

Minnesota Today and Tomorrow¹

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I AM QUITE SURE it is not what Dr. Cater had in mind, but I have nevertheless been tempted to interpret the subject of these remarks in terms of the history about which I have some modest firsthand knowledge, for I am a Minnesota historian. I am a geologist, and geology is the study of the history of the earth and its creatures.

In geological terms, Minnesota has a fabulous history today. It was the most recent of all geological ages, the still unfinished great Ice Age or Pleistocene, which gives Minnesota most of its surface physical character. It was the gift of the glaciers that left our low, rolling hills and our ten thousand lakes. It was the gift of successive advances of ice gouging the earth in Canada, picking up its soil, and flowing down into this part of the United States, that not only gave southern Minnesota its enormous wealth of soil, but gave the state its place as one of the two or three richest in the nation in the amount of grade A farm land.

From its ancient rocks dating back millions and hundreds of millions of years, Minnesota has produced more than sixty per cent of all iron mined in the United States in recent years. From its building stones have risen such structures as the Fisher Building in Detroit, the Capitol Plaza in Washington, the Philadelphia Art Museum, and many others.

Though we have pretty systematically eliminated the native peoples, yet their names are left to give romance and color to the state. Minnesota itself is a Sioux word meaning "cloudy water." The Sioux also gave us Kandiyohi, "where the buffalo fish come to spawn"; Waseca, "rich in good things to eat." From the Chippewa come Mississippi, "great river"; and Mahnomen, Menahga, Watab,

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Winnebagoshish, and Koochiching; and the names of Sioux chiefs have been given to such communities as Wabasha, Red Wing, Shakopee, Sleepy Eye, and to what those who live in that city call the most beautiful word in the English language—Winona.

The French, like the Indians, are part of Minnesota history today in name, at least. They gave us such names as Mille Lacs, St. Croix, Hennepin, Marquette, Nicollet, Faribault, Lac qui Parle, and many others.

The succeeding peoples who came remained with the names they brought. Anyone would know from where the people came who gave Minnesota communities such names as Albany, Princeton, Cambridge, Northfield, Rochester; and then New Ulm, New Munich, New Trier, New Prague, Nerstrand, Oslo, Strandquist, and so on.

The occupations which the white man pursued as he exploited the raw resources of the state have followed each other in such rapid sequence that no new one has quite obliterated its predecessor. The major threads around which Minnesota history has been written are still here. The sources of our history are still largely alive.

First came the fur trader, then the lumberman, then the grain farmer, then the stock farmer, and lastly the dairy farmer. All still thrive in varying degrees. Over and above these occupations there emerged a variety of industries to process the raw products of the land. These in turn have stimulated other industries to come into the state. Minnesota history today is a kind of mosaic of the essential features of its past. We still suffer from the problems of adolescence. We are plagued with the growing pains of youth.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present
in time future,
And time future contained
in time past.

These lines by T. S. Eliot reveal both the nature and importance of history. Only as we conserve and understand the past do we

have a basis for approaching current problems. Without the hindsight of history we dare not even hazard a guess of the shape of things to come.

Man as a child of the earth epitomizes the whole history of life. It takes all of life to account for man. He stands at the apex of a great pyramid whose base was laid more than two billions of years ago. Likewise, civilized man is a product of all the culture that has preceded him. He is both a part of all he has met and all that has preceded him. Biologically, culturally, and in every respect man and his problems can only be understood against his historical background.

Human history is a great reservoir into which the records of men's lives have been pouring for thousands of years. Here man's nature, with all its nobility, as well as its cussedness, is revealed. Man's hopes, his fears; his failures, his successes; his aspirations, his despairs; his loves, his hates—the reservoir holds them all. Only in this reservoir can one see in proper perspective the inevitable consequences that come from making the wrong moral choices.

People give their blood so that blood plasma may be made from it. Plasma is an inert, powerless fluid in itself, but when injected into the blood stream of a dying man it brings life back to him.

I have heard Professor Lucile Deen of our history department at Carleton College say that books are the blood plasma of civilization. I should think this is especially true of great historical writing. Dr. Cater and his staff are gathering and storing this plasma in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. They know we can hand on to posterity no greater gift than an accurate record of our times. It is of such stuff that responsible citizenship is made.

The unique character of the Minnesota Historical Society stems from the fact that it and Minnesota Territory were twins. The men who were responsible for territorial Minnesota founded the Minnesota Historical Society, for they recognized the contribution such a society could make to the development of a responsible citizenry. Without some such guiding principle, a historical society would become so concerned with the backward look, so concerned with

the worship of tradition, that it would lose sight of the fact that the supreme gift history can make is to help create new values to fit the needs of the future. Without such a principle a historical society could amass collections of so-called historic relics that would take on the proportions and importance of a dime museum. The founders of the Minnesota Historical Society have not been betrayed by those who guide its destinies today. Its executive council and staff alike recognize the fact that citizenship comes first in our crowded world today. It is about that aspect of Minnesota today that I shall speak.

I must go a long way back into geological history as a point of departure for my remarks during the next few minutes. Earth history has been a succession of prolonged periods of quiet followed by shorter periods of great activity, which we call revolutions. Mountains, earthquakes, volcanoes are phenomena of earth revolution. The development of life closely reflects the physical history of the earth. The stream of life has been sluggish during the more quiet periods of earth history. The great revolutions have been times of great development. They have been the expression points in evolution. But always the stream of life has been in a state of flux. It has always been in the process of becoming something else, and throughout the known two billions of years of its history, life has ever exhibited two complementary but competitive qualities. There has always been a struggle for individual expression on the one hand and an equally constant groping for order on the other. The interplay of these two forces characterizes the whole stream of life.

Complete diversity would have been chaos and complete order would have been stagnation and death. Without diversity there could have been no individual progress in the stream of life; no new species could have evolved. On the other hand, without some kind of order the contributions made by individual advances could not have been preserved and secured for the good of the whole and the future.

This paradox, basic to all life, projects itself into the affairs of

man. This eternal paradox of individualism versus co-operation has characterized man's whole struggle. Unlimited individual expression or unbridled liberty in the affairs of man would be anarchy. Complete order would be tyranny, stagnation, and death. The greater the diversity in our ways of life, the greater the problem of obtaining order. The rapid mechanization in the means of production and in our modes of living in recent years has brought ever greater demands for more order, and it appears that the crest has not yet been reached.

This eternal basic biological paradise of the need for order, for co-operation on the one hand versus the necessity for some measure of individual freedom and expression on the other, is basic to man's major problems. It finds expression in many ways as viewed by different people.

Edmund Burke said, "Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without." That is to say, if society is to direct its own fate, we must either submit to being made good or permit ourselves to be trained to be good. Here is authoritarianism with its rigid regimentation versus a society of responsible individuals.

An English jurist, Lord Moulton, phrased it in a somewhat different way some years ago in a brief talk on "Law and Manners." He said there are three great domains of human action. The first is the domain of absolute or positive law, where man's actions are prescribed by law which must be obeyed. There is no alternative. Then there is the domain of free and absolute choice which includes all of those actions in which we claim and enjoy complete freedom. Between these two domains there is a third and very important domain.

In this domain there are neither rules of positive law nor absolute freedom. This is the domain of the obedience to the unenforceable. It covers all cases of right doing where there is no one to make you do right except yourself. The extent of this land of obedience to

the unenforceable determines the extent to which a people has become civilized.

The extent of this important middle domain is determined by the extent to which individuals can be trusted to obey self-imposed law. If this middle land is not policed by inhabitants of it, it will be taken over by the domain of positive law or by the state. We have seen this middle land become narrower in certain parts of our world because it has been taken over by the authoritarian state or the area of positive law. We have seen it shrink elsewhere, including our own country, from being encroached upon by the abdication of individual responsibility.

Yet this middle land is the land of civilization. It is in this domain that man has achieved his highest aspirations in literature, science, and the arts. This is the land of the good society. This is the land of what western civilization knows as a free society. Whether it is eliminated from the encroachments of the domain of positive law or by the voluntary yielding of individual choices in the domain of absolute choice, its disappearance will mean the disappearance of what we have called a free society.

It is the common task of all agencies for education and enlightenment to keep this middle domain free from encroachments from either side. The maintenance of what Justice Holmes called "free trade in ideas" is the task of such agencies as the Minnesota Historical Society, along with a free press and our free educational institutions.

Today we live in an age in which the pendulum has swung far over toward concern for the welfare of the group as a whole, toward the demand for order, for security. Everything seems to conspire to minimize the importance of the individual.

The persistent character of our age centers about concern for the welfare of the group. Ours is a mass age; people are living and thinking in standardized fashion. What appear to be inexorable forces seem almost purposely intent upon crushing the individual. Whatever good the collectivist philosophy has brought is overshadowed by this most tragic of the evils that have come with it.

The historic idea of man in the great tradition of the liberalism of Jefferson in the nineteenth century is in danger of disappearing.

Chesterton once pointed out that our principal social problems spring from the situation that what one man regards as a cure for our ills another considers a worse malady. There are many people who sincerely believe that if the economic and social welfare of man are taken care of, the individual can take care of himself. They point out that the preamble of the Constitution states that one of the main purposes of the new federal government was to "promote the general welfare," and that Article 1 empowers Congress to levy taxes "to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States." The prophets of the twentieth century welfare state fasten upon such words and expressions in our constitution and tell us our present headlong strides toward an all-embracing state are a natural sequence or evolutionary development of the ideas held by Jefferson and others of our founding fathers. This I cannot accept at all. On the contrary, I think the modern concept of the welfare state is a complete betrayal of Jeffersonian democracy and the liberalism of the nineteenth century.

When I was a lad, "The world owes me a living" was the credo of the hobo. Today it pretty accurately reflects the mores of our time. We have a right to expect everything from the state. Individual competence is a minor concern. Everyone is entitled to a job whether he deserves it or not. There is no stimulus for him to create one, for if industry does not offer him one, then the government must do so. Being secure in his job, he does not have the spur of reward for superior effort. On the contrary, he progresses not by show of ability, but by staying alive on the job longer than his co-workers. This is called seniority.

One of the most bewildering features of our organized society consists of obstacles that seem to be put deliberately in the way of individual worth and competence as they find their way vertically upward through the rigid horizontal levelling stratification. How is the best leadership to emerge?

Perhaps this is no longer important in a state which is concerned to find as many things as possible to do for the individual. Why individual achievement when a pension awaits a man at sixty-five so he can continue to eat whether he continues to work or not? Furthermore, in order that he shall live to collect all his "benefits," the state must guarantee him medical attention and finally bury him when he dies.

Such become the characteristics of a society which is content with security as an end in itself. Security is a philosophy for a people which is finished, a people which believes no further improvements are possible. It is a philosophy of senility and defeat.

This is not gross overstatement. The enthusiastic adherents of the welfare state, as we now understand that term, think they have just discovered the real liberalism, and that all of man's history is a history of reaction. The idea that equal opportunity means the chance for a man to go as far as his abilities and ambitions will take him is reactionary. The prophets of the new liberalism do grudgingly admit the idea of competition; life is still a race; but we must all come out even in the end! This doesn't make sense. It takes no account of the basic differences and inequalities in competence among individuals. Said Thomas Hobbes: "When two men ride a horse, one must go in front."

The ultimate test of any society is the kind of citizen it produces. I don't think you can build a good citizen by taking from man his initiative and independence. In his book *Ends and Means*, Aldous Huxley observes that in a completely socialized state the good Samaritan would be a criminal. Said John Stuart Mill: "A state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no really great things can be accomplished."

And again from T. S. Eliot these lines:

They constantly try to escape
From the Darkness outside and within
By dreaming up systems so perfect
That no one will need to be good.

This is an illusion. We know full well that our personal character determines not only what we do but how we do it. I think our differences with Russia are not so much a quarrel with Communism as they are with Russia's methods of attempting to establish it. Character does determine the destiny of a state as well as that of an individual.

We are developing a people which is apathetic, to say the least, toward work, toward religion, and toward individual responsibility. Individual conscience gives way to a kind of group conscience. Our system of representative government based upon the idea of the responsibility of the individual citizen appears to be disintegrating due to the inertia and indifference of the mass mind.

When you free man from all the risks of hunger, health, and any others that might plague him, you free him of the things that have made him a man. A society with complete security for every individual would be as lively as a cemetery. Insecurity—the goading necessity of coping with changing conditions—has always been basic to human progress. The whole two billions of years of the evolution of life have been a saga of insecurity. Life has progressed and evolved new forms only when it has been kicked into an unfriendly environment. If geological history teaches any one lesson clearly, it is this.

The new liberalism would eliminate all risks, including the right to fail. It is not in keeping with the traditional concept of American freedom, which implies freedom to fail as well as freedom to succeed. It is this concept which has brought us where we are. In so far as ours is a great material civilization, it is one in large part because of this fact.

It is said that Charles Dodgson, alias Lewis Carroll, was embarrassed at the success of *Alice in Wonderland*, as compared with his scholarly mathematical treatises, and that Conan Doyle preferred not to be identified as the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories.

In a parallel sense we are in danger of being ashamed of the things that have made us great, of being apologetic about our his-

tory. For, trite as it may sound, it has been our capitalistic economic system of free enterprise, coupled with our political system, which has produced our opulent material civilization.

I am sure when Dr. Cater asked me to speak to you tonight he knew I would not be so foolish as to discuss details of Minnesota history in the presence of people like Dr. Grace Lee Nute and other members of his staff, of Dean Theodore C. Blegen, and, of course, my colleague and friend, Dr. Merrill E. Jarchow, dean of men at Carleton College. The latter's excellent account of the early history of Minnesota agriculture has just been published in a handsome book by the Minnesota Historical Society under the title *The Earth Brought Forth*. However, I really have been talking about Minnesota history today; for the most pressing problem today is the basic one I have been discussing—how to achieve a balance between the eternal need for individual expression and the no less eternal demand for order. Or, in the language of our day, "How to stabilize personal risk and still preserve individual responsibility." The *New Yorker* of November 20, 1948, pointed out that "If security itself were ever to become the highest national goal, the citizen would shed his self-reliance as a buck sheds his horns, and the citizens of the republic would be like privates in the army—each with a dog tag and a dull sense of having abandoned something irreplaceable."

F. A. Hayek, Tooke professor of economic science and statistics in London University, says "It may be that a free society as we have known it carries in itself the forces of its own destruction—that once freedom has been achieved it is taken for granted and ceases to be valued and that the free growth of ideas, which is the essence of a free society, will bring about the destruction of the foundations on which it depends." He goes on to point out that there is little doubt that in countries like the United States the ideal of freedom has much less real appeal today for young men than it has in countries where they have learned what its loss means. Professor Hayek asks, "Does this mean that freedom is valued only when it is lost—that the world must everywhere go through a dark phase of

socialist totalitarianism before the forces of freedom can gather strength anew?" Perhaps George Orwell's gloomy predictions in his book *1984* will come true. I don't believe it need be so, for though freedom seems a dead issue now, I believe the free spirit of man is pervasive in nature and will not be submerged permanently by any authoritarian philosophy.

James Anthony Froude, an English historian of another day, once wrote, "One lesson and only one history may be said to repeat with distinctness,—that the world is built somehow on moral foundations—that in the long run it is well with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked."

Perhaps not all historians would agree with such a positive statement, and yet I have never known a cynical historian. I believe that Froude was right and that the ultimate reality of life is good. I believe there are no absolute certainties—no final solutions in the affairs of men—nothing but an unending campaign for a better world; but I do believe in the survival values of democratic institutions over totalitarian.

Being a historian of sorts myself, I cannot therefore dispose of the second part of my subject, "Minnesota Tomorrow," in too cynical a fashion. When you consider the rich natural resources of this state and its people, it is difficult not to be gently optimistic at least.

If some hundred years and more ago man could have been endowed with a divine authority to select peoples at will from over the face of the earth for his Minnesota melting pot, he could scarcely have improved upon the peoples we now have. From our own Yankee New England and largely from the countries of northern Europe—Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—they have come. If the testimony of history means anything at all, the peoples of Minnesota are of the best.

When men and women of good will are gathered hereabouts to celebrate the one-thousandth anniversary of the Minnesota Historical Society, they will still be trying to solve the basic problem I have been talking about. But they will have new tools and tech-

niques and will be meeting their problems on higher planes. Their ancestors centuries before will have repudiated war as a means of solving any problems. They will wonder how Dr. Cater and his staff could have accomplished so much with the tools they had. They will look at our times with envy and say how exciting they were and how we, and not they, lived in the great days. They will say ours was the most revolutionary age in all of man's history. In our times the patterns by which man would live during a thousand years were set.

They will be saying that thanks to the wisdom, the integrity, and the judgment of those good people back in the middle of the twentieth century, world wars were abolished and no atom bombs were ever dropped. They will be saying that in the state of Minnesota was one of the few liberal outposts where people clung to the belief that the idea of one world was not a forever unrealizable dream. They will be saying that here was a small but tough-minded group of intellectuals and idealists who persisted in the then impossible faith that men could live together in one world. It was their faith that showed the way toward our one world today, where we do have unity without uniformity. Our debt to them is beyond computation.



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