

Voltaire's *Candide*: The Education of Everyman

By WINSTON WEATHERS, '50ba, '51ma

Candide's untimely exodus from the little paradise of Westphalia is comparable to the exodus that everyman is forced to make, sometime or other, from the garden of Eden that his childhood innocence may have been for him; and "with all the world before" him, Candide or everyman, faces the long journey through human experience that will finally lead him, if he is sincere and observant, to wisdom and a degree of happiness. This is the essential story that has for some two hundred years delighted the intellectual world with its ready wit and incisive idiom.

Though composed in three days, it is the epitome of human knowledge, for in its pseudo-comic mood and satirical manner it has caught the archetypal myth of human experience as few books so brief have done. Though we think of Voltaire as being anything but a romanticist, he has created in *Candide* the romantic journey that is comparable in its basic form to those more definitely romantic journeys we find in Coleridge, Byron, and even Melville. And *Candide*, though a far different work, is related with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve, once supermen, have become everymen and now begin their journey through the world. Candide is the everyman that Adam and Eve became and in his experiences we find the continuum of Adam and Eve's experiences. We may place *Candide* after *Paradise Lost* and find the continuity of the archetypal myth, for it is through the disrupted world, wrought by the sin of Adam and Eve, that Candide must journey.

That Candide is everyman is evident from what Voltaire says throughout the book, but most directly from the statement at the beginning of Part Two: "Candide, born to experience all the vicissitudes of fortune. . . ." Candide, as the universal sufferer, the everyman; if he had been superman and the universal sufferer, then this little book would have recorded the story of a Messiah, but as it is, Candide is anything but superman, for "His judgment was quite honest and he was extreme simple-minded."

Voltaire also points out the archetypal nature of his story. "Candide, expelled from the earthly paradise, wandered for

a long time. . ." is an overt statement to the fact. The book therefore becomes Voltaire's attempt to explain the nature of everyman's wandering, the hazards of the journey, and the eventual and ultimate goals which await him in this world. Voltaire, a Deist and free-thinker, obviously gives answers and descriptions of everyman's journey from the viewpoint of his particular predilections, but if we look at his answers and descriptions carefully, we find that once we go beyond the immediate idiom of them, we find, in many instances, answers and descriptions similar to those given by the Christian Milton and the humanist Goethe. And it is this more serious attempt to answer some of the basic questions of human existence which makes *Candide* more than an attack upon foolish optimism.

As Candide goes forth into the world he takes with him a false philosophy and a false ideal. The false philosophy is that of Dr. Pangloss, or the foolish optimism of believing this is the best of all possible worlds. The false ideal is that of Mlle. Cunegonde who represents in *Candide* the ephemeral beauty of an inadequate soul. By the end of Part Two, Candide has at last rid himself of Panglossianism and has achieved the new ideal of "love and friendship" that "shall sweeten the remainder of my life." But the many adventures in between are telling and leave Candide physically depleted if not morally. His loss of a leg is symbolic of the very definite physical suffering or even psychological suffering that we experience in achieving our new paradise in life, our new set of values when we have lost the old. Candide, in this sense, is like Ahab who, in *Moby Dick*, has suffered in the eternal quest and is physically depleted. Candide, of course, would never have made the journey, would never have lost the false philosophy and false ideal if he had not had something true and basic within him, namely his candidness which in the Voltairian sense is not only equitable with innocence but also with intellectual skepticism. It is this characteristic which salvages Candide from the many moments of despair and lifts him up toward the vision of El Dorado which, once having known and lost, Candide seeks for ever after.

The quest of Candide may be divided into two parts. First is the quest for wisdom, and then, when wisdom has been defined—"Il faut cultiver votre jardin"—we find the quest to "live" that wisdom and practice it. Many readers think Candide's adventures and maturation are over when Part One ends as Candide and friends settle down to the humdrum existence on the Propontis. Actually, as we know from life and certainly as Voltaire knew, the quest is not over at all. Part Two of *Candide* is the quest of confirming that wisdom, a quest frequently as difficult and painful as the first.

The quest of Part One is beset with many difficulties. Burdened with the false philosophy of Pangloss and the false ideal of Mlle. Cunegonde, Candide attempts to mature and grow even in the environment of such false values. In the face of experience and obvious fact, Candide cannot help growing up a little, though he finds it difficult to cast aside the real burdens of his life. A limited maturation does occur, however. We see Candide moving from the complete peace of thinking and practicing the philosophy of optimism to the confusing antithesis of trying to believe the optimistic philosophy but being unable to accept it in the face of much adventure to the contrary. We can almost see the stairsteps of this maturation: first Candide acts in accordance with the teachings of Dr. Pangloss, then he discovers he must trust in himself more than in the philosophy alone, and finally he begins to reason for himself and express opinions of his own, though he still maintains the false philosophy. Of course, Candide reasons illogically and with error when he first begins to reason for himself, but it is out of reasoning, eventually improved, that Candide is to escape from the clutches of falseness and move into the more real, though qualified, harmony that is available to human beings.

It is, of course, his adherence to the false ideal and the false philosophy that prevents Candide from maintaining the paradise of El Dorado even when he once envisions it in the mountains of South America. It is the desire for Mlle. Cunegonde

that makes him return into the struggle of a reality that is anything but the best possible. El Dorado could have been a reality for Candide if he had been prepared for it; as it was, it became only a vision and once he left it, he could never return. Like the Shangri La of a more modern novel, it is the ephemeral vision that man can conceive but finds difficult to grasp and maintain.

Once having envisioned El Dorado, however, it becomes a possible goal and an endless stimulus for Candide. It becomes one of the poles in the polarity between which Candide moves during his entire journey. The other pole is of course the far opposite of El Dorado or the ideal; it is Hell, or as Hell is envisioned in *Candide*, it is the cosmopolitan, urban, ultimately civilized city of Paris. Paris is the epitome in *Candide* of human deception and disguise, human skulduggery and insincerity, the lack of reason and the maintenance of false values. It is between these two poles—the vision of the ideal El Dorado and the reality of the Parisian hell—that Candide journeys once he has identified them early in his career.

Moving between these two possibilities and moving from an original paradisaic peace and security toward an antithetical state of mind, Candide experiences the evils and misfortunes of a world beset with physical and social calamity in Part One. As intense as the personal sufferings are in the first section of the novel, the general tenor of the evils which Candide encounters is that of social and natural implication: war, earthquake, inquisition, cannibalism, piracy—the evils of groups of men against man, the evils of an insentient nature are the main teachers of the innocent everyman. In Part Two, however, we find Candide, yet in a world of natural and social disaster of course, in situations in which a greater emphasis is given to personal evil and personal flaw: the homosexual Persian, the sadistic Sultan, the deceitful Abbé all represent particular prob-

lems of personality and we may rightly say that Part Two is more intimate and personal in its instances of experience than is Part One.

After being educated in the school of natural and social phenomenon in Part One, Candide at last finds out what wisdom is, though he is far from having happiness which is, of course, his ultimate goal. He learns that it is wise, just as Michael instructed Adam in *Paradise Lost*, to determine one's limitations in this world and then within those limitations to work and grow. It is necessary to cultivate our garden, in other words.

Now Candide is willing to do this and this is a great turning point for him, but it is not the conclusion of his journey, for he has not yet surrendered the false philosophy of Dr. Pangloss. He has surrendered the false ideal of Mlle. Cunegonde because she has grown ugly; temporal beauty has revealed its temporality, the ideal has proved itself not all that we thought it was. But even though surrendered, Mlle. Cunegonde remains, and not only is the false philosophy of Dr. Pangloss involved in the garden along with beauty turned to ugliness, but there is also Martin the Manichean, the eternal pessimist, who is the contrary of Dr. Pangloss and just as deadly. Candide indeed has a garden to cultivate and it is wisdom to do so, but he is not especially satisfied with the garden he has, neither with its size nor its content, just as everyman, knowing he must live within his own personality and find whatever happiness there is to be had within it, nevertheless seeks a better personality in which to live and in which to find the joy of life.

So it is, Candide deserts the garden and sets out once again, knowing now what wisdom is, and on the basis of that knowing, trying to find a happiness. He tries to find happiness in several guises. First as a philosopher, second as a

ruler, third as a private citizen. But in none of these guises does he find what he is looking for, because as long as Dr. Pangloss is alive and the philosophy in the life of Candide which Dr. Pangloss represents, Candide will never really be happy.

Perhaps the most deadly thing Candide meets in the first stages of his second quest, however, is Abbé de Perigord who has now become an English ambassador. Abbé de Perigord is, of course, the incarnation of evil in the universe; he is Satan; he is subman. His origin is in Paris and like Satan or Mephistopheles, he leaves his infernal home to range across the world. He admits his own nature; admits deceit is an innate part of his character; admits his own disguises, the inevitable disguises which evil assumes just as Satan in *Paradise Lost* is now a cherub and is now a toad. It is Perigord who destroys the possibilities of Candide's obtaining happiness or even practicing wisdom in this first part of the second quest, for Perigord lies and deceives Candide in a disastrous way. But even without the deceit of Perigord, Candide is far from happiness—he has not found it in doing good for others, for one cannot make others happy until he has discovered what happiness is for himself—nor has Candide found it in the seraglio, for just as with Cunegonde, ephemeral beauty vanishes and the moment's pleasure, is after all, only momentary.

It is only with the discovery of Zenouide and the true ideal and the true philosophy—that philosophy of reasonableness which is a median between Pangloss' optimism and Martin's pessimism—that Candide begins to approach the end of his education and his search, and the antithesis of his thinking fades. It is only with Zenouide, in her presence, in the little El Dorado of Agaton and Suname that Candide is able to be wise—cultivate his garden—and to be happy, to accept the fact that we can never be blissfully happy but only moderately so. And it is only now that Candide can practice good deeds by teaching young people—good deeds which are not the cause of our happiness but the fulfillment of it. And it is only by coming to this stage in his education and growth that Candide is able to renounce Pangloss and his philosophy.

Even though we acquire the possible ideal, however, we are still buffeted by the fortunes of life. In the later pages of the *Candide*, Mlle. Cunegonde and Dr. Pangloss both reappear—but Dr. Pangloss reappears only to die, for he is dead already within Candide, and Mlle. Cunegonde reappears to no avail save to hinder, as a remembrance of things past sometimes does, the full marriage of everyman and

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Winston Weathers, of Bartlesville, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Letters in 1950, and his M. A., with a major in English and a minor in Greek, in 1951. He was a Junior Phi Beta Kappa, and a Graduate Assistant in English during the year 1950-51. At present he is teaching English at Cottey College. The editors are very glad to print this excellent contribution from an alumnus.



his ideal. But she too eventually dies—a false ideal unencouraged by Candide—as the last remnants of everyman's old and immature paradise disappear and vanish. Candide is at last educated and grown up and with the love of Zenoide and the friendship of Cacambo—Cacambo who is that portion of the true ideal which seeks us out and is with us all along; is actually a part of us crying out against suicide and self-destruction—Candide finds the “new Eden” of human existence; an Eden, a paradise, an ideal that is not as perfect as El Dorado as long as we are in our corporeal state, but at least is an ideal that is based on wisdom, reasonableness, and truth, and which is, at least, far removed from the infernal Paris.

By the time this little novel is finished, Voltaire has taken Candide back where geographically he started—not quite to Westphalia but near it. And on another level, Candide has returned to not quite the same bliss and security he knew as a boy in Westphalia but to an approximation of it. And in the course of presenting that long journey, both geographically and mythically, Voltaire has had his say on many subjects, satirizing much, from the superficial aesthetics of Senator Pococurante to the perverse nature of the Jesuits, from the fallacy of contemporary drama criticism to the detestable snobbishness of Western culture.

But more than an attack upon religion, or an attack upon our cultural habits, or an attack on Leibnitz, this masterpiece of Voltaire is a positive statement on how and how not to live life, is a positive statement on the archetypal situation of everyman. It is a little masterpiece, coming out of eighteenth century French rationalistic thinking and literature, that takes its place between the story of Superman who became Everyman in *Paradise Lost* and the story of Everyman who sought to become Superman in Goethe's *Faust*. This is the story of Everyman alone, his loss, his quest, his victory. It is called *Candide, or the Optimist*, and if we pause and think about it, we find it after all, strangely enough, one of the most optimistic books to be read, optimistic in its faith that Everyman can lose, endure, survive, and come at last, as Candide himself says, where “things are not as well as in El Dorado, but where things are pretty well.”

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Time delivers fools from grief; and reason, wise men.

The Enchiridion, or Manual, of Epictetus. CXXIII

Translation by Elizabeth Carter.

The Boy's Own Historian

By ALEXANDER M. SAUNDERS

In my early youth I received a memorable birthday present. I was practicing scale-passages on my violin in the living room—in those days I aspired to be a budding young Albert Spaulding or a Fritz Kreisler—when the doorbell rang loudly. I opened the door. There stood my Aunt Mitt, who smiled, handed me a small package, and greeted me with a “Happy birthday, Son.” Despite my eagerness I opened the package slowly. It was a book, and it bore the magic title *With Lee in Virginia*. This was my first introduction to G. A. Henty, who was to have such a profound effect on my life as he had on the lives of others of my generation.

My delight in reading about Lee's campaigns in Virginia during the Civil War led eventually to similar delight with others of the famous Henty books for boys, and I become a regular Henty fan. Soon I discovered that other boys in my neighborhood were also Henty fans when they were not reading about the Rover Boys, Tom Swift, or the poor boys who made good in the ubiquitous and dubious pages of Horatio Alger, Jr. We organized a club and arranged to swap books. Even today I have a few of those old Henty books, now much battered, foxed, and dog-eared from many readings by many teen-age boys. Whenever I could get sufficient change, I bought one of the cheaper editions. But the high peak of reading joy came twice a year, at Christmas time and when my Grandfather Ferguson and my Aunt Lena and Aunt Kate returned from their yearly stay at Hot Springs, Arkansas, at which resort my grandfather fancied he could boil out troublous rheumatic pains. When trunks were opened, the grandchildren gathered round for their share of the goodies to be handed out—candy, toys, and books. Part of my precious share was always eight or ten Henty books with bright, shining covers.

Years have passed since those happy days of adolescence, but my interest in the Henty books is unabated. I still collect them with the idea of someday writing a

book about their author and his influence on at least two generations of British and American boys. I learned much history from Henty; and I owe to him the genesis of my interest in military tactics and strategy, particularly of the American Civil War and, to a lesser degree, of the campaigns of such celebrated captains as Hannibal, Marlborough, Frederick the Great, Lee, and Lord Roberts. My hobby has in turn led to many delightful experiences, such as my explorations Sunday after Sunday of every spot of tactical significance on the battlefield of the First Manassas in Virginia in company with a staff officer from the War College in Washington, D. C.

The influence of the Henty books was just as pervasive on others. Several professional military men have told me that reading Henty had a great deal to do with their making a career of the service. Every now and then I meet people who still read Henty. Two sons of a graduate student on the University of Oklahoma campus have read twenty or thirty within recent years. One of my colleagues has been collecting Henties for years, and he still reads them. The vice-president of a large chain of hotels is a Henty collector and the compiler of a tentative bibliography on which he worked in part at the British Museum.

William Beebe, the noted ornithologist, ichthyologist, and popularizer of his own scientific adventures in many parts of the world, testifies to their influence in a passage in his *Arcturus Adventure* (1926):

I am twenty feet under water with a huge copper helmet on my head, tilting with my trident against an olive-green grouper over a yard long, who is much too fearless and inquisitive for my liking. Not until I have pricked him sharply with the grains does he leave off nosing my legs with his mean jaws and efficient teeth. It suddenly occurs to me how knightlike I am as far as the metal casque goes, and then in spite of the strange world all about, my mind goes back to the long-ago Christmases when a new-published Henty book was an invariable and almost the best gift. I instantly know that if ever I succeed in shackling those divings to mere awkward words, it must be called “With Helmet