

carat English prose, spiked with apt quotations and laced with allusions. Nearly a lifetime of reflection had been spent on each of the topics here aired, and this book is Nock's final statement and testament. It is the book by which he will be finally judged, the one in which he himself took most satisfaction. It is a book to be enjoyed and then mastered; and as the dyer's hand is stained by the medium he works in so does the magic of the *Memoirs* work on a person's whole outlook and philosophy.

His Life Abroad

Nock's *Freeman* has an enviable reputation in American journalism, ranked as the high water mark by many. After four glorious years it ceased publication with its issue of March 5, 1924, having bade farewell to its readership a month earlier. An item in AJN's final Miscellany column offers a rueful reflection on the contemporary civilization.

Nock notes that deep grooves are worn in the wooden counters of the change booths in the older elevated railway stations, and muses, "There seems something symbolic about them. They are in their way, a testimony to the nature of our civilization; they are our counterpart of the grooves worn in the stone steps of European cathedrals by the feet of innumerable devotees." With this parting shot he left these shores to live and work abroad for long peri-

ods during the next fifteen years. These were fruitful years, marked by his brilliant Rabelais scholarship, his classic essay on Jefferson and another on Henry George, his book on the State, *A Journal of These Days*, and numerous articles in magazines like *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and *The American Mercury*. World War II brought him permanently back to these shores, where he lived his final years.

A month before his death he wrote to a friend, "I have been really quite ill, feeble and worthless, and have now reached the point of letting the quacks roll up their sleeves and do their worst . . . I'll keep you informed, or some one will, but I foresee I shall not be writing much at length. On his last day Lord Houghton said, 'I am going to join the majority, and you know how I always prefer the minority.' Witty fellow!" The minority lost AJN on the nineteenth of August, nineteen hundred forty five.

It is Nock's attitude toward life that chiefly interests us, the demands he put upon it, his expectations of what it had to offer him, his tactical approach as he sought to avail himself of its bounty. Open the *Memoirs*. It is a fair presumption that the quotation Nock selected for the title page of this book had a special meaning for him. We read the familiar testimony of Sir Isaac Newton: "I do not know what I may appear to

the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered around me."

The seashore is broad enough to support a related analogy, having to do with the search for truth. This time imagine that the man at the water's edge is blind. He's just been told that a message of enormous importance from someone he loves is written in the sand in Braille, and that the incoming tide will soon obliterate it. There's no time to spare, so no wasted motion! Loss of vision has keyed up the man's other senses, and the heightened expectancy generated by this crisis situation pushes alertness and sensitivity still higher. But he restrains himself. He knows that if he thrusts his fingers too rudely against the sand his contact with the letters will erase them; so, he gets himself out of the way and deliberately, with the utmost delicacy, eases his hands over the sand until he establishes tactile contact with the Braille, at which point he brings all his finesse into play and lets the message seep through his fingertips.

Alert-Passivity

This points to the attitude or posture of alert-passivity, of interest-affection, which some people are oc-

asionally able to bring to bear. Nock exemplified this kind of receptivity no matter what his immediate preoccupation—writing, reading, editorial work, convivial relations. "They have helped the truth along without encumbering it with themselves," said Artemus Ward of men of his stripe. Nock was fond of this sentence, for it defined his style, and suited his temperament. Would his style have been different if Nock had been one of Sheldon's mesomorphs, inclined toward somatonia? The speculation is vain. He was what he was, and we can say only that bodily make up and chemistry did not stand in the way of his characteristic approach.

Most of our contemporaries are arrayed on the other side of the fence. They are what H. G. Wells used to refer to as "gawdsakers." Nervously apprehensive that the world is about to go to hell in a handbasket the typical Modern runs around yelling "For gawdsake let's do something!" He has wearily accepted the joyless task of straightening out the cosmos, and the first step is to improve others. The incomparable John Dewey gave us marching orders when he announced a new role for the intellect. No more for us the old delights of knowledge to be enjoyed for its own sake; mankind has come of age, having graduated "from knowledge as an esthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature regarded as a work