

FORGOTTEN ENGLISH

copybook morality

Formal, cheap morality, in allusion to the maxims given to schoolchildren to copy as practice in calligraphy.

—Albert Hyamson's *Dictionary of English Phrases*, 1922

Birthday of Henry Louis Mencken (1880–1956),

American essayist and journalist, remembered for his insightful commentaries on the American dialect. But he was also critical of the political climate of his day. In *Minority Report* (1956) he wrote, "Moral certainty is always a sign of cultural inferiority. The more uncivilized the man, the surer he is that he knows precisely what is right and what is wrong. All human progress, even in morals, has been the work of men who have doubted the current moral values, not of men who have whooped them up and tried to enforce them. The truly civilized man is always skeptical and tolerant, in this field as in all others."

Mencken's cynicism can be traced back much further to his July 26, 1920, article "Bayard vs. Lionheart" in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, in which he predicted of the presidency: "On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their hearts' desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

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Rosh Hashanah
(begins at sunset)

WEDNESDAY

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PROPHETIC!

September