

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

Manly P. Hall, President and Founder

Dr. John W. Ervin, Vice President

CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN

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THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

Dear Friends:



Confused persons living today have a tendency to blame the present generation for prevailing conditions. Before we settle back and downgrade prevailing policies, we are inclined to forget that there are forces moving in nature beyond human control. We face situations today which never confronted our ancestors, and each of us must sooner or later face the challenge of change. If there had been better thinking five hundred years ago, the present emergency could have been postponed for several centuries, but this is now too late. We did not make proper use of our own mental facilities, and for many individuals of today the prevailing emergency comes as a complete surprise.

In the Guinness Book of World Records, it is stated that at the time of the birth of Christ the total population of the earth was between two hundred and fifty million and three hundred million. In other words, the number of living persons was approximately equal to those now living in the United States of America. At that time there was certainly no serious over-population. The natural resources of the earth were comparatively untouched, and men lived by merely scratching the surface of the planet. While there was probably conflict over territorial domain, there was room for everyone somewhere on the planet. Infant mortality was certainly high, but still there was a moderate increase during the expansion of the Roman Empire.

In these times, health problems resulting from lack of sanitation were comparatively few. When refuse accumulated, the tribe simply moved to a new location. The competitive instinct had not expanded for there was nothing to buy and nothing to spend. The stratification of society was sketchy, the chieftain and his family enjoyed a little prestige, and major decisions were in the hands of the priests or shamans. Ingenuity had not yet begun to complicate the perils of existence.

By that glorious seventeenth century, which some still think of as a golden age, population had increased, and from seven hundred to eight hundred million lived together in uncertain peace. Western nations had little or no idea of what was going on in the Eastern Hemisphere, but periodic epidemics of the bubonic plague had resulted in over thirty-five million deaths. The American continent was populated by Indian tribes who did very little to damage the ecology. The original American colonies were more or less self-supporting, but in due time competition gained a foothold and established a precedent which led inevitably to financial and political corruption. There did not seem to be much to really worry about until the nineteenth century. In the United States especially, it was assumed that all intelligent persons would live within their means paying little attention to the wealthy and their foibles.

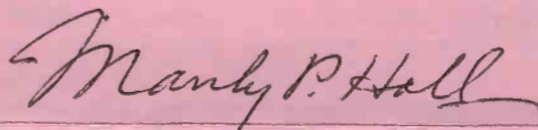
Many stores issued annual catalogs and customers in smaller communities sent their orders in by mail. In many country families it was customary to make one trip a year to a metropolitan center. Money was seldom discussed because it played so small a part in daily living. Food was ridiculously cheap, clothing inexpensive, and housing abundant. The main point in this is that there was comparatively little to buy. It was considered right and proper to appreciate comfortable surroundings and peace of mind. Industrial expansion changed all this, markets increased in size and number, competition became increasingly severe, and everything possible was done to induce the private citizen to live beyond his means. It was necessary to discard possessions of all kinds in order that merchants could stay in business. Ingenuity also resulted in a rise in the cost of living. One of the most important conveniences was the automobile which by itself has burdened the earth with debt for the last sixty years. Then came the radio, motion pictures, and television. All of these things cost money and were comparatively expendable. The balanced budget was gone forever.

Something else more insidious was also occurring. In the name of styles, countless persons changed their wardrobes every year. Others had to have new cars. Very little that the individual bought actually wore out. It was cast aside for the newer model which was often inferior in quality. To keep up this momentum, we recklessly expended the natural resources of the planet. Factories grew in number and gathered raw materials from the most remote corners of the world. A vast labor force was necessary to satisfy a luxury-prone human society. In the early 1920s, population increased to nearly two billion, and now some sixty years later it has passed the four billion mark. Most of this four billion is profit impelled and burdened by its appetite for luxury. The common chores hold little interest for those who fully believe that they were born to live for pleasure alone. Every day it gets a little worse. Congestion is menacing health, air pollution goes unchecked, and the cost of living has risen fantastically.

Through all of this we have tried to live by old rules that no longer operate. We have failed to meet change. We do not realize that in the closing years of the twentieth century we cannot maintain the same attitudes, practice the same policies, and nurse the profit system without tragic consequences. In the near future the population will increase to six billion. There are more people, but there is no more planet to take care of them. In order to survive we must return to a more simple and economical way of living. We cannot legislate the present dilemma or hope that someone will arise who can promise to give us food grown on land now covered with condominiums, or provide us steady employment when markets are already saturated or raw materials are no longer available. There is no hope of balancing a budget in a world where debt is a way of life. Statesmen have seldom realized that this planet is a kind of bottle, the contents of which have been accumulating for billions of years. In less than a hundred years, we have expended and largely wasted this planetary wealth. It cannot be replaced, but we go along using whatever is left with no thought for consequences. At a time when we should all be realizing that many essential materials are in very short supply, there is saber rattling, talk of war, and competitive armament. A major war at this time could well reduce the life expectancy of humanity by a hundred years or more.

We can no longer attempt to perpetuate policies that were apparently successful a century ago. Lord Bacon summarized the situation which confronts us today. His Lordship says in substance that problems that have never been faced before must be solved by methods that have never been tried before. The challenge of change is not to be avoided--rather it must be met by the use of the highest mental faculties that we possess. We must all meet the future with hearts and minds open to a general reformation of character and conduct.

May all the changes in our lives be for the better,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Manly P. Hall". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Manly P. Hall

The following list of books is recommended reading. They are all among the best sellers during 1981 in the Gift Shop

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