



THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.
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Intelligent Curiosity

THE DESIRE for a better environment will always be an aspiration of persons who are maturing as human beings. Maturing persons are those growing in awareness, perception, consciousness. In a word, they are in a life-long search for Truth; they are, as we say, "possessed" of what Aristotle termed *intelligent curiosity*. This exclusively individual trait, if sufficiently cultivated, is, in my view, the only kind of cultural environment from which an improved society can ever flower.

One of the best descriptions of intelligent curiosity I have seen or heard or read is a painting, the "School of Athens," done by Raphael before 1509 A.D. It is in the Vatican. But in better condition today than the original is a remarkable replica painted by Waller.¹ Depicting about sixty characters — Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Ptolemy, Euclid, to name a few — the artist has captured that passionate spirit of inquiry which distinguished these people. When seen, studied, and apprehended, the impression remains to haunt and elevate the mind of the beholder.

It is my belief that this intelligent curiosity, on a scale found in the historic record only now and then, makes credible Edith Hamilton's observation:

... this full stature of greatness came to pass at a time when the mighty civilizations of the ancient world had perished and the shadow of "effortless

barbarism" was dark upon the earth. In that black and fierce world a little centre of white-hot spiritual energy was at work. A new civilization had arisen in Athens, unlike all that had gone before.²

People are forever groping, as if in the dark, for some panacea that will insure a good society. Yet Raphael, looking backward 2,000 years, put his finger on the only key there is: intelligent curiosity! He perceived what so many of us miss, perhaps because he himself was an important figure in the Italian Renaissance, another "little centre of white-hot spiritual energy." Conceivably, it takes an oversoul to recognize his kind, a Raphael to know a Socrates, an individual steeped in intelligent curiosity to discover that single and elusive path to a good society: intelligent curiosity.

A SOCIETY of remarkable quality — for all its defects — got under way in this land of ours. The explanation? The phenomenon of our politico-economic ascendancy, the cause of which has had our best minds guessing for the past century — such achievements as dignity of the individual; man's right to life, liberty, and to the fruits of his own labor; the freest market the world has ever known; a government substantially limited to securing these rights, invoking a common justice, and keeping the peace; an unprecedented burst of creative energy — these blessings suddenly tumble together, make sense, become intelligible in

¹ Waller's masterpiece is in the Panhellenic Room of the Levere Memorial Temple, on the Northwestern University Campus, Evanston, Illinois. This Temple (Sigma Alpha Epsilon) is open to the public.

² See *The Greek Way to Western Civilization* by Edith Hamilton. (A Mentor Book, p. 7.)