

## “The Lessons in History”

(Will and Ariel Durant)

Peace...I happened upon this book recently, and considering the Global political concerns of Autocratic “Batterer” forces across Earth, the enlightened perspective really helped. One of the ways I like to process concerns is through making notes and gathering quotes.

May the quotes bring light to your day as well.

“To those of us who study history not merely as a warning reminder of man’s follies and crimes, but also as an encouraging remembrance of generative souls, the past ceases to be a depressing chamber of horrors; it becomes a celestial city, a spacious country of the mind, wherein a thousand saints, statesmen, inventors, scientists, poets, artists, musicians, lovers, and philosophers still live and speak, teach and carve and sing. The historian will not mourn because he (she) can see no meaning in human existence except that which man puts into it; let it be our pride that we ourselves may put meaning into our lives, and sometimes a significance that transcends death. If a man is fortunate he will, before he dies, gather up as much as he can of his civilized heritage and transmit it to his children. And to his final breath he will be grateful for this inexhaustible legacy, knowing that it is our nourishing mother and our lasting life”. (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 102).

"Obviously historiography cannot be a science. It can only be an industry, an art, and a philosophy-- An industry by ferreting out the facts, an art by establishing a meaningful order in the chaos of materials, a philosophy by seeking perspective and enlightenment. 'The present is the past rolled up for action, and the past is the present unrolled for understanding'--or so we believe and hope. In philosophy, we try to see the part in the light of the whole; in the 'philosophy of history' we try to see this moment in the light of the past. We know that in both cases, this is a council of perfection; total

perspective is an optical illusion. We do not know the whole of man's history;...Perhaps within these limits, we can learn enough from history to bear reality patiently, and to respect one another's delusions...Since man is a moment in astronomic time, a transient guest of the earth... what history has to say about the nature, conduct, and prospects of man. It is a precarious enterprise, and only a fool would try to compress a hundred centuries into a hundred pages of hazardous conclusions. We proceed." (Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pgs 12-13).

### Argument for Democracy

"...The best that the amiable philosopher can hope for is an approximate equality of legal justice and educational opportunity. A society in which all potential abilities are allowed to develop and function will have a survival advantage in the competition of groups." (Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pg 20)

*(next quote) Regarding Women's rights and not allowing choice. The irony of the population shift. What was intended for control/chattel defeated itself?*

"Family limitation played some part in the history of Greece and Rome. It is amusing to find Julius Caesar offering (59 B.C.) rewards to Romans who had many children, and forbidding childless women to write in litters or wear jewelry. Augustus renewed this campaign some forty years later, with like futility. Birth control continued to spread in the upper classes as while immigrant stocks from the Germanic North and the Greek or Semitic East replenished and altered the population of Italy." (Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pg 23)

"Ideally parentage should be a privilege of heath, not a by-product of sexual agitation" (Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pg 22).

"There is no humorist like history" (Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pg 24)

:0) Indeed, we proceed

"History is subject to geology. Every day the sea encroaches somewhere upon the land, or the land upon the sea, cities disappear under the water, and sunken cathedrals ring their melancholy bells. Mountains rise and fall in the rhythm of emergence and erosion; rivers swell and flood, or dry up, or change their course; valleys become deserts and isthmuses become straights. To the geologic eye all surface of the earth is a fluid form, and man moves upon it as insecurely as Peter walking on the waves to Christ...Generations of men establish a growing mastery over the Earth, but they are destined to become fossils in its soil". Durant, *The Lessons of History*, pgs 14 and 15).

"A knowledge of history may teach us that civilization is a co-operative product, that nearly all peoples have contributed to it; it is our common heritage and debt; and the civilized soul will reveal itself in treating every man or woman, however lowly, as a representative of one of these creative and contributory groups" (Durant, "The Lessons of History", pg 31).

"Society is founded not on the ideals but on the nature of man, and the constitution of man rewrites the constitution of states. But what is the constitution of man?...Each instinct generates habits and is accompanied by feelings. Their totality is a nature of man. But how far has human nature changed in the course of history?

Theoretically there must have been some change; natural selection has presumably operated upon psychological as well as physiological variations. Nevertheless known history shows little alteration in the conduct of mankind...Means an instrumentalities change; Motives and ends remain the same... Evolution and man has during record of time has been social rather than biological" (Durant, "The Lessons of History", pgs 32-34).

Regarding the "Strongman" "I alone can fix it" creature:

"Here the initiative individual---the 'great man', the 'hero' the 'genius'---regains his place as a formative force in history...When he is a hero of action, the demands of his position and the exultation of crisis develop and inflate him to such magnitude and powers as would in normal times have remained potential and untapped. But he is not merely an effect. Events take place through him as well as around him; his ideas and decisions

enter vitally into the course of history" Durant, "The Lessons of History", pg 34-35).

"It is good that new ideas should be heard, for the sake of the few that can be used; but it is also good that new ideas should be compelled to go through the mill objection, opposition, and contumely; this is the trial heat which innovations must survive before being allowed to enter the human race. It is good that the old should resist the young, and that the young should prod the old; out of this tension, as out of the strife of the sexes and the classes, comes a creative tensile strength, a stimulated development, a secret and basic unity and movement of the whole. Durant, "The Lessons of History", pg 36).

(next quote): The Agricultural Code of 1500 years and how the Industrial Revolution changed the structure of life, no longer only village life:

"On the farm the family was the unit of production under the discipline of the father and the seasons, and paternal authority had a firm economic base...at fifteen (the young men) understood the physical tasks of life as well as he would understand at forty; all that he needed was land a plow and a willing arm. So he married early almost as soon as nature wished; As for young women, chastity was indispensable, for its loss might bring unprotected motherhood. For fifteen hundred years this agricultural moral code of continence, early marriage divorceless monogamy, and multiple maternity maintained itself..." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 38)

"Gradually, then rapidly and evermore widely, the Industrial Revolution changed the economic form and moral superstructure of European and American life. Men, women, and children left home and family, authority and unity, to work as individuals, individually paid, in factories built to house not men but machines. Every decade the machines multiplied and became more complex... Children were no longer economic assets, marriage was delayed...The rebellious youth was no longer constrained by the surveillance of the village, he could hide his sins in the protective anonymity of the city crowd...education spread religious doubts" (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 39)

"Who will dare to write a history of human goodness? So we cannot be sure that the moral laxity of our times is a herald of decay rather than a painful or delightful transition between a moral code that has lost its agricultural basis and another that our industrial civilization has yet to forge into social order and normality...Roman morals began to 'decay' soon after the conquered Greeks passed into Italy (146 B.C), But Rome continued to have great statesmen, philosophers, poets and artists until the death of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 180). Politically Rome was at a nadir when Caesar came (60 B.C.); Yet it did not quite to come to the barbarians till A.D. 465. May we take as long to fall as did Imperial Rome!..Meanwhile, much of our moral freedom is good: It is pleasant to be relieved of theological terrors, to enjoy without qualm the pleasures that harm neither others or ourselves" (Durant, The Lessons of History, pgs 41-42)

(next quote) - Regarding claims of "Patriotism" or "National purity" using Christian/Muslim Nationalism to oppress and grab power:

"More and more the hierarchy spent its energies in promoting orthodoxy rather than morality, and the Inquisition almost fatally disgraced the Church. Even while preaching peace the Church fomented religious wars in the sixteenth-century France and the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth-century Germany." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 45)

Regarding the overall view of Religion throughout History (Reminds of Revelations 14:6)

"If history supports any theology this would be the dualism of Zoroastrian or Manichaeism: a good spirit and an evil spirit battling for control of the universe and men's souls." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 45)

"Since wealth is an order and procedure of production and exchange rather than an accumulation of (mostly perishable) goods, and is a trust (the 'credit system') in men and institutions rather than in the intrinsic value of paper money or checks, violent revolutions do not so much redistribute

wealth as destroy it. There may be a redivision of the land, but the natural inequality of men soon re-creates an inequality of possessions and privileges, and raises to power a new minority with essentially the same instincts as in the old. ***The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is the individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints.***" (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 72)

-- Regarding Plato's analysis of Democracy in the story of "Political Evolution: Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy, Dictatorship.

"The citizens chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority, and at length...They cease to care even for the laws written or unwritten...And this is the fair and glorious beginning out of which springs dictatorship (tyrannis)...The excessive increase of anything causes a reaction in the opposite direction;...Dictatorship naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme form of liberty." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 74)

"By the time of Plato's death (347 B.C.) his hostile analysis of Athenian democracy was approaching apparent confirmation by history...The gap between the rich and the poor widened; Athens was divided, as Plato put it, into two cities...one the city of the poor, the other of the rich, the one at war with the other...The poor schemed to despoil the rich by legislation taxation and revolution; The rich organized themselves for protection against the poor...The poorer citizens captured control of the Assembly, and began to vote the money of the rich into coffers of the state, for redistribution among the people through governmental enterprise and subsidies. The middle classes, as well as the rich, began to distrust democracy as empowered envy, and the poor distrusted it as a sham equality of votes nullified by a gaping inequality of wealth. The rising bitterness of the class war left Greece internally, as well as internationally divided when Philip of Macedon pounced down upon it in 338 B.C., and many rich Greeks welcomed his coming as preferable to revolution. Athenian democracy disappeared under Macedonian dictatorship. Plato's reduction of political evolution to a sequence of monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and

dictatorship found another illustration in the history of Rome." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pgs 74 and 75)

"If equality of educational opportunity can be established, democracy will be real and justified. For this is the vital truth beneath its catchwords: that though men cannot be equal, their access to education and opportunity can be made more nearly equal. The rights of man are not rights to office and power, but the rights of entry into every avenue that may nourish and test a man's fitness for office and power. A right is not a gift of God or nature But a privilege which it is good for the group that the individual should have." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pg 79)

"In England and the United States in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, in Switzerland and Canada, democracy is today sounder than ever before. It has defended itself with courage and energy against the assaults of foreign dictatorship, and has not yielded to dictatorship at home. But if war continues to absorb and dominate it, or the itch to rule the world requires a large military establishment and appropriation, the freedoms of democracy may one by one succumb to the discipline of arms and strife. If race or class war divides us into hostile camps, changing political argument into blind hate, one side or the other may overturn the hustings with the rule of the sword. If our economy of freedom fails to distribute wealth as ably as it has created it, the road to dictatorship will be open to any man who can persuasively promise security to all, and a martial government, under whatever charming phrases, will engulf the democratic world." (Durant, The Lessons of History, pgs 79-80) ---Written in 1968---

"War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization or democracy...said Heracleitus: war, is the father of all things... The causes of war are the same as the causes of competition among individuals: acquisitiveness, pugnacity, and pride; The desire for food, land, materials, fuels mastery. The state has our instincts without our restraints... The state itself acknowledges no substantial restraints, either because it is strong enough to defy any interference with its will or because there is no super state to offer it basic protection, and no international law or moral code wielding effective force. In the individual, pride gives added vigor in the competitions of life, in the state, nationalism gives added force in diplomacy and war. When the states of Europe freed themselves from

papal overlordship and protection, each state encouraged nationalism as a supplement to its army and navy. If it foresaw a conflict with any particular country it fomented, in its people, hatred of that country, and formulated catchwords to bring that hatred to a lethal point; Meanwhile it's dressed it's love of peace. This conscription of the soul to international phobia occurred only in the most elemental conflicts, and was seldom resorted to in Europe between Religious Wars of the sixteenth century and the Wars of the French Revolution. During that interval, the peoples of conflicting states were allowed to respect one another's achievements and civilization; Englishmen traveled safely in France while France was at war with England; and the French and Frederick the Great continued to admire each other while they fought each other in the Seven Year's War. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries war was a contest of aristocracies rather than of peoples. In the twentieth century...One war can now destroy the labor of centuries in building cities, creating art, and developing habits of civilization... The philosopher answers...There is something greater than history. Somewhere, sometime, in the name of humanity, we must challenge a thousand evil precedents, and dare to apply the Golden Rule to nations, as the buddhist king ashoka did (262 B.C.), or at least do what Augustus did when he bade Tiberius desist from further invasion of Germany (A.D. 9). Let us refuse at whatever cost to ourselves, to make a hundred (atom bombs)" (Durant, The Lessons of History, pgs 81-85)

(basically let us refuse nuclear war).

"But in a developed and complex civilization individuals are more differentiated and unique than in a primitive society, and many situations contain novel circumstances requiring modifications of instinctive response; custom recedes, reasoning spreads; the results are less predictable. There is no certainty that the future will repeat the past. Every year is an adventure" (Durant, The Lessons in History, pg 88)

(A fictitious General saying) "You have forgotten all the lessons of history...and all that nature of man which you described. Some conflicts are too fundamental to be resolved by negotiations;...States will unite in basic



co-operation only when they are in common attacked from without. Perhaps we are now restlessly moving toward that higher plateau of competition; we may make contact with ambitious species on other planets or stars; soon after there will be interplanetary war. Then, and only then, will we think of this earth be one." (Durant, *The Lessons in History*, pg 86).

Regarding History repeating itself:

"Are there any regularities, in this process of growth and decay, which may enable us to predict, from the course of past civilizations, the future of our own?...Certain imaginative spirits have thought so, even predicting the future in detail. In his fourth Eclogue, Virgil announced that some day, the ingenuity of change having been exhausted, the whole universe, by design or accident, will fall into a condition precisely the same as in some forgotten antiquity, and will then repeat, by deterministic fatality and in every particular, all those events that had followed that condition before." (Durant, *The Lessons in History*, pg 87)

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"We have multiplied a hundred times our ability to learn and report the events of the day and the planet, but at times we envy our ancestors, whose peace was only gently disturbed by the news of their village. We have laudably bettered the conditions of life for skilled workingman and the middle class, but we have allowed our cities to fester with dark ghettos and slimy slums...

Have we really outgrown intolerance, or merely transferred it from religious to national, ideological, or racial hostilities?" (Durant, *The Lessons in History*, pg 96)

"...The idea of progress finds itself in dubious shape. It is only the vain and traditional boast of each modern generation? Since we have admitted to no substantial change in man's nature during historic times all technological advances will have to be written off as merely new means of achieving old ends-... One of the discouraging discoveries of our disillusioning century is that science is neutral: it will kill for us as readily as it will heal, and will destroy for us more readily than it can build. How inadequate now seems the proud motto of Francis Bacon, "Knowledge is power"! Sometimes we feel that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which stressed mythology and art rather than science and power, may have been wiser than we, who repeatedly enlarge our instrumentalities without improving our purposes." (Durant, *The Lessons in History*, pg 95).

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