original founder, John Bard. The

institution, limited to a hundred students. Instruction was by tutors, and the academic course "was fixed and unchangeable as the everlasting hills."[1] This was expressedly stated in the college catalogue:

> There are no elective studies. The course is principally classical and philosophical. It is such as is required of those who are to enter on the study of theology. It consists of Latin and Greek with French, rhetoric, logic, the philosophy of the mind and of the moral nature, and English literature. There is also the ordinary course in mathematics and physics, with lectures on scientific subjects.[2]

There was no social intercourse between teachers and students at St. Stephen's. The students put in a full day's work, "union hours," for the rest they were free to engage in activities of their own choice. The possibilities were limited. The region was isolated and there was no settlement or railroad station within a radius of about three miles, and the road was poor. The college offered no facilities for recreational purposes. The students kept their own quarters tidy and in order without supervision.

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college was originally charted by the State of New York in 1860. In 1928, it became a part of Columbia University, and after 1934, served as an experimental liberal arts college in the country. The plan incorporated some of the ideas of Alexander Meiklejohn, William Kilpatrick, and John Dewey. Columbia ended this program in 1944, and Bard turned co-ed. (Cziraky, op. cit., p. 11, footnote.)

[1] Memoirs, p. 76.

[2] Student Records, 1887-1892, Bardiana Collection, as quoted by Cziraky, p. 12.

There was no praise for the student who did well and no extra tutoring for the one who failed. It was accepted as a natural law that some simply were not equipped for the type of learning the college offered; they had to go elsewhere and try their luck. At the same time, absolute fairness and justice ruled, and the students felt respected as individuals. They were addressed as Mr. by the teachers, for whom they had great respect and admiration due to their character and learning. Nock thought himself fortunate to have attended one of the last American institutions which still adhered faithfully to "the grand, old, fortifying classical curriculum."

Nock received his bachelor's degree from St. Stephen's in 1892, standing third in a class of ten.[1] By then, he and his fellow students,

> knew nothing of the natural sciences this side of Aristotle, Teophrastus, Pliny; nothing of any history since A. D. 1500, not even the history of our own country. Our ignorance of other subjects was quite as complete.[2]

To Nock, this ignorance was an advantage. It meant that they left college with open minds, without doctrines and formulas to be cleared away when it came to evaluating whatever they met in life. At the same time, their minds were trained "to see things as they are," and not to be

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[1] Cziraky, p. 12.

[2] Memoirs, pp. 82-83.

deceived by appearances. They knew how to go about disciplined and disinterested intellectual work, and they possessed a solid foundation of formative knowledge on which to build specialized and instrumental knowledge.

Nock pursued his studies at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, taking advanced courses in Latin, Greek, and French literature which gained him a master's degree in the classics, conferred by St. Stephen's College. He went on to Berkeley Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, for theological studies and was made a deacon in the Episcopal Church in 1896. This ended Nock's formal education.[1]

In his Memoirs, Nock never mentioned his theological training and spoke of his graduate studies merely in general terms. He depicted himself as a wandering scholar going where he knew there was a notable professor in a field he was interested in and leaving when he felt that he had "squeezed out" what the professor had to give. "Getting education is like getting measles;" he wrote,

> you have to go where measles is . . . unless you are by nature immune, you will get it . . . if you don't go where it is, you will never get it.[2]

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[1] Cziraky, p. 14.

[2] Memoirs, pp. 97-98.

Nock expressed himself as being profoundly grateful that during his formative years he had never had anything to do with any institution under State control. He had thus avoided all indoctrination with "synthetic" devotion to his native land and loyalty to its political "job-holders." There were, he asserted, plenty of these "state-inspired views" already in the days of his youth, but they had not been as bad as they later became. He had luckily escaped "the sites of infection," and his attitudes towards his country and its rulers, he believed, were correspondingly unemotional and unbiased.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER II

CAREER AND PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Happily, there are signs pointing to a revived interest in this original and perceptive social critic, whose commentaries upon many subjects, including education, continue to deserve a wide reading.

From 1896-1898, Albert Jay Nock was a teacher at St. Stephen's College, first as tutor in Latin and instructor in German, and then as assistant professor of Latin. In 1897, he was ordained a priest, and he served as an Episcopal clergyman from 1898 until 1909; for the first seven years (1898-1905) as rector of St. James Protestant Episcopal Church in Titusville, Pennsylvania, then as chaplain at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg (1905-1907), and finally at St. Joseph's Protestant Episcopal Church, Detroit, Michigan (1907-1909). Except for matters of official Episcopal record, little else factual has been documented about Nock in his twelve active years as a priest. On April 25, 1900, Nock married Agnes Grumbine of Titusville, Pennsylvania. She died in 1935. They had two sons, Samuel Albert and Francis Jay, born 1901 and 1905 respectively and still living. They are both scholars and university professors.

Apparently Nock was not happy either with his ministry or his marriage. Shortly after his father's death in 1909, he demanded and received non-parish status, and after 1910 he held merely sporadic contact with his wife and sons, residing mostly with his mother in Sussex County, New Jersey, where on rare occasions he gave a sermon in the church she attended. In 1924, a short time after her death, Nock renounced his ministry and left the Church. At about the same time the separation from his wife became permanent.[1]

Having left the pulpit, Nock entered upon a career as magazine editor and writer which lasted from 1910-1924. Aside from possible personal reasons, there was a philosophical base for this abrupt change in his career. As this is the clue to the understanding of his whole future work as well as his educational philosophy, it needs to be explained here.[2]

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[1]The names of people and places as well as data about Nock's career as teacher and minister and about his marriage are taken from Cziraky's thesis, pp. 14-15. Nock made no mention of ministership or marriage in his writings.

[2]In his Memoirs, especially Chaps. 6 and 7, Nock gave an account of his reactions to the American society upon leaving university as well of his subsequent readings and the change of mind he underwent. In an essay, "Anarchist's Progress," [On Doing the Right Thing (New York, 1928), pp. 123-160], he also set forth the development of his social and political thought from the age of seven until the outbreak of the war in 1914. A collection of letters by Nock published last year by his youngest son, is so edited as to show Nock's philosophical development from 1910 until the end of his life; [Francis J. Nock, ed., Selected Letters by Albert Jay Nock (Caldwell, Idaho, 1962).]

If little is known of Nock as a minister, one thing is documented in his own writings about his activities during this period. He had read copiously in history, in political, economic, and social matters. Upon leaving the sheltered and happy world of his childhood and student years--sheltered that is from the general current of events --he had been shocked by what he saw in American society: the wealth of the few, the misery of the many, federal and state governments in alliance with business, the cities in the hands of corrupt political machines. He observed that the individual, except for the wealthy few who benefitted from the set-up, was caught in a vicious system which deprived him of his freedom, dignity and natural rights. He saw the vulgarity of the popular press, and how newspapers and magazines in general served as vehicles for the indoctrination of the people with "synthetic patriotism" to back up the imperialistic policies in which America was at the moment involved.

Nock's first impulse was to find out <u>why</u> things had gone so wrong. He set out to study American history backwards to trace the roots of the evils and discover why there had been an almost complete deviation from the principles of the natural rights of man and of republicanism as laid down by Paine, Jefferson and others and synthesized in the Declaration of Independence. From there he proceeded to study the history of other modern Western nations

the same way.

From direct observations of society and from these studies he came to some basic conclusions which may be summed up as follows:

1. that economics was the underlying force, the basis of the social and political structures in any country, and that a dignified life was not possible for anybody without reasonable means of subsistence;

2. that the State invariably had originated in aggression and everywhere was an instrument for economic exploitation; directly or indirectly, or both;

3. that politics were everywhere corrupt, and, worse still, invariably corrupted those who engaged in them, and that the political parties were mere vehicles for the exploitation of the people;

4. that the judiciary served primarily the State, and not Justice;

5. that schools, colleges, and universities, like all other social institutions with some State support or under government control, invariably became instruments of indoctrination and no longer could serve as they ought to do, that is to assert and present the truth;

6. that the individual in general, living under the State, suffered. He lost in intellectual integrity and moral fibre. This had to be changed if progress in civilization should result, and this could be done only by the restoration to the individual of his natural rights;

7. that progress in religion was linked to progress in culture and civilization; and that a Christian minister, whose chief function it was to guide people towards the practice of a truly Christian life, could only succeed in a civilized society.[1]

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[1] Albert Jay Nock, "Value to the Clergyman of Training in the Classics," School Review, XVI (June, 1908), pp. 383-390.

Nock's next step was to try to find out how things could be redressed, and in Herbert Spencer, Social Statics (1852) and Henry George, Progress and Poverty (1879), taken together, he found "the complete formulation of the philosophy of human freedom, the one complemented the other;"[1] and both Spencer and George believed "that the moral and intellectual constitution of mankind is indefinitely improvable."[2] Nock thus became a single-taxer and a Spencerian.

A third element in Nock's philosophical make-up is essential to an understanding of his mind. As a graduate student at Wesleyan University, Nock had come under the spell of the French Renaissance humanist, Francis Rabelais.[3] He became a lifetime adherent to the Rabelaisien philosophy, which the great humanist had named Pantagruelism and defined as "certain joyfulness of mind preserved in the scorn of accidental things."[4] It was the fruit of the knowledge of and submission to nature, the belief that people who are free, well-born, well-educated, have, by nature an instinct

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[1] Albert Jay Nock, Henry George: An Essay (New York, 1939), p. 153.

[2] Ibid., p. 156.

[3] Selected Letters of Albert Jay Nock, p. 192.

[4] certaine qaieté d'esprit confite en mépris des choses fortuites. (Francis Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Prologue to Book IV.)

which always leads them towards virtue and away from vice. The Abbey of Thelema, the curious convent Gargantua had established, its inmates adhering only to one rule: Do what you like, was founded on this belief. Its result is a wide sympathy with all human affairs, together with a comprehension of their vanity. Intolerance must be directed only against anything that deforms nature and infringes upon man's dignity, freedom and the full development of his being.

Pantagruelism fitted Nock's tremendous inborn sense of humour exactly. He not only believed in Rabelais's philosophy; he lived by it. "Life is given us to enjoy," became the leading theme of Nock's thought.

Thus, to Nock, freedom was the panacea. Man was basically good and improvable, given the right environment, but there was no freedom without a sound economic system as its base. From his role as an educator in religion, Nock became an educator in tax matters. In 1910 he joined the editorial staff of the American Magazine primarily as its authority on tax questions, but also writing on many other subjects and doing general editorial work. The magazine was formed in 1906 by a group of leading muckrakers, who had left McClure's, the pioneering magazine in the field of muckraking around the turn of the century. Among them were Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and Lincoln Steffens. John S. Phillips, former associate editor of McClure's,

was editor-in-chief.[1] The heyday of muckraking was over when the American Magazine started, and its editorial policy tended more towards holding up good examples, than exposing shortcomings and evils of the American society.[2] This editorial policy coincided with Nock's own educational theory. He did not believe that people's minds could be changed by moral or legal pressures or by coercion. A change of mind and manners could be brought about only by demonstrating the truth illustrated by good examples.

Nock wrote critical articles on the American tax system and advocated the single-tax system in its place. "Land, viewed naturally, is one of the common properties of mankind, like the air." It ought to be made accessible to everybody through single-tax reform.[3] Such was his recurrent theme. He also contributed articles on other economic matters, and on social problems. The emphasis was always made that his and the magazine's chief interest was civilization, and diffused material well-being was an indispensable condition for its progress. In addition, Nock did editorial work and wrote some "Portraits"--a

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[1]Louis Filler, Crusaders for American Liberalism: The Story of the Muckrakers (New York, 1961), p. 228.

[2]Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York, 1961), p. 197. American Magazine, LXXV (Nov. 1912), p. 133.

[3]Albert Jay Nock, "The Earning Power of the Population," American Magazine, LXXV (Nov. 1912), pp. 52-54.

standing feature in the magazine--of "good" people, people who could be held up as examples to follow.[1]

Nock remained with the American Magazine for five years, achieving excellence in the art of editing and writing. He also became a highly versatile reporter and an expert interviewer. He travelled widely, especially in the Midwest, and made a transcontinental tour of Canada. During these years, Nock also made at least three extended trips to Europe, thus, initiating the commuting between the two continents which continued for the next twenty-five years of his life.

When the American Magazine changed editor-in-chief in 1915 and entered upon a new editorial policy less congenial to Nock, he resigned. As a freelance writer he contributed during 1916-1918 to Atlantic Monthly, Century, North American Review, and the Sewanee Review. In the summer of 1918, he became an associate editor of the Nation and remained in that post until the end of 1919. His signed contributions to the Nation were chiefly on economic and political matters.

During his decade of magazine work, Nock had naturally

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[1]In speaking about the editorial staff of the American Magazine, Lincoln Steffens wrote in his autobiography: "Later came that finished scholar, Albert Jay Nock, to put in mastered English for us [sic] editorials which expressed with his grave smile and chuckling tolerance 'our' interpretations of things human." The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens (New York, 1931), II, p. 536.

come to know the thought and methods of the Progressives thoroughly, and in the end he could not see that they had anything but palliatives to offer. Their chief fallacy he concluded, was their faith in government intervention. This faith ran contrary to his beliefs in the individual and in limited government. The Progressives and liberals were not his kind. Nock was not satisfied with their half-measures. He gradually shifted to a radical position becoming a philosophical anarchist of the Godwin-Proudhon school.[1] Pacifism and non-violence comprised an integral part of it. Like Pantagruelism it was based, as Nock defined it, on "a profound belief in the essential goodness of Home sapiens."[2] It further confirmed his faith in freedom as the only condition under which men could become "as good and decent, as elevated and noble, as they might and really wish to be."[3] Freedom meant absence of government, or nearly so. The function of government should solely be the safeguarding of the freedom and security of the individual, to protect his inalienable rights, as set forth in the Declaration of Independence. Nock had arrived at this radical outlook

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[1]Compare above, p. 21, footnote.

[2]Albert Jay Nock, Free Speech and Plain Language (New York, 1937), in essay "The Quest of the Missing Link," p. 242.

[3]On Doing the Right Thing, title essay, p. 177.

at the time he left the American Magazine.[1]

Fortunate circumstances made it possible for Nock to start, in the beginning of 1920, on a venture which was to bring him high recognition and to be decisive for his future career. It was the founding of an independent and radical American magazine. Backed financially by Helen Swift, a daughter of the wealthy meat-packing family in Chicago, this weekly, called the Freeman, started out in March 1920, with Nock and Mrs. Swift's husband, an Englishman by name of Francis Neilson, as co-editors. Nock, however, became the actual editor.[2]

The name Freeman was in itself intended as a pledge to radicalism.[3] It proclaimed as its aim to follow the developments in all phases of international life. In dealing with public affairs it would concentrate on the main principles of politics and economics rather than on events and personalities. It also promised sound criticism of literature and the fine arts. It did not wish to mold public

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[1]Albert Jay Nock, Journal of Forgotten Days: May 1934-October 1935. (Hinsdale, Illinois, 1948), pp. 104-106.

[2]This is generally confirmed in contemporary and later writings about the Freeman; among others by Van Wyck Brooks, who was the literary editor of the magazine for most of its existence. Van Wyck Brooks, Days of the Phoenix (New York, 1957), p. 52.

[3]A review with the same name had been published by Walt Whitman in Brooklyn in 1849, committed to radicalism. Freeman, I (March 24, 1920), p. 52.

opinion but rather to promote free popular discussion.[1]

Nock's rabelaisien philosophy permeated the Freeman. "The Freeman's primary interest is not so much in what people think as in that they think," Nock wrote in an editorial.[2] Wit, penetration, good temper and humor marked the magazine, but also scorching satire and frank criticism, usually with a humorous turn. Nock's editorial policy was one of extending complete freedom to well-chosen associates and contributors under three conditions: "(1) the writer must have a point, (2) he must make it out, (3) he must make it out in eighteen-carat, impeccable, idiomatic English."[3] These were the acting editor's untouchable sacred cows.[4]

Nock wrote a great deal himself, and he gathered around him a group of young, first-rate writers and editors. Among the contributors to the Freeman were the ablest minds of the period, including Thorstein Veblen, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, Vernon Parrington, Charles Beard, Upton

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[1]The New Republic, XXI (February 18, 1920), p. 365. Advertisement for the Freeman.

[2]Freeman, IV (November 16, 1921), p. 222.

[3]Memoirs, p. 172.

[4]Van Wyck Brooks described the editorial office of the paper as an Abbey of Thelema where the acting editor let everybody do what he liked. Brooks pictured Nock as a man of tremendous erudition and a prodiguous memory. Op. cit., Chap. IV, "The Freeman," p. 52.

Sinclair, Lewis Mumford, Lincoln Steffens, Harold E. Stearns, Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw, Norman Angell, and Maxim Gorky. The Freeman also reflected Nock's preoccupation with education as a basis for true civilization.

The Freeman won the highest of praise from contemporaries. It had "the most consistent excellent prose of any weekly in America," wrote the New York Times.[1] It won the praise of men, such as George Santayana, who from his voluntary exile wrote a letter to the editor, reprinted in several issues of the Freeman (the only advertisements the magazine carried were for itself), expressing his surprise that an organ of critical opinion of the Freeman's caliber could be produced in America. Oswald Garrison Villard, head editor of the Nation, talked about Nock and the Freeman in his autobiography in the following terms: "the brilliant Albert Jay Nock, later the creator and editor of the Freeman, the best written weekly yet to appear in the United States."[2]

The magazine was nevertheless unable to survive. There was not a sufficiently large reading public for it

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[1]New York Times Book Review and Magazine, June 9, 1922, Sec. VI, p. 722.

[2]Fighting Years (New York, 1922), p. 350.

in the America of the "roaring twenties" to make it a going concern economically. When, after four years Helen Swift withdrew her subsidies, the Freeman took a graceful leave of its readers. The latest issue was dated March 5, 1924. Its circulation was then at its peak of about seven thousand.[1]

In 1922, Nock produced his first book The Myth of a Guilty Nation.[2] It was made up of a series of articles he had previously published anonymously in the Freeman, in which he blamed the outbreak of World War I on England, France, and Russia and freed the German government from any guilt in the matter. He thus became the earliest of the so-called revisionist school of historians of the origins of World War I. He was a harsh critic of the Versailles Treaty as unjust and probably leading to another war.

Albert Jay Nock had emerged from the editorship of the Freeman a full-fledged and highly original writer. His ambitions as a first-rate editor and writer were undisputed. He received many favorable offers, of which he accepted two. One was a temporary arrangement as a reporter-at-large in Europe for Harper's Magazine. The other was of

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[1] Cziraky, p. 78.

[2] (New York, 1922.)

permanent character. Some ardent friends of the Freeman in Philadelphia, the architect Edmund Cadwalder Evans, his wife, and her sister, Miss Ellen Winsor, "appalled" at the news that the magazine would disappear, offered their economic assistance to keep it alive.[1] Nock, whom they did not know personally was not inclined to continue with the magazine. So, instead, the Evans-Winsor family put up a trust fund for Nock himself with no strings attached, which would enable him to do what pleased him for the rest of his life.[2]

Thus, Nock, at fifty-four, was a financially independent man at the peak of his ability. He could live where he wished and do what he wanted. The day after the Freeman closed its editorial office, he sailed for Europe, where he lived from 1924 until 1938 except for yearly visits to the United States. His headquarters were in Brussels, but he travelled a great deal on the European Continent. He embarked upon a prolific and distinguished career as a free lance writer and scholar.

His originality as an essayist came to the fore, and essays by Albert Jay Nock became frequent features in Harper's Magazine (1924-1933), Atlantic Monthly (1931-1941), American Mercury, New Freeman, Bookman, and occasionally

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[1] Letters from Albert Jay Nock: 1924-1945 (Caldwell, Idaho, 1949), p. 7.

[2] Cziraky, abstract of doctoral thesis (L.C. Card No. Mic 59-4609).

in Century, New Republic, Review of Reviews, and Scribner's Monthly. In subject matter they ranged across literature, language, history, travels, culture, immortality, music, art, politics, economics, manners, morale, philosophy, women, food and almost anything under the sun. Education became a central topic in his writings. Three collections of essays were brought out in book form during Nock's lifetime, and a fourth appeared posthumously.[1] The quality of American civilization is the central theme in them all, with education very much in the foreground. Nock cherished humorous writers, such as Montague Glass, Peter Finne Dunley, and Bret Harte. A favorite of his was Charles F. Browne (Artemus Ward). Nock edited Ward's selected works providing them with an introductory essay, stressing Ward's astuteness as a social critic.[2] "It was this work that contributed largely to the popular recognition of Ward's satirical genius," wrote the New York Times.[3]

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[1] On Doing the Right Thing (New York, 1928). The Book of Journeyman; Essays from the New Freeman (New York, 1930). During his first years in journalistic work, Nock looked upon himself as an apprentice and journeyman. He admired excellence in workmanship in all areas, and was fond of the title journeyman. He used it as pseudonym, in the twenties, when he was already an accomplished craftsman as a writer. Free Speech and Plain Language (New York, 1937). Snoring as a Fine Art and Twelve Other Essays (New York, 1958).

[2] Albert J. Nock, ed., The Selected Works of Artemus Ward (New York, 1924).

[3] August 20, 1945, p. 19.

Nock's idol was Thomas Jefferson. On the centennary of Jefferson's death, Nock published a book about him, designated as a "study in conduct and character."[1] It is still regarded by many historians as the best study of Jefferson's character ever written.[2]

In 1927, Nock received an honorary degree, Doctor of Letters, from St. Stephen's College, "in recognition of his service to journalism and literature," especially through his editorship of the Freeman and his Jefferson.[3] Nock gave the commencement address to the class of 1927 at St. Stephen's.[4]

More than on any other work, Nock spent time and effort on the editing, in cooperation with a young Oxford scholar, Catherine Rose Wilson, The Urquhart-Le Motteux

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[1] Jefferson (New York, 1926).

[2] ". . . somehow or other we know the mind of Thomas Jefferson when we have finished the book." Edward H. O'Neill, A History of American Biography, 1800-1935 (New York, 1961), p. 315. "Albert Jay Nock's Jefferson . . . is a superb biographical essay, beautifully written and penetrating in analysis; Mr. Nock understands Jefferson so well that one despairs of going at all beyond him, especially in a brief essay." Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition (New York, 1960), p. 356. "The book was described by reviewers as sparkling, charming, witty, and all the other adjectives inevitably called forth by Nock's inimitable prose style." Current Biography, 1944, p. 498.

[3] Cziraky, p. 145.

[4] New York Times, June 16, 1927, p. 18.

Translation of the Works of Francis Rabelais,[1] for Nock a true labor of love. The work consisted of two large scholarly volumes with an introductory essay, written by Nock, which was first published as a separate book.[2] As an appendix to this major work, A Journey into Rabelais's France, a superbly illustrated book, was published in 1924, giving a delightful description of Nock's travels to get the atmosphere and a firsthand view of the landscape and the remaining artefacts from Rabelais's own time.[3]

In 1930, Nock lectured as visiting professor at Columbia University on the nature of the State. These lectures were subsequently reworked and published as a book, Our Enemy, the State.[4] As the title suggests, it constituted an indictment of the State as an institution born out of aggression and by nature a vehicle for the exploitation of the people, an enemy of individual freedom. The State was contrasted with Government as set up by agreement of an association of free people and limited to the protection of the natural rights of the individual. Nock did not see any way out of the ubiquitous aggrandizement of the State in the Western world or in New Deal America;

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[1](New York, 1931.)

[2]Francis Rabelais: The Man and His Work (New York, 1929).

[3](New York, 1934.)

[4](New York, 1935.)

he wrote "for the record" in the hope that some day in an unforeseeable future, freedom would return and the State abolished.

The following year, he gave his lectures on "The Theory of Education in the United States" at the University of Virginia.[1]

Nock expressed himself as an inveterate scribbler. In the early thirties, he kept a diary, part of which, was published during his life-time. A second volume was presented to the public posthumously.[2]

Nock's activities during the thirties also included monthly contributions to the American Mercury, as associate editor from 1935-38 in charge of the section "The State of the Union." He there violently attacked Roosevelt and the New Deal policy as representative of growing "Statism." In making practical proposals for an alternate system he landed in the conservative fold, although he very much resented being so identified. For the most part, Nock sat between stools: on the one hand, preaching the return to "sterling American principles," i.e. Jeffersonian democracy, on the other hand, advocating a benevolent oligarchy of plutocrats and philosophers.

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[1] Above, p. 5.

[2] A Journal of These Days: June 1932-December 1933 (New York, 1934.) Journal of Forgotten Days: May 1934-October 1935 (Chicago, 1948.)

At the close of the New Deal, Nock lectured at the Henry George School in New York, and on the occasion of the centennial of Henry George's death in 1938 he published a booklength essay of George, not intended to "converting one's readers, or prepossessing them towards George's doctrine" but a "critical Essay . . . trying to answer certain questions concerning George and his career, which have never been satisfactorily answered."[1] In 1940, Nock edited a new edition of Herbert Spencer's The Man Versus the State, stressing in his introduction the difference between the true or "early" liberals of the past century which were for the freedom of the individual and limited government, and the self-styled, "new" liberals of the twentieth century, demanding State intervention in all matters.[2]

During the second World War, isolationism was the natural course to take for the pacifist Nock. He wrote for the isolationist magazine, Scribner's Commentary--abandoning the Atlantic Monthly, where his essays had appeared until 1941, of his own free will, as he considered it dominated by British propaganda. This shift subjected him to groundless accusations of being a Nazi sympathizer. During the war years Nock made himself doubly suspect among

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[1]Henry George; An Essay (New York, 1939), p. 7.

[2](Caldwell, Idaho, 1940), pp. vii-xiv.

liberals by writing for the National Economic Council, an association of leading industrialists and businessmen in opposition to the Roosevelt regime.

The climax and conclusion of Nock's authorship came with his Memoirs of a Superfluous Man, "the autobiography of a mind in relation to the society in which it found itself."[1] By no means a complete biography, it was rather a counterpart to The Education of Henry Adams, and Nock was delighted when reviewers made the inevitable comparison.[2] The book rapidly went through several printings.[3]

The critics were strenuously ambivalent. H. J. Haskell reviewed the book in Saturday Review under the title, "Study in Brilliant Unbalance."[4] Clifton Fadiman wrote:

> Mr. Nock is a highly civilized man who does not like our civilization and will have no part of it. I have not since the days of the early Mencken read a more eloquently written blast against democracy or enjoyed more fully a display of crusted prejudice.[5]

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[1](New York, 1943), p. iv.

[2]Letters from Albert Jay Nock, p. 178.

[3]Selected Letters of Albert Jay Nock, p. 154.

[4]Saturday Review, October 9, 1943, p. 8.

[5]Current Biography, 1944, p. 499.

In the New York Herald Tribune, Isabel Paterson concluded:

> Whether for instruction or for entertainment, this is a unique book, of instant timeliness and permanent value.[1]

H. I. Brock, reviewer in the Times found the book

> packed with things that made it worth reading. The reward will be both entertainment and profit, coupled with admiration (sometimes reluctant) for a master craftsman and plenty of wholesome exasperation with a vagarious author.[2]

Nock's controversial and seemingly sprawling literary achievements actually form a coherent unit. His various writings are parts of a consciously sustained effort in behalf of individual freedom and the betterment of the American civilization. This was Nock's chosen task in life; the one he felt himself best equipped to tackle. This, his "work," as he termed it, kept him constantly busy almost to the last month of his comparatively long life. He died following a brief illness--leukemia--on August 19, 1945.

Nock remained singularly faithful to his ideals and house gods throughout his life. Jefferson and Rabelais never lost their lustre, nor did the validity of their philosophies and ideas, nor did Nock ever disavow his own convictions: his faith in human goodness and improvability; in freedom as the only atmosphere conducive to its full attainments, and in the meaning of life as being given us

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

to enjoy. His confidence remained firm in the single tax method as the only basis for a sound economy and a diffusion of material well-being without impairing the freedom of the individual; he continued in his adherence to philosophical anarchism as the best political system towards the same ends.

Nock's philosophy of life, nevertheless, underwent marked changes which can be dated almost exactly by decades during his career as a writer. In the second decade of the twentieth century, he held an unqualified belief in man's essential goodness, and in the possibility to change the American society and make his country truly civilized and lovable. Nock, in letters and writings from this period, stands out as a man, eager and happy to be "up and doing" to promote this development. He had a program, which he regarded as foolproof, for the economic and political transformation of society. The years of the Great War had been a great strain on his spirit, especially after America's entering the battle. The ways of reformers, liberals, and progressives, as well as socialists and communists seemed to him to lead into the wrong direction, always towards more regulations and less freedom. But he had still been a journeyman writer in the employ of others. He had not wielded his pen in complete freedom nor with the perfect ease which he later achieved.

In the 1920s, Nock was an independent writer. With

the Freeman, he won hope. There he possessed a platform of his own from which he could expose his ideas and philosophy freely. The war was over, and things seemed to him to be stirring again. He was confident something could be achieved. His foolproof system might still become accepted and his native country truly civilized. But the Freeman did not survive. The tendencies in the America of the "roaring twenties" did not tend in his direction. Europe gave relief. Tradition there served in his view as a powerful brake on the modern trend away from the Great Tradition. He, nevertheless, experienced evil forebodings. He began to discern a division of mankind between a small elite of educable and educated, truly humane and civilized individuals, and a great mass of ignorant, uneducable people, including the wealthy and powerful, rapacious and corrupt, who did not care about civilization and never would. Yet Nock entertained a certain optimism that the elite, the saving remnant, would some day assert its influence. His ideas were worth fighting for.

The Great Depression had struck, and totalitarianism was raising its ugly head almost everywhere in the Western world, as Nock saw it, including his own country. By 1930, misanthropy and pessimism dominated Nock's spirit. His millenium, seemed fifty thousand years off, or more; yet, gloom and despondency never completely overtook him. He kept on working: speaking and writing "for the record"

and for the unknown remnant, however small it might be. He also offered makeshift proposals even though they did not agree with his basic philosophy in political and economic matters, hoping to preserve at least some values until better times came. Some day, when mankind had been through many more depressions, tyrannies, wars, and other unforeseeable misfortunes, man would revert to the Great Tradition and to the humanist ideal of a truly civilized life. He would find out that he simply could not do without these. Then Nock's writings might be of some help.

The outbreak of the Second World War was no shock to Nock. He had seen it coming. It confirmed his anticipation of the rebarbarization of the Western World. He took no interest in the war. He was by that time an old man. He survived only the first half of the nineteen-forties. He, nevertheless, continued to take some active part in the political and economic debate which continued to bed him down with isolationists and Wall Street tycoons, with whom he otherwise would have had nothing in common and whom in many cases he heartily despised. In 1941, he withdrew to Caanan Mountain, Connecticut, and there he spent the next two years writing his Memoirs, where he presented himself as the highly diverted, magnaminous spectator of human follies: a Stoic, an Epicurean, and a hedonist.

Nock had no exaggerated opinion of the value of his own work. Towards the end of his life he wrote in a letter:

> I have really done so little of anything and almost nothing of what I am best fitted to do; and by reason of our living at this particular time, what I have tried to do would be at least relatively ineffectual, even if I had succeeded in doing it better than I have. I simply content myself as well as I can with the thought that no one who does his best ever knows what he actually accomplishes and I have always done my best. Nevertheless I have no very high opinion of myself, or can have.[1]

On the other hand, Nock probably did not look upon himself as the superfluous man by which he identifies himself in the title of the Memoirs. At the conclusion of the book he makes passing reference to Voltaire's epigram: le superflu, chose très-nécessaire.[2] This aphorism strikes at the center of Nock's philosophy: that the ideals and the amenities of life called culture, are essential to civilization, and that the spokesmen of civilization like himself are also. In any case, he felt that he had worked in a good cause, and in a spirit of self-reliance. He believed that some of his writings might have a lasting value, among them his Jefferson.[3] Time seems to be at the point of confirming his self-image. Jefferson was republished in 1960 after having been long out of print.[4] Nock's Memoirs were

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[1] Letters from Albert Jay Nock, p. 8.

[2] Memoirs, p. 274.

[3] Letters from Albert Jay Nock, p. 20.

[4] (New York, 1960).

a few years ago included in a selection of three hundred and fifty books sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, called American Panorama, intended to "portray USA in its many aspects."[1] His Theory of Education in the United States was republished in 1949 with an introduction by his oldest son, Samuel Albert Nock.[2]

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[1]See Eric A. Larabee, ed., American Panorama (New York, 1957), p. 254.

[2](Chicago, 1949.)

CHAPTER III

NOCK'S EARLY IDEAS ON EDUCATION

Not being a continuing member of the teaching profession, Albert Jay Nock until the mid-twenties had followed the developments in American education only in a general way.[1] Without examination of the subject, he had taken for granted everybody ought to be able to ready and write. As to more advanced education he had assumed that it was available for anybody who wanted it. Occasionally he had written or lectured on educational topics but without penetrating the entire complex. Often these early writings show, however, a deeper insight than might be expected from the average interested layman, and many of the ideas about education expressed therein became in time parts of the coherent educational philosophy which Nock gradually developed.

In 1908, Nock participated in a symposium held at the University of Michigan on the value of humanistic, particularly classic, studies in the preparation for the theological profession. This was his first important public appearance as a lecturer on educational topics.[2]

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[1] Free Speech and Plain Language, p. 209.

[2] "Value to the Clergyman of Training in the Classics," by Albert Jay Nock, School Review, XVI (June, 1908), pp. 383-390.

Nock took the occasion to state the case for these studies which he would like to see broadened in general, and especially in the training of future clergymen. He defined the function of the Christian minister as that of a spokesman for religion as the practical means of making "the will of God prevail in all the relations of society." Only when such a condition was fulfilled could a truly civilized and humane society emerge. But true insight into religion--the essence of which to Nock was poetic truth, not scientific truth, an inward conviction, not outward observance of certain rites and rules--could only be achieved by the exercise of certain spiritual activity of the highest order in which the Christian minister must be experienced.

Nock recommended the study of Greek and Latin literature as a superior method to achieve this kind of experience and also because it clarified what a truly humane and civilized life is. It furnished "such a large proportion of notable models" for this kind of life that it was an indispensable source for the clergyman in illustrating the practice of the humane life.

Thus Nock argued for the moral value of the classics "as an indispensable and powerful factor in the work of humanizing society." He wanted them taught with the literary and historical interest in the foreground. He explicitly stated that he was not concerned with the disciplinary worth of Greek and Latin studies, nor with their value as

memory exercises or as a basis for the acquisition of modern languages. Their grammatical, philological, and textual interest should not dominate the teaching, as was the prevailing tendency. But, "knowing Homer's, Plato's and Sophocles' writings well, meant knowledge of these great spirits' views of life and what they asked from life." It also meant a growing conviction in the student that he should conform to these high standards of life and thinking. He acquired a habit always to try to "see things as they are" and to aspire enthusiastically toward the truly humane life epitomized in "the discipline of Jesus."

American secular education received severe criticism in Nock's paper. The revolution in American education which had recently taken place, did not represent progress to Nock. In his opinion it had shifted to a process of acquiring and using instrumental knowledge concerned solely with scientific truth, as opposed to formative knowledge, with insight into poetic truth as chief aim. It had substituted training for education. "The friends of education as it now is keep insisting," Nock said,

> that citizens should be trained to be useful men of their time, men who do things, men who can develop our natural and commercial resources, carry our material well-being on to a yet higher degree of abundance and security, and play a winning game at politics.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 387.

In Nock's view, the cardinal defect in such an educational philosophy and system was,

> that it does next to nothing for the humane life, next to nothing for poetic truth, next to nothing for spiritual activity; and its failure in these directions being what it is, that our civilization is retarded and vulgarized to correspond.[1]

This type of education in purely instrumental knowledge had, Nock thought, promoted the erroneous concept that civilization and material well-being constituted the same thing. Material well-being was the indispensable basis of civilization, but in itself it did not guarantee civilization in a society.

A few years later, as reported in the American Magazine, Nock visited the public schools in Gary, Indiana. These had been reorganized on the basis of educational principles, known internationally as the Froebel system. Its chief doctrines were: (1) that man is primarily a doer and an originator; (2) he is learning only through self-activity, and (3) the educator creates nothing in children, he merely superintends the development of inborn faculties.[2]

In Gary, the school plants were called opportunity centers. They provided all sorts of opportunities for intellectual, social and industrial improvements for adults

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[1] Ibid., p. 387.

[2] Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago, 1957), IX, pp. 857-858.

as well as for children. There were no compulsory attendance, no fixed terms, schedules or class hours, no required curriculum and highly elastic grade standards. The schools were open from eight in the morning until ten in the evening, all year around, and the child could come and go at will. He could pick and choose between the opportunities offered as it pleased him.

This way of getting an education had obviously great similarities with Albert Jay Nock's own educational experiences as a child. In the article which became the fruit of his studies of "the Gary System" he wholeheartedly endorsed it.[1] He had come there, he wrote, with considerable misgivings, assuming that he would find another set of "vocational schools." He had happily found himself wrong in these assumptions. Instead he had been convinced that children possess an infallible, God-given instinct to find what they were most apt for and would enjoy most, when given the chances to do so. Each individual child converged with the exactness of the law of gravitation, towards what was best for him. With wide-open and varied opportunities presented to him, no other inducement or discipline was needed. The teacher's role was merely to be at hand and to guide in a kind and leisurely fashion the

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[1]"Adventure in Education," American Magazine, LXXVII (April, 1914), pp. 25-28.

activities and the studies of the child. Nobody could really educate anybody, Nock wrote. The only way to become educated was to educate oneself. Self-education imposed its own discipline, and made outer control and surveillance superfluous. Nock recommended "the Gary System" for adoption all over the country.

An element in education which Nock often stressed during this period was joy. As life, in his view, was given us to enjoy, so education should be a joy, and its purpose was to help us to enjoy life more and to develop our instinct for style, for manners, for quality in all matters. He often praised the joy of workmanship in child-rearing, in cabinet-making, in soap-making, and other practical fields, as much as in the literary field he himself so diligently pursued.[1]

Surveying the American scene from the editor's chair of the Freeman, from 1920-1924, Nock found that nobody seemed to be having a very good time. For about twenty-five years, he said, "the vocationalists" had had the upper hand in American education, and the present American society was largely the creation of the generation that they had trained. As a strong and very timely argument for the

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[1]"Motherhood and the State," Atlantic Monthly, CXIV (August, 1914), p. 161. "The Instinct for Style," Nation, LVIII(May 24, 1919), pp. 824-825.

study of the classics, he asserted that it was fun; "that you can have ten times more fun and better fun throughout life, if you know Greek and Latin literature."[1]

On the whole, a growing awareness on Nock's part of the problems and tendencies of American education is discernable during his years with the Freeman. As acting editor, he obviously encouraged contributions on educational topics. There were many articles on education both in America and in foreign countries. Bertrand Russell among others contributed articles on educational philosophy. In 1922, a series of seven articles, "College Education: an Inquest," signed "Somnia Vana" (Latin for Vain Dream) made a thorough survey of the recent developments and tendencies of the American college and university including administrative organization, the task of the president, the role of the faculty, and the curriculum. The final article in the series presented a plan for what the author regarded as a true university.[2] This series was not written by Nock, but much of the criticism and the educational philosophy in these articles coincide with what Nock later wrote.

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[1]"The Classicist's Opportunity," Freeman (March 2, 1921). Reprinted in The Freeman Book (New York, 1924), p. 53.

[2]Freeman, 1922, Vol. IV, February 22, pp. 561-563; March 1, pp. 584-585; Vol. V, March 15, pp. 12-13; March 29, pp. 58-60; April 12, pp. 106-108; April 26, pp. 155-156; May 10, pp. 202-203.

The Freeman frequently ran editorials on academic topics, such as the elective system, academic freedom and architecture on the campus. Under the heading "Current Comment" brief commentaries were given regularly on the issues and happenings of the day, in politics, economics, in culture and society in general. Educational matters were often treated here. Editorials and "Current Comment" were always anonymous. For anybody familiar with Nock's inimitable style, however, his authorship is readily discernable. For practically every issue of the Freeman, Nock wrote a column, "Miscellany," under his signature "Journeyman," informal in manner and dealing with all kinds of subject matter, including education.

Off and on, Nock himself took issue with university presidents and other prominent people who in public speeches such as commencement addresses or in newspaper interviews and articles had spoken on educational matters. So, for instance, Nock praised the president of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler for having given a valid criticism of the American educational system in an address before an educational association. As to Butler's proposed remedies, however, Nock did not find him worth quoting. In this respect, Nock found Butler guilty of "commonplace generalities," which to Nock proved how Mr. Butler was a "victim of his circumstances."[1] President Lawrence Lowell of Harvard,

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[1] "Current Comment," Freeman, IIX (January 16, 1924), p. 434.

President Mark Hopkins of Dartmouth, and the administrators of Vassar College, to mention but a few, also came in for severe criticism in the Freeman.

Nock's strongest statement on academic matters during this period, was made in an editorial in connection with the hundredth anniversary of the University of Virginia. It was titled "The Vanished University."[1] In a sad mood, Nock pointed out that to the friends of serious higher education, the celebration of this centennial must "bear somewhat of an in memoriam character. The University of Virginia was," said Nock, "by its original intention very largely a true university. The buildings Jefferson had designed were still there, and

> their charm is still eloquent, still moving--all the more so, probably, because the tradition that Mr. Jefferson established, the tradition that for so many years they appropriately expressed, is now departed.
> . . .
> It was perhaps inevitable that this should be; the occasion, at all events, is one for neither praise nor blame, but rather for gratefully reminding ourselves of how great a thing it is to have had the University of Virginia bearing witness to that tradition for more than eighty years.

Nock expressed his hopes that this tradition would return some day, "not only upon the University of Virginia, but upon all the schools of the country."[2]

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[1] Freeman (June 29, 1921). Reprinted in The Freeman Book, pp. 57-60.

[2] Ibid., p. 58.

In the same editorial, Nock pointed out that universities, properly so called, had disappeared in the United States. Its present universities, he declared, were patterned after the modern English college, and had little in common, either in organization or in function, with the true university. Nock quoted Ernest Renan as having given a highly plausible explanation of why serious higher education in the United States was in that debased state:

> . . . countries which, like the United States, have created a considerable popular tuition without any serious higher education, will long expiate their error by their intellectual mediocrity, the vulgarity of their manners, their superficial spirit, their failure in general intelligence.[1]

In spite of Nock's adverse opinion of American education and its institutions, an optimistic tone pervaded his writings during the Freeman period. In his own beloved college, St. Stephen's, he found hopeful signs. Thirty years earlier, he wrote, it had given "the best education . . . to be found in the country. Of late, organizational changes had restored the power of the academic policy on the faculty, and things had begun to pick up."[2]

Also in general education Nock saw good prospects at this time. From the head of a large business organization he had learned that the younger generation of America

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[1] Ibid., p. 57.

[2] "Miscellany," Freeman, IIX (November 14, 1923), p. 227.

did not demand any provision for book shelves in their homes. Drawing the inference that young people did not read anything worth keeping, Nock concluded:

> Considering the kind of education that they have had, it would be surprising if they did. . . . Their children and grandchildren however, will do differently; they will have other and larger views of life and will make larger demands on life; so for the present, one must content oneself with that assurance. Even now the tide is unquestionably setting towards a type of education that will meet these larger demands.[1]

Nock's hopes that the new generations of Americans would improve in reading habits over their parents and that the system of education would then answer to larger demands, soon came to fade away.

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[1] "Miscellany," Freeman, VI (February 7, 1922), p. 520.

CHAPTER IV

JEFFERSON AND RABELAIS: THE LENGTHENING OF DOUBT

In 1926, Nock's mind turned to a systematic examination of the nature of education, and to a close observation of American education, especially the institutions of higher learning. From then he took part continuously for years in the educational debate in the country and in so doing gradually developed a coherent philosophy in the field. His heightened interest in education may be accounted for on several grounds.

First of all, the failure of the Freeman must have been a terrible blow to him. After four years a mere seven thousand out of a nation of hundred twenty millions, had found it worthwhile to subscribe to it.[1] In essence, Nock had looked upon Freeman as a venture in education, presenting the facts in the realms of society and culture, treated on the basis of sound philosophical thought, with the purpose, not to convert, but to make people think for themselves. Apparently they were not--with a few notable

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[1] Compare above, p. 32.

exceptions--disposed to do so.

For Nock's logical mind, this poor reception might have aroused suspicion that there was something wrong with an educational system which had not produced a larger audience for a quality magazine like the Freeman. It must also have confirmed his growing suspicion that something was wrong with his earlier conviction that--given the opportunity and the guidance towards self-education--man would naturally be inclined to avail himself of these benefits. From the end of the Freeman on, Nock's thought tended to drift in this direction.

Nock's chief literary pursuits after he left the Freeman give another clue to the turn of his mind towards educational matters. In preparing his study of Thomas Jefferson, "the greatest man, all around, that we ever produced,"[1] Nock penetrated deeply into the education of Jefferson himself as well as into Jefferson's own educational philosophy. What kind of education had produced a man of his stature? Nock obviously put that question to himself, in his approach to the subject, as he devoted a substantial part of the book to Jefferson's education. He also discussed in detail Jefferson's part in various educational proposals and ventures.

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[1]Book of Journeyman, p. 13.

Nock's opus magnum during these years was the Urquahart-Le-Motteux Translation of the Works of Francis Rabelais with its lengthy introduction, which was first published separately in bookform.[1] In the course of this undertaking, Nock visited the several universities in France which Rabelais himself had frequented. Nock did so both to study the universities themselves, comparing them with the report Rabelais had given of them, and also to develop a feeling for the atmosphere in which Rabelais had studied. Furthermore, Nock visited a great many other French as well as English, German, and Belgian universities where material on Rabelais was available or where research on him had been conducted. Nock, as a good observer by instinct and experience, thus developed good points of comparisons with American universities. Rabelais's own vital interest in education, a topic he discussed profoundly in his writings, also provided Nock with food for thought and helped to focus his own interest on the subject.

Another incentive was the conferring upon him by Columbia University of an honorary doctor's degree in letters in 1927. In that connection he delivered a commencement address[2] and assisted at various academic solemnities where he had to listen to a great deal of

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[1] Above, p. 36.

[2] New York Times, June 16, 1927, p.18.

academic oratory of college presidents and other dignitaries.[1] He also followed the reviews of these speeches in the press.[2] In addition, later, as visiting professor at Columbia University, he had occasion to observe American university life at first hand.

Nock did not find this experience a very encouraging one. Trying to find out why the students who sat in his class were there, he found but one who had an interest in the subject treated. The others could give no special reason for their attendance. It was Nock's suspicion that some of them, at least, were there merely because they expected it to be an easy course, but with the one exception all reminded him of an old drinking song, running:

We're here because
We're here because
We're here because
We're here.[3]

Nock's books on both Jefferson and Rabelais were essentially educational undertakings. In spite of his growing doubts about the educability of man, Nock still clung to his conviction that the most efficient method of education was to hold up truth and the good example for everyone to see, to study and to ponder, and to follow at will. To Nock, this was also the only respectable method,

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[1] Book of Journeyman, p. 55.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] Memoirs, p. 259.

as it concurred with his deep conviction of the individual's right to independent thought and the forming of his own opinion upon all matters. Jefferson and Rabelais were in Nock's views two of the most accomplished practitioners of the truly humane and civilized life. He saw it as his mission to hold them and their philosophy of life before the American public at what he considered to be a time of eclipse for true civilization in the United States.

As the theories of education of Rabelais and Jefferson highly influenced Nock's own educational philosophy, a summary of the Rabelaisien and Jeffersonian educational doctrines are given below.

In his great work, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Rabelais devoted several chapters to the education of Gargantua, a burlesque satire of the Scholastic type of education, then in a state of decline, which at Rabelais's time dominated the French universities, with Sorbonne as its most important headquarters. The professors, the "Sorbonnites" as Rabelais called them, are held up for ridicule for sophism, pedantry, hair-splitting discussion, meaningless professional jargon, and empty rhetoric.[1]

This type of education, entirely dominated by the theological faculty, Rabelais most unfavorably contrasted

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[1]Francis Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book I, Chaps. XIV, XV, XXI, XXIII, XXIV.

against the "new education" favored by the humanists, which was then making progress under persecution and heavy resistance from the old guard. This new philosophy of education, Rabelais summed up in a letter from Gargantua to his son Pantagruel while the latter was a student in Paris.[1] The letter constitutes a eulogy--common to all humanists of the Renaissance--of the study of the Greek language and literature. No person who did not know Greek could justly call himself educated, Gargantua emphatically declared in the letter. Next in importance came Latin and then the other classical languages, Hebrew--for study of the scriptures--Chaldaïc and Arabic--for the reading of the apocryphical books. Mathematics, music, and astronomy followed. The classical studies in themselves would lead to a profound knowledge of ancient history, and would make the student familiar with the other arts and sciences such as philosophy, poetry, drama, sculpture, painting, architecture as well as the practical sciences such as agriculture, medicine, and law. The classics should be cultivated, above all, for their formative value upon morale and character. The natural sciences such as botany, zoology, geology, should be studied in nature. It was the ideal of universal knowledge that Gargantua recommended to his son.

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[1] Ibid., Book II, Chap. VIII.

The body should be developed by healthful exercise and sports of all kinds. In sum, it was the revival of the classical ideal mens sana in corpore sano as the ultimate purpose of education which Rabelais favored in common with the other humanists of his time.

The intellectual frenzy and the ideal of encyclopaedic knowledge of the Renaissance humanists also became the hallmark of the Enlightenment. The reverence for the classics was shared by both periods, but the Enlightenment added the fervor for universal literacy to these educational ideas. The theory of education of Rabelais and that of Thomas Jefferson, a foremost American representative of the Enlightenment, had a great deal in common.

The system of general education, proposed by Jefferson for his home state Virginia, Nock observed, provided for elementary schools in all counties open to all. These schools would give instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Each year, the boy "of the best genius in school" would be sent for one or two years' further education to a grammar school, of which there would be twenty in the state, conveniently distributed geographically. Then "the best genius of the whole" would be retained at school for six more years. In that way "twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually," as Nock quoted Mr. Jefferson. At the end of the six years, the best half of the twenty would be sent to William and Mary College, and the rest turned adrift.[1] Nock often

[1]Jefferson, p. 190.

referred to Jefferson's highly selective system of education in his own criticism and proposals for the American educational system.

In Jefferson's educational policy for the University of Virginia there were two points which Nock stressed: (1) the intention to fill the professorial chairs with the best men in their respective field "from either side of the Atlantic," and (2) that there were "some novelties in the University of Virginia . . . founded in the rights of man . . . the institution should be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind to explore and expose every subject susceptible to contemplation."[1]

With his changed opinion of man, however, Nock had come to doubt the value of widespread literacy. He blamed Jefferson for his overconfidence in general literacy as an unqualified good, which would, as Nock quoted Jefferson "enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom." Nock pointed out that a literate nation might more easily be perverted or indoctrinated than an illiterate one.[2] A prolonged stay in Portugal, a country with a high rate of illiteracy, confirmed Nock in these views. He found the people in general very intelligent and civilized, despite the illiteracy, and, furthermore,

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[1] Ibid., p. 193.

[2] Ibid., pp. 190-191.

he found the reading material, books, magazines, etc., in the Lisbon book stores to be of much higher quality than in the American book stores. The vulgar books and magazines, which he found so abundant in his own country, were largely missing in the Portuguese book shops and newsstands.[1] Also, in comparing the contemporary contents in American quality magazines like Harper's, Atlantic Monthly, North American Review, and Century with back issues of the same magazines thirty to forty years previously he found a markedly lower level. His conclusion was that in the old days the literate public had been much smaller and more discriminate and that the magazines in trying to capture more subscribers from the now widely literate mass, had intentionally lowered their standards.[2]

Nock came to the conviction that two economic laws, the law of diminishing returns, and Gresham's law (bad money drives good out), operated as inexorably in the realm of education and culture as they did in the economic field. Increased literacy was followed by a larger amount of poor reading material driving the good literature out. The same thing happened in colleges and universities. The larger they grew, the higher would be the proportion of average students. The good ones would not come, or, if already there, would be crowded out and go elsewhere. In

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[1] Memoirs, pp. 47-48.

[2] Ibid., pp. 41-45.

addition, the bigger these institutions became the less would be the return for the individual student.

Gradually, Nock's earlier ardent faith that everybody would benefit from what he termed education, as distinct from instruction or training, withered away. He saw mankind divided into a small number of educable individuals and a large mass of uneducable people. These could be trained but not educated. On this assumption he based his criticism of the American educational system and developed fully his own theory of education.

CHAPTER V

THE THEORY OF EDUCATION OF ALBERT JAY NOCK

Nock never presented a comprehensive educational philosophy in any one single book or essay. That he possessed one, however, is obvious from his various writings, and the gradual change in his general philosophy of life has a clear parallel in the development of his educational thought. In anything Nock discussed or criticized, political or economic systems, social conditions, literary criticism or culture, he always strove to "see things as they are;" to cut through to fundamentals and make clear distinctions. Without right thinking, there is no right action, was one of his favorite maxims. He applied the same technique in his analysis of American education.

In judging Nock's finished educational theory, it is important to keep in mind his educational nomenclature and the connotations he gave the various terms he used.[1] In his proposals Nock was concerned merely with <u>education</u>, i.e. the imparting of formative knowledge to the <u>educable</u> minority, not with <u>instruction</u> or <u>training</u> to the <u>uneducable</u>

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[1]Compare above, p. 48.

mass. As Nock did not want "to be caught meddling in matters which were too high for him," another favorite expression of his, borrowed from the Psalmist, he refrained from discussing instruction and training, that is to say professional and vocational fields.

Except for his article on the "Gary System" of opportunity centers, Nock never discussed primary schools in any detail.[1] Despite his misgivings about the value of widespread literacy, he never opposed general public education, at least to the level of the three Rs. Beyond that, however, his recommendations for the education of the elite, "those raked from the rubbish," were very precise. In an essay, "Towards a New Quality-Product," he outlined a course of study for them.[2] They should qualify for a college education of his design. As no such college existed any more in the United States, and, in view of the inestimable value of truly educated and cultured citizens to society and to civilization, Nock suggested that a limited but rigorous experiment should be carried out in quality education in the shape of a strictly undergraduate college limited to two hundred and fifty students.

The entrance requirements would be:

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[1]Above, p. 50.

[2]<u>On Doing the Right Thing</u>, pp. 97-122.

(1) knowledge of arithmetic, and of algebra up to quadratics,

(2) ability to read Greek and Latin, both prose and poetry, at sight, and to write Greek and Latin prose.

Nothing else should be required. As Nock put it, "any child worth educating can easily get up those requirements between the ages of eight and fifteen. . . ."[1]

The curriculum of the college should be:

> (1) the whole range of Greek and Roman language, (2) mathematics up as far as the differential calculus, (3) later in the course, six or eight weeks work (three hours per week) in formal logic; and still later, the same amount of time on the history of the English language. Nothing but that.[2]

The college should have no contact with its alumni. There should be no "student activities" or organized extra-curricular activities. No attempts to cultivate "college spirit" should be made; nor should there be permitted any "specious and sentimental Elk-Rotarian good-fellowship" between professor and student.[3] Neither should there be any extra tutoring for weak students. Those who did not make it would have to go elsewhere. When the student had completed the course at the age of twenty-one, or so, he would receive a B.A. degree and then be turned loose, to go wherever he chose; to graduate studies at a university

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[1] Ibid., p. 116.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

[3] Ibid., p. 118.

or to institutes for professional training as a veterinarian, engineer, bond-seller, or whatever he chose. Such, then, was Nock's equivalent to today's "programs for gifted children." Obviously, the course of study corresponded to his own, and his "dream" college to the St. Stephen's College he had attended in his youth.[1]

The experiment would be followed up by observing how the graduates of the proposed college turned out over a lengthy period of time in the professions and in the practice of the humane life as compared to their non-educated but trained colleagues.

To Nock, a college and a university were two different types of institutions. The distinction between them, he felt, had been erased in the American usage of the two words as well as in British English. True universities, he found only on the European Continent. In America, they had become extinct. This view already expressed in his "in memoriam" editorial on the University of Virginia in 1921,[2] he repeated both in his lectures at the University of Virginia, a decade later, and in his Memoirs. Nor did his idea of a true university change over the years.

"Mark Hopkins sitting on one end of a log and a

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[1] Compare above, pp. 15-16.

[2] Ibid., p. 54.

student on the other," Nock often quoted, "is no bad notion of a university." He also frequently pointed to the university of the middle ages, consisting merely of some learned men with a gift for teaching, to whom people flocked to listen to what they had to say in subjects they were interested in. The students stayed as long as they felt that they received something in return for their time and effort, and then moved on.

Nock's university--the only one he would call a true university--was modelled upon the small Continental type of universities which were still serving the Great Tradition. It comprised the four traditional faculties of Literature, Law, Theology, and Medicine.[1] As in the case of the Continental universities, the students should be admitted on a selective basis--as with them it should accept only educable persons.[2] They should be thoroughly steeped in the classics in undergraduate colleges of the type described above. It should be up to the student at the university, as in college, to acquire the education he wanted; this responsibility rested solely with him. The purpose of the

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[1] Book of Journeyman, p. 125; The Theory of Education in the United States, p. 147.

[2] Among the universities Nock especially mentioned as models were the German universities in Bonn and Göttingen and some small, provincial universities in France (Poitiers, Montpellier, Bordeaux) and Belgium (Liège and Ghent).

university should be to educate men of wisdom, and intelligence, not merely skillful or even excellent physicians, lawyers, philologists, or historians.[1] Thus, the faculties of Medicine and Law should stress the history of those disciplines. The professional instruction of physicians and lawyers did not need even to be included. That could very well be taken care of by special institutions. The run-of-the-mill practitioner, the uneducable one, need not even go to a university, as education was beyond him. As for the educable people, they were so precious few that they could not fill the needs of society; so the merely trained practitioner was necessary in large numbers to perform the services required.

The university of Nock's fancy being small, the organization and plant could be correspondingly simple. The important thing, given bright students, would be the faculty members. The professors should be keen, highly cultured men, not merely top scholars in their fields. Nock mentioned Oliver Wendell Holmes, Longfellow and James Russell Lowell as the type of cultured men, not necessarily outstanding in the areas in which they lectured, to whom an older and wiser generation at Harvard University had given chairs. Men of their caliber, however, had become increasingly rare on the faculties of modern American

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[1] *Memoirs*, p. 279.

universities. Specialists of all kinds, trained outside the Great Tradition had taken their place.[1] There should be absolute freedom of thought, expression and discussion. To secure this, no connection with organized religion or with the state should exist. "The relations between State and education are as immoral and monstrous as those between the State and religion."[2]

Nock possessed an arsenal of arguments for the Great Tradition. The study of the classics involved a deeply formative experience. The person who had been through such an education possessed a mature mind. He was an experienced person, well equipped to tackle any kind of study on his own. He was always a realist, striving "to see things as they are," untrammelled by prejudice and insensible to any kind of indoctrination. He could not be deceived. Also, the Greek and Latin classics presented the longest and most varied continuous record that existed of what the human mind had engaged itself in. Like Rabelais four hundred years earlier, Nock pointed out that in the course of their study one came into contact with practically all fields of human knowledge.[3]

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[1] The Theory of Education, p. 100.

[2] "The Vanished University," The Freeman Book, p. 58.

[3] Compare above, p. 62.

The chief aim of the Great Tradition was to Nock, the furthering of:

> a harmonious and balanced development in human society of the instinct of workmanship (the instinct for progressive material well-being, with which industry and trade are concerned), the instinct of intellect and knowledge, the instinct of religion and morals, the instinct of beauty and poetry, the instinct of social life and manners.[1]

The wise social philosophers were to Nock those who like Socrates, and Jesus, and Lao-Tze, merely "hung up" their theses for everybody to see but did not go out propagandizing. "If any man have ears to hear," said the Santissimo Salvatore, "let him hear."[2] Trying to bend people's minds to one's will, was to violate the principal of individual freedom. The great shortcoming of Henry George, "one of the first half-dozen of the world's creative geniuses in social philosophy,"[3] had been in Nock's eyes that he went out proselytizing, instead of letting his perfect single-tax system speak for itself, merely being handy with information and guidance to those who approached him.[4]

The professor and teacher in Nock's view should act just like the great philosophers had done. He would not intrude upon the student but would present his knowledge

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[1] Book of Journeyman, p. 122.

[2] Memoirs, p. 129.

[3] Henry George, p. 7.

[4] Ibid., pp. 196-197.

and wisdom in lectures and seminars and for the rest, be approachable, at hand with friendly advise and guidance. Thus Nock's ideal teacher would be like the preceptors he himself had studied under in his youth: his own father, the teachers at the Peoria school, the professors at St. Stephen's College--and, like the teachers he had met in the Gary "opportunity centers."

Nock never gave a detailed explanation of what he meant by "the mechanics of teaching." He explicitly stated that it did not interest him very much until an educational system was devised which comprehended the Great Tradition.[1] As to Latin and Greek studies he limited himself to advising that the classics be introduced in the right order, compatible with a child's understanding of the subject matter and that they be taught chiefly for content: for their literary and historic interest, that is for their formative value. His own hard experience in preparing for the Peoria school evidently lingered in his memory.[2] In general, Nock stressed the importance of correct timing in education, i.e. the introduction of a subject matter at the time when the student was mature enough to grasp it.[3]

The only other subject he had very much at heart

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[1]"The Absurdity of Teaching English," Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), p. 119.

[2]Compare above, p. 14.

[3]Henry George, p. 179.

aside from classical languages was history which he included in the category of formative studies. He quoted Goethe on Lord Byron: "When he tries to think, he is a child," and he pointed out that such was the case with any person who did not know history. And he found that many Americans did not know history and therefore fitted Goethe's description precisely.[1] He was strongly opposed to the teaching of history for the purpose of inculcating patriotism.[2] History should in Nock's view be taught and studied to make out "history-minded," not necessarily "history-learned."[3]

On the whole, Nock disliked pedantry in education. It had nothing to do with culture. On the contrary, it had a damaging influence. He wanted to establish a clear distinction between useful and useless knowledge. Useful knowledge was instrumental knowledge: while the essence of culture was useless knowledge such as history and the classics. It was precisely the function of the university to preserve such knowledge.[4]

In his journal he made the following entry:

> Considered as a process, culture consists in an intensive learning and an intensive forgetting. . . .

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[1]"American Education," Free Speech and Plain Language, p. 190.

[2]"The Nature of Education," Book of Journeyman, pp. 44-47.

[3]"'New' and 'Modern,'" Ibid., p. 4.

[4]"The Value of Useless Knowledge," Free Speech and Plain Language, pp. 266-284.

> Considered as a possession, culture might be described as the residuum left by a diligently forgotten learning.
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> I could never reconcile myself to the idea that the scientific school had any proper place in a university. A university implies faculties, and the function of a faculty is not the dissemination of useful knowledge but the curatorship of useless knowledge; the kind of knowledge that, properly acquired and properly forgotten, leaves the residuum of culture. . . . For example, the Faculty of Medicine at Johns Hopkins ought not to be dealing out knowledge to medical students. Let a medical school do that. It ought to be winnowing and conserving the vast body of useless knowledge that has grown up around the profession.
>
> Let us have all the science there is, let us have all the useful knowledge there is, but let us have them from the scientific schools, and leave the colleges and the universities free to employ themselves upon the enormous resources of useless knowledge, which are of such incalculable value, and are now so completely neglected that one could make out a pretty good case for the thesis that the world is perishing of inattention to the discipline of useless knowledge.[1]

Thus, Nock was by no means hostile to instruction and training which he viewed as good and necessary. "Let us have all the science there is," he declared in his lectures at the University of Virginia.[2] He expounded at length on the advantages to society of having a trained citizenry. Still, science and vocational training had other spokesmen and were well taken care of while education was thoroughly neglected. There was simply nowhere to go in the country for an educable person, he felt, and therefore he took it upon himself to champion true education, the discipline of the Great Tradition.[3]

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[1] A Journal of These Days, pp. 285-286. Entry dated December 7, 1933.

[2] The Theory of Education, p. 104.

[3] Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

NOCK'S CHIEF CRITICISM OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

Much of Nock's criticism of American education has already been stated or is implicit in what already has been said. He was by no means the only person who criticized American education, especially the colleges and universities, during the 1920s and 1930s. Since the end of World War I, vast discontent had manifested itself, not least among the professional educators. Shortcomings of the system were a common topic for speeches by college presidents and other interested persons. More than a generation earlier, in the 1890s, the revolution of the college and university curriculum, with its transfer to the elective system, had been practically completed. The result could now be thoroughly scrutinized and weighed.

It was a season of repentance, a kind of blue Monday. What had happened to the good liberal arts education which the older system had produced? Had the baby possibly been thrown out with the bathwater? Had the entrance requirements and the college curricula been watered down to the point where they had lost all substance? Were there too many "snap" courses, too many electives with little or no justification in institutions pretending to be

academic? Should there be strict standards, and, if so, where should one draw the line? Had the institutions of higher learning grown too big to ensure quality and coherence to the program? These and similar questions were raised again and again by professional educators as well as by interested laymen.

It was at this time that the intelligence test came into its own. Such tests had been performed upon army recruits and other groups. They had led to the depressing conclusion that the majority of people would never develop intellectually beyond the twelve to fourteen year-old level. The question was raised: Was there actually a sufficient number of educable people to fill the numerous and increasing colleges and universities in the country?

Thus, Albert Jay Nock was far from being alone as a critic of the American educational system. He enjoyed distinguished company. President Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University observed that the system might be impressive, measured by cost, number of pupils and physical equipment, but that the result was less impressive in terms of truly educated men turned out.[1] President Mark Hopkins of Dartmouth complained that "too many men are going to college."[2] President Lawrence Lowell of Harvard University

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[1]"Current Comment," Freeman, IIX (January 16, 1924), p. 434.

[2]Ibid., VI (October 4, 1922), p. 75.

and others wanted to restrict college admissions owing to sheer physical inability to care for more students.[1] President Robert Hutchins of Chicago joined in the chorus,[2] so did the presidents of other colleges and universities including Brown, Haverford, and St. Stephen's.[3] The list of complaints and complainers could be made much longer.

In 1930, Dr. Abraham Flexner, director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, published a book, based upon thorough observations of American, English, and German universities, drawing comparisons between the three countries.[4] It is still looked upon as a standard work in the field. Flexner, like Nock, made a distinction between education and training; American college curricula were constructed, "not to educate, but to train," he said, and were teeming with "ad hoc courses."[5] He coined the expression bargain-counter education. He blamed the American universities for "a wild, uncontrolled, and uncritical expansion" which caused them to "break beneath the incongruous load placed upon them," and he

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[1] Ibid., IIX (February 6, 1924), p. 507.

[2] "That Dreadful Average," Book of Journeyman, p. 59.

[3] "American Education," Free Speech and Plain Language, p. 170.

[4] Abraham Flexner, Universities, American, English, German (New York, 1930).

[5] Ibid., p. 71.

blamed the educational understructure, the elementary and secondary schools, for being demoralized by politicians.[1] Flexner, like Nock, talked about the "saving remnant";[2] he, too, castigated the cultivation of "college spirit" and of social contacts as being too dominating in college life and leading to a false loyalty, damaging to disinterested studies. Again, like Nock, he deplored the intertwining of the graduate school and college.

From 1926 to 1931, Nock took an active part in the educational discussion; sometimes with serious and penetrating analyses, striking down to fundamentals; sometimes with flippant comments upon the lamentations and proposals made by the "Big Lights" in education. Gradually, he created a significant place for himself in the debate.

His contributions in the New Freeman during the latter part of the twenties were mainly written in the light vein, seriously intended. As a rule, he was sceptical of other men's proposals to remedy the situation in order to save the Great Tradition and liberal arts colleges, as well as of the talk going on about the introduction of a "new humanism."[3] He refused to endorse a drive to support five hundred small liberal arts colleges with a half billion

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[1] Ibid., p. 222.

[2] Ibid., p. 69.

[3] "New' and 'Modern?," Book of Journeyman, p. 3.

dollar additional endowment, on the grounds that those colleges most certainly did not offer a real education in the liberal arts, and that, even if they did, there would not be enough students in the country capable of taking such an education to fill five hundred colleges, however small. "The American curriculum in the liberal arts is a combination of bargain-counter, grab-bag and Christmas tree," he declared.[1] The only remedy he could see was to throw out about ninety per cent of the students in those colleges. This reduction would correspond to Thomas Jefferson's scheme for public education.[2]

Nock was not impressed by what the high and the mighty in education were saying. He confessed that he did not take any stock in the utterances of President Hutchins, University of Chicago, who reputedly had said that the modern university system was geared to the average student, and that the first duty of a college was to organize itself so that a student who wished to become a scholar would not have insuperable obstacles put in his path. Nock found this much to the point, but he did not expect Hutchins to do anything about it in his own institution, as it would mean the cutting down of the student population and the shrinking of the university to a fraction of its size. On

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[1] "Grab-bag Education," Ibid., p. 19.

[2] Ibid., p. 120.

the same grounds, Nock distrusted the sincerity of President Butler of Columbia. In a commencement address, Butler had talked about "that dreadful average which . . . is the mortal enemy of excellence" and to which the universities had to cater.[1] Nock was certain that Butler was not going to change anything at Columbia as it would have meant the same shrinking of the university to Butler as Hutchins' ideas would have meant to his, if they had been transplanted into action. When Butler had spoken "affectingly" of the Great Tradition to the freshman class, Nock pointed out that Butler had given "no hint that they were coming to the world's unlikeliest place for any regenerative contact with it."[2]

Nock did not confine himself to rebutting other people. He had his own ideas and he expressed them in a straight-forward manner in several essays and finally in his lectures at the University of Virginia in 1931.

In following the educational debate, Nock had found that little serious effort was being made to strike down to the basic principles and ideas underlying the American system. As long as this was not done, he contended, nothing really constructive could be achieved; without this any

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[1]"That Dreadful Average," Book of Journeyman, pp. 59-62.

[2]"Ireland and the Great Tradition," Ibid., p. 124.

amount of "tinkering" with the system would be of little help; it would remain in a state of confusion. With his characteristic thoroughness and logic, he set out to define those fundamentals. He had found that there was among the educators no clear concept of what kind of product the schools should bring out and that, therefore, standards were lacking for the "material" the schools needed to be able to turn out a reasonably guaranteed "quality product."

In his essay titled, "Towards a New Quality-Product," Nock debated this question as well as some of the fundamental conventions underlying the American educational system.[1] First of all, he found that a clear division had never been made between education and instruction, it having been tacitly assumed that they were the same thing. In his view, they were entirely different concepts. Instruction, Nock said, was not necessarily educational. An instructed person was by no means necessarily an educated person, and an instructional institution was not necessarily educational. As long as this distinction was not clearly made, the American educational system would remain in a state of confusion.

The second basic error was the American notion that everybody ought to go to school, college, and university, regardless of ability; while the true fact was that a large

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[1] On Doing the Right Thing, p. 97.

proportion of the younger people did not have the intellectual ability to go through even secondary school or high school with any profit to themselves. Nock referred in this context to army tests which had confirmed this fact.[1]

Thirdly, there was among the instructors and educators no clear concept of what kind of product the schools should bring out. Nock compared them to disadvantage with Henry Ford, who knew exactly what qualities his cars should possess and also could guarantee them. Dealing with inanimate material, Ford could do so; the schools could not apply the same rigidity in its specifications, but they ought to have some kind of a coherent ideal of what they wanted to produce and some standards for the human material with which they worked. Instead, the American educational institutions on all levels had kept expanding, equating bigness with greatness, worshipping numbers in lieu of quality and, in order to keep their student bodies large, modifying their requirements by the introduction of the "elective system." For the university, this was a correct principle but, unfortunately, it had seeped down into colleges and secondary schools. In essence, this meant that education had disappeared and instruction had taken its place. There was little else for the schools to do, in view of the prevailing conditions and the exigencies of

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[1]Compare above, p. 79.

society, Nock admitted. Charles Eliot, the late president of Harvard, who had introduced the elective system there and, "in consequence was enabled to ride the shoulders of American education like the Old Man of the Sea for nearly half a century," was indeed a great interpreter of the times, Nock conceded, and he expressed his admiration for Eliot to this extent--but a great educator, or indeed educator in any degree, Eliot was not. By the same verdict, he condemned Butler, President of Columbia University.[1]

A bewildering assortment of vocational courses, "snap" courses, and courses in English, all kinds of courses were now swelling the catalogues of the educational institutions as a result of the introduction of the elective system.

The third fundamental convention that Nock set out to expose in his essay was the general ignorance of the distinction between formative knowledge and instrumental knowledge and the creeping notion among those who knew this difference that the latter could substitute for the former. With the movement towards educational mass-production, the borderline between these two kinds of knowledge had become erased, and it was being more or less assumed that any kind of education per se was educational, i.e., formative. Formative studies had been crowded out or

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[1] On Doing the Right Thing, p. 108.

withered to mere vestiges of the past, the time when the distinction had been seen and upheld. Society wanted it so; the overwhelming majority had no idea of what formative knowledge or true education was. The representatives of education, Nock concluded, were overpowered and had yielded.

To Nock, courses in English were the very epitome of absurdity, and he devoted a special essay to this matter in 1929.[1] "I would as soon think of undertaking to teach people how to breathe," he exclaimed. He estimated that roughly twenty thousand courses in English were being taught at American colleges and universities. In his student days, such courses had not existed; yet everybody in his college had both spoken and written good English and had cultivated English literature on their own. In spite of all the courses in English offered, this was no longer the case. The only explanation for this development so far as Nock could see was that these courses had been incorporated into the curriculum to accommodate the "average students" who had come to crowd the colleges and universities. They had, in his view, no business being there, and should be turned away. They were not able to benefit from more than a primary education and, perhaps a little secondary schooling, and they, therefore, should be given no more--

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[1] "The Absurdity of Teaching English," Bookman, LXIX (April, 1929), pp. 113-119.

just as Jefferson had proposed for the State of Virginia. Not until the average collegian had been sent away, could the American college and secondary schools become educational institutions, and until this had been achieved, nothing of value could be done.

By the time Nock gave the Page-Barbour lectures on "The Theory of Education in the United States" at the University of Virginia in 1931, he had moved a step further in his search for the fundamental principles underlying the existing system. He had come to the conclusion that it was founded on eighteenth-century political doctrine of equality and democracy and of the faith in general literacy as leading to an informed and intelligent citizenry, equipped to safe-guard the rights of the individual. These theories were at the time of the Enlightenment untried, speculative ideas. Nock pointed out that in subsequent history it had been proven that these doctrines were erroneous when translated into political action. In the educational context, furthermore, they had been interpreted in a distorted fashion. The doctrine of equality had been equated with the idea that everybody was educable, and that in the realm of spirit "everybody is able to enjoy everything that anybody can enjoy."[1] From this had

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[1] The Theory of Education in the United States, p. 51.

followed that the doctrine of democracy in its popular version had come to embody a strong resentment against superiority; against the idea of an elite. The conclusion had been drawn that there should be "nothing worth enjoying for anybody to enjoy that everybody may not enjoy."[1]

The educational system set up under these auspices had been distorted by a resentment against the educable elite and had been lowered to the average man. Furthermore, the spirit of democracy had set for the schools the goal of giving "the people what they want" not that they should be good. These theories Nock did not find equalitarian and democratic, but pseudo-equalitarian and pseudo-democratic. They were unsound. The third basic pillar of the American educational system, the doctrine of general literacy as an unqualified good thing, was quite as fallacious as the other two and had been proven so. An educational system based on unsound doctrines could not possibly work well, and experience had borne that out.

Nock saw, however, one noble and disinterested sentiment, underlying our school system: that of parental love. American parents in general wanted to give their children all the education available. Together, these four basic ideas had led to the notion that all subject matter should be common property. The crux of the matter was that the

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[1] Ibid., p. 51.

Great Tradition was not within the intellectual reach of anybody but the educable. Instead of recognizing this fact, our educational institutions had accommodated themselves--under social pressure--to the pseudo-equalitarian, pseudo-democratic philosophy and the false notion of the worth of general literacy.

Out of all this had emerged that confusion and malfunction of the system which was obvious to so many and under such constant debate. Training had become identified with education; the division between formative knowledge and instrumental knowledge had been eradicated; the distinction between college and university had been blurred; even the respective functions of the secondary school and the college were not upheld; and the opinion prevailed that educables and uneducables alike should go to college and university.

The result was that the Great Tradition had been swept away; the universities and colleges had become overgrown in size; bigness had been equated with greatness; the law of diminishing return had set in, and the student was receiving less and less from his education. Gresham's law was working inexorably: the good students were driven away by the sheer presence of an overwhelming majority of "average students." All subject matter including all kinds of vocational training, had been allowed into the college and university curricula, and, in order to cater to all the

uneducables, additional "snap" courses had been crowded in. The institution of higher learning had, like the modern drug store, taken upon itself functions which did not belong there, so that its primary and essential function had become overlooked. The net result was that there was no longer any place for the educable person to get an education. "Our system is not educational . . . its institutions are no educational institutions," Nock concluded.[1] He warned of the risks to a society of letting its educable persons go to waste--history taught the lesson that no society had done so without coming to great disaster.

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[1] Ibid., p. 116.

CHAPTER VII

THE LONG VIEW

In his essay, "Towards a New Quality-Product," written in 1927,[1] Nock recalled that he had discussed his idea of a small college based on the classical curriculum with a young graduate in an English university. Later his friend had pointed out to him in a letter that this would be a cruel experiment. "The cultivated, sensitive beings that this kind of education would produce, would probably all die six months after they were exposed to your actual civilization," his friend had concluded.[2] This was no expression of Oxonian superciliousness, for his friend had added that English civilization was heading swiftly and surely in the same direction.

Even considering the actual human sacrifice which might be involved, Nock expressed, however, the opinion that the experiment was worth making for the possible benefits which would in the long run accrue to American civilization.

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[1]Compare above, p. 86.

[2]On Doing the Right Thing, p. 121.

Five years later, Nock had pondered further on this matter and had apparently changed his views. An essay, "The Disadvantages of Being Educated," dated June, 1932, bears this out; pointing to the experience of Henry Adams fifty years earlier, when, as Adams had said in his The Education of Henry Adams, "the American character showed singular limitations, which sometimes drove the student of civilized man to despair,"[1] Nock emphasized that the disadvantages in American society for the educated person in the meantime had increased considerably, and that during the last few years the odds had gone dead against him. Therefore it was doubtful if it would any longer be fair to give the same advice to a young person to seek an education. It would make him "alone in spirit--a depressing situation, and especially almost unbearably depressing to youth."[2] Education made a person ask more from life than society under prevailing conditions could give him. It also made him think, and there was a pervasive resentment against thought in American society, which made the taste for thinking a decided disadvantage. An educated person furthermore, liked to cultivate a sense of history, and this made him sceptical about all kinds of popular movements, political, economic, social, which in turn increased

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[1]Free Speech and Plain Language, p. 223.

[2]Ibid., p. 215.

his isolation. Another disadvantage was that education made some things distasteful to a person, such as pushing oneself forward, and this was under prevailing conditions--the Great Depression-- necessary for anybody who aspired to a reasonable existence materially. The educated person had the joys and satisfactions of his education; nobody could take it from him, but it helped him little if he had to live in utter destitution.

These thoughts apparently were brewing in Nock's mind when he gave his lectures at the University of Virginia in 1931. He made no proposal of experiments with educational institutions based on the classical curriculum. In fact, he did not make any practical proposals at all for changes in the American institutions of higher learning or in the educational system on the whole. He merely made several suggestions in matters of nomenclature. He suggested that the American colleges and universities abandon these names and call themselves institutes, and that degrees like Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctor of Philosophy and similar time-honored academic degrees which formerly had had clear connotations, connected with formative knowledge, should not be given to their graduates but replaced by other titles, ". . . because words have power. . . . One can easily cheat oneself with words."[1]

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[1] The Theory of Education in the United States, p. 120.

Nock expressed great respect for what the American institutions of higher learning were doing as training schools, equipping the mass of uneducable but trainable youth with the kind of instrumental knowledge they needed for the society in which they would live and work. It was a great work--a necessary work--and it was well done. Nock saw great need for it and wished that this work could be extended. But these institutions would be able to do an even better work as training schools if they were not based upon an unsound theory. This was a disability for them as they could not concentrate on providing training or instruction but had to go through the motion of, in addition, supplying some kind of general education.

It was, Nock said, against the order of nature that institutions like Columbia College--of whose faculty Nock himself was a member at the time--could simultaneously be a training school for the uneducable and an educational school for the educable. Those functions were incompatible and both suffered. Nock wished to make a clean sweep with the pseudo-equalitarian, pseudo-democratic theory and see a return to the Jeffersonian theory of education, i.e., the same theory which had remained the basis for the Continental universities in Europe which did exist exclusively for the educable and did not pretend to provide, or wished to provide, anything for the uneducable. For his training ample provision was made in other types of institutions.

In spite of the acute and widespread discontent with the American educational system, Nock did not expect that such a revision of its educational theory as he proposed would come about. The Great Tradition had fallen into such complete abeyance in the American society that a return to it was no longer possible in Nock's view. Having abandoned the regenerative power of the Great Tradition, our civilization would go on repeating the experience of other societies, "lapsing into decay and death."[1] Even if one day its eyes were opened to the vital need for the Great Tradition, it would no longer have the power to transform itself.

But Nock did not end his lectures in a note of complete despair. The Great Tradition did not care, he said, for national boundaries, nor did its members. They belonged to a republic of their own, and they knew that the Great Tradition would always go on reasserting itself.[2]

The reaction to Nock's lectures when they were subsequently published, obviously was not encouraging. "Professional educators for the most part snubbed it [the book];

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[1] The Theory of Education in the United States, p. 151.

[2] These statements refer to the fact that Nock did not have a nationalist concept of culture. In his writings he often pointed out that the great ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Virgil, and Marcus Aurelius never contemplated the future of culture into set terms of nationality or race or time but recognized that the self-preserving instinct of mankind was on its side and therefore did not worry. ("A Cultural Forecast," On Doing the Right Thing, pp. 95-96.)

those who did not, with two exceptions, abused it heartily," wrote Nock summing up the criticism in his Memoirs.[1] But there was one bright spot: the Jesuits praised the book, and "if the Jesuits praise a work of education, it is sure to be a good one," Nock concluded.[2] To him they seemed to be the only people in the United States who had any idea of what education really meant.[3]

On the other hand, the climate of opinion among American educators at the time was by no means altogether hostile to much of the criticism and viewpoints presented by Nock in his lectures. This is confirmed by the fact that Nock, who for more than a decade had made no bones about his negative opinion of higher education in America, was invited to give these lectures at the very university over which he had written an obituary of sorts nine years earlier.[4] His appointment as visiting professor to Columbia

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[1]p. 87. John Dewey wrote about Nock's Theory of Education in the United States in a review for The New Republic: "Since anything Mr. Nock writes is worth pondering both for its style and for its substance, it is to be hoped that the extreme exaggeration of his book will not repel educators and trainers from giving it serious consideration." [LXX (April 13, 1932), p. 242] Note that Dewey made a distinction between "educators" and "trainers."

[2]Memoirs, p. 87. Also: Journal of These Days, p. 31.

[3]Memoirs, pp. 87-88.

[4]Compare above, p. 54.

University--the institution he had perhaps castigated most severely in his writings on education--bears witness to the same kind of hospitality towards a relentless critic.[1] As for academic freedom, Nock found the atmosphere at Columbia as "free as air."[2] Johns Hopkins University also honored Nock about this time with an invitation to lecture on the physician-humanist Rebelais to its medical faculty in connection with the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first book in the Gargantua and Pantagruel series, which Nock greatly enjoyed doing.[3]

Nock certainly was not ostracized for his iconoclastic theory of education, and many educators shared his worries. Abraham Flexner expressed the same opinions concerning the deflation of academic degrees and titles,[4] and of the loose connotation of the term university in American usage.[5]

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[1]In a letter, dated March 20, 1932, Nock wrote to Gilbert Chinard, the recognized Jefferson biographer, at that time Professor of French at the Johns Hopkins University: "I had resigned my work at college, Columbia University and Stephen's College, thinking I had better get out before I was thrown out on account of my views on education, and my freedom in setting them forth. But it seems in spite of all this, the authorities want me back another two months next year, so I shall probably return for October and November;" (Selected Letters of Albert Jay Nock, pp. 108-109).

[2]Letters from Albert Jay Nock, p. 44.

[3]Selected Letters, p. 107. Letter to Gilbert Chinard, dated March 20, 1932.

[4]Flexner, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

[5]Ibid., p. 45. Flexner's concern with the state of humanism in American education and the attitude of society towards education is in addition reflected in two earlier books by him: Do Americans Really Value Education? (Cambridge, 1927, and The Burden of Humanism (Oxford, 1928).

Robert Hutchins' speeches and lectures during these years show great concern over the loss of the Great Tradition and he, too, saw a conflict between the two functions of the university, "the pursuit of truth for its own sake," and "the preparation of men and women for their life work."[1]

After 1931, Nock wrote little about education, except for a concluding chapter in his Memoirs, adding nothing new to the opinions he had expressed in his lectures at the University of Virginia.[2] His interest was primarily in the quality of American civilization and he discussed education merely as its indispensable servant.[3] Nor did Nock have any aspirations to take on permanently a professor's chair, although he had many offers, much less did he wish to become a college president or a trustee.[4]

So, having said his word on education, and being, like Plato, a strong believer in the difficulty of education

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[1]Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America (New Haven, 1962), p. 33. First published in 1936.

[2]Memoirs, Chap. XIV, p. 258.

[3]"My interest is only in a competent diagnosis of the weaknesses and disabilities of American civilization--disabilities which are every day increasingly apparent--and in finding some remedy for them," Nock wrote in his essay "Towards a New Quality-Product," (On Doing the Right Thing, pp. 120-121).

[4]Journal of These Days, p. 222. Entry dated July 26, 1933. On Doing the Right Thing, p. 120.

contrary to the prevailing views of society, Nock after 1931 limited himself to occasional comments on the debate over American higher education and on the various reforms that were proposed or instigated. Nothing could be done in his eyes, as long as the fundamental conditions persisted, and nobody concerned seemed to him inclined to do anything serious about them. He presented his final attitude and expectations quite faithfully when he declared that, "if a hundred college presidents published a manifesto on what really ails education in this country, and then resigned in a body, something might begin to happen."[1]

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[1] Journal of These Days, p. 49. Entry dated September 20, 1932.

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