

Will Durant

PHILOSOPHY taken seriously is all wrong. In fact if you take it that way you are no philosopher at all. So spake "the outstanding scholar of the times" the other night to a gathering of the sons of Abraham and a handful of gentiles at the St. Louis Young Men's Hebrew Association. And straightway Dr. Durant proceeded to call himself one of these - a great philosopher. He is too modest. Judged on his own criterion he is uncommonly great.

Seven years he spent in writing "The Story of Philosophy". More than a hundred thousand copies have sold, and now he tells the world that he did not mean to be serious when he wrote his "storybook". It was a mere means to give him more time to play with his little girl. And he followed it by "The Failure of Philosophy", for which he has such a "passion". But now he tells us he wasn't serious - it was only a joke; and his confession bears with it something of the relief one might feel on having the ghost in the cemetery pull off his own sheet. If one can prescind entirely from content; his "Storybook" should at least serve now as a good collection of sentences for structure in a school of journalism. For fiction we will continue to read "Treasure Island" and the humor of "Alice in Wonderland"

will never hold place to this "scholarly" bit of deceptive disproportion.

But he hasn't stopped yet. Along comes the American for March with "The Ten Greatest Thinkers" blazed across the cover. They are Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, of whom Durant says, "We must quiet our prejudices

and admit him to our ten. . . Some hearts will break at this selection, including the author's own. The fifth is Copernicus, "who seemed to overthrow Jacob's ladder which faith had built between angels and men, and made the earth, thought to be the footstool of God a minor satellite of a minor sun". Then follow Francis Bacon, Newton, Voltaire "the great emancipator of Ferney", Kant, and lastly Darwin "who made the world turn red with his doctrine of 'natural selection' and whose advent made the old faith fight so fiercely for its life - and a losing battle.

And these were

chosen ruthlessly and dogmatically, without regard for prejudice or preference - not "Durant men" but philosophers and scientists who "by their thinking have most influenced mankind". But within the week the weather vane veered. In his Milwaukee lecture Aquinas, chosen so objectively in the face of the author's

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