



Letter from Svante Arrhenius to Georg Bredig, February 1923

Arrhenius, Svante. "Letter from Svante Arrhenius to Georg Bredig, February 1923," February 25, 1923. Papers of Georg and Max Bredig, Box 1, Folder 4. Science History Institute. Philadelphia.

<https://digital.sciencehistory.org/works/qe1tlb7>.

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Translated by Jocelyn R. McDaniel

English Translation

Image 1

Duplicate

The Fields for Experiments at the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, 25 February 1923

To: Professor G. Bredig, Karlsruhe

My dear old friend:

The day before yesterday, I received your interesting letter along with an excerpt from the Rector's speech. Thank you very much for these, especially for the good wishes on the occasion of my 65th birthday.

From the one enclosure, I can see how individuals who support the military are annoyed that the war generals are not as highly regarded as they deserve. They only have to turn their gaze westward to see how Marshal (Ferdinand) Fock is called in to suppress all notions of humanity. That is their express purpose.

With regards to the introduction of humanistic subjects at technical universities, I believe this development would have an adverse effect, at least for us. The students are already thoroughly engaged with their work in technical subjects. An allowance for humanistic education would only be possible with the extension of the study period. However, this is already viewed as time-consuming.

It does not matter if one receives a humanistic education. In my opinion, it should be emphasized in lectures that the primary purpose of the engineering profession is to be useful and make people's lives healthier and more enjoyable. At the moment, the primary emphasis of an engineering education is to make as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time. How this is achieved is irrelevant. At least no one says anything about it, especially if legal difficulties are avoided.

Image 2

Nation states share a similar mentality. Flagrant egoism is viewed as the only driving force. I am told that they are now negotiating how to reduce opium imports to China. England and good old Holland, which produce a lot of opium in their colonies, are defying this proposed legislation. I have no doubt that throughout this process, they are speaking in humanitarian platitudes.

As for the United States of Europe, events of the past few decades have terribly prevented us from achieving that goal. Look at the League of Nations, for example. Every single state, at least a major state, has absolute veto, just like the Polish parliament before the partition of Poland. The union can only gradually gain strength, but this process will take many decades. However, if the unbelievable foolishness of the last century (110 years have passed) does not invoke war and disturb the peace, the situation will stabilize so that disputes can be resolved without weapons. Incidentally, we can now see that a solution involving weapons is not a solution, but rather the opposite.

For the most part, I agree with you. However, with the way people are now, we cannot expect circumstances to suddenly improve.

One unfortunate situation is the arrival of colonial troops to suppress civilized people. Similar circumstances occurred before the fall of Rome. The barbarians sense where power lies and seize it. In the end, they subjugate their own superiors. They develop contempt for the white man. English rule in India is also seriously wavering.

Image 3

As far as I understand, the conditions for intellectuals in France are comparable with those

in Germany. The C.T.J (coopération des travailleurs intellectuels) in France was formed to protect the interests of scholars, engineers, teachers, and workers, etc. They are paid less than manual laborers workers. How science will develop in Europe in the long run remains unclear to me. For the time being, we are approaching barbarianism.

Warm regards from our home to yours!

Yours truly,

Svante Arrhenius