

MISCELLANEOUS RUMINATIONS

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There are months (and they seem to occur more and more frequently) in which the inspiration to write never develops. January was one of them. The longer we stay at this job, the more respect we have for those professionals who daily, weekly or monthly, turn out interesting and polished columns.

Maybe, however, we shouldn't be too impressed. After all, the professional in any field devotes himself almost exclusively to his chosen task, and he should be capable of competent and repetitious performance in his work. Even physicians and plumbers fall into this category. But attempting proficiency in more than one field does require some extra talent and effort. Not everyone can hope to be a da Vinci or Cellini. So, we still must admire those writers like Irving Page, Michael Halberstam and Mark Altschule who seem to be able to produce well-written articles regularly and easily while still devoting their main effort to medicine.

The prophets of doom are many and increasingly in evidence. It is fashionable these days to predict the decline and fall of Western Civilization (we've indulged a bit ourselves) and to see little hope for the future of mankind. Still, most political judgments and predictions are colored by the times and the narrowed national character and outlook of the viewer. Nearly always, most predictions are based on the belief that present trends are bound to continue.

We are less than a decade away from 1984, the year of the title of George Orwell's famous novel. At the time of its writing in 1946, the outlook for Britain, Western and Eastern Europe was bleak. Orwell was projecting some forty years into the future, which must then have seemed like a long enough interval in which to project change. However, while the trend of events has been inching in that direction, so far, the reality of the frightening society he envisioned is still far removed.

Fortunately, the fact is, barring some sudden catastrophe like an atomic holocaust, that major historical change proceeds at a slow shuffle instead of a gallop.

Even Orwell was aware of this, and he had this to say about predictions based on the beliefs in the continuation of current trends, "This habit of mind leads also to the belief that things will happen more quickly, completely and catastrophically than they ever do in practice. The rise and fall of empires, the disappearance of cultures and religions, are expected to happen with earthquake suddenness, and processes which have barely started are talked about as though they were already at an end. . . . The slowness of historical change, the fact that every epoch always contains a great deal of the last epoch, is never sufficiently allowed for. Such a manner of thinking is bound to lead to mistaken prophecies, because, even when it gauges the direction of events rightly, it will miscalculate their tempo." Take heart. Let your children and grandchildren worry about it.

Last month's *Bulletin* was hardly at the printers before CBS exposed us to Dan Rather again—this time a health documentary on the hazards of taking prescription drugs. By use of the “projected statistic” once more, it was claimed that “hundreds of thousands of Americans are admitted to hospitals because of drug reactions,” although it wasn't clear whether this was daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. Ignorance or error on the part of the prescribing physician was blamed for most of these. About one quarter of the program was devoted to Chloromycetin and the fatal blood dyscrasias it caused. Even though the use of this drug has been limited for more than two decades now, the occurrence rate of serious dyscrasias is only 1:30,000. Rather also interviewed that authority on drugs and medicine, Senator Ted Kennedy. We thought you'd like to know.

Incidentally, the reason for the *Bulletin*'s erratic and delayed appearance lately has been the fire in November that practically destroyed our printers at Columbus Office Supply Company. Things will eventually get back on schedule.

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