




1938

Greed and Other Faults, 1938

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Greed and Other Faults.

When on November 11, 1620, the Pilgrims drew up, in the cabin of their ship, the Mayflower Compact, 'they covenanted and combined themselves together in to a civil body politick to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordenances and offices, from time to time, as should be thought most mete and convenient for the general good of the Colonie'. ~~Sincere~~ Co-operation and equity were the spirit of the Mayflower Pact. The general good was to be sought. If the regulation of private conduct was ^{later} to become meticulous, at least their's was an ideal higher than mere material gain. They did not expect to "get rich quick". Freedom and a quiet prosperity through toil were good enough for them. Who today would ^{clear the rocky fields and} pile up the endless stone fences of New England and cheerfully wring a living from that then so difficult soil? How soft we are compared to them!

Not only freedom but economic betterment was the goal of the colonists, North and South. But they did not expect something for nothing. They knew they must work hard for both freedom and a living. The stern struggles of colonial days created a tough and virile stock ready for the mighty achievement of the pioneer days ahead. The Revolution and the Constitution brought national ~~unity~~ ^{and national unity.} and national consciousness. There was an era of great statesmen; one of real thinking and fine literature; one of notable invention. Far from perfect, of course, and by no means a stranger to the abuses of the epoch, America nevertheless earned a proud place among the nations. It held the promise of a fine civilization and

culture. It had the machinery for a wise government.

With almost no immigration for twenty years after the Revolution, it was not until 1825 that the yearly arrivals reached 10,000. A distinguished scientist concludes that if immigration had been stopped at the beginning of the nineteenth century the nation today might be one of about 80,000,000^{people}, homogenous, and as comparatively law-abiding and free from crime as England. "Think of the difference", he writes, "if we knew not only that kidnapping, racketeering, bootlegging, vice, graft, blackmail, murder, and theft were as rare as in England, but also that misrepresentation of investments, unfairly pyramided corporations, and all sorts of financial gold bricks were equally diminished in number". The same authority believes, on this hypothesis, that we should have had a higher standard of living, and, with less ignorance^{and indifference} and more intelligence and wisdom, much better government.

To Americans who give thought to the subject, it has been a shock to see their nation turning into something so different from what its founders hopefully looked forward to. Past generations of Americans made the country great, and welded it into a nation. They cherished, and rightly, the Anglo-Saxon culture of the United States. Elements of other congenial cultures that arrived in the earlier days were assimilated without much tension or cleavage. There remained a dominant and pretty definite American culture; and it was essentially Anglo-Saxon. The "melting-pot" melted thoroughly. There was an American type and there was an American viewpoint;

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each differentiated, to be sure, but substantially one. The American melting-pot was believed invincible. The "little red school house" was counted on to turn out genuine Americans, and it did so.

Meanwhile, with courage and energy the pioneers were developing the country, in pursuit of individual gain. As the pioneer exploitation of the land was completed, successors to the qualities of the pioneers turned their indomitable energies to daring business ventures, and, too often, to the exploitation of their fellow men. The glamour of pioneer exploits was extended to material success of all kinds, without much fastidiousness as to the means by which it was achieved. The "get-rich-quick" mania began to poison the air. Later great "trusts" grew up, with incorporations, financing, and industries on a scale vast beyond all precedent. The country teemed with self-made millionaires. Vulgarity, ostentation and all manner of exaggeration flowered forth in many places from the rank soil of new riches. Very generally the acquisition of money became the aim, the measure of success, and the passport to "society". Ethics deteriorated along with manners.

In the 1840s our annual immigration had struck the pace of hundreds of thousands; and the average steadily mounted until, between 1905 and 1914, the number of immigrants arriving in one year ^{was,} six times, ~~was~~ above the million mark. During the decades before 1900 there had come people in great part of easily assimilable stocks,-- Celt and Saxon, "Nordic" peoples from the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany and all of Northern Europe. In blood, ⁱⁿ temperament, character and mind

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they were well fitted to merge readily into an Anglo-Saxon people and civilization. But immigration was unrestricted. There was no thought of the future of the race; no real test of the mental or physical fitness of the individual arrival. Just as the exigencies of the Southern planter had earlier created the negro question, so now the greed of the Northern manufacturer, eager for cheap labor, ^{was bringing} ~~had brought~~ us the immigration problem. No melting-pot could melt so fast. No "little red school house" could assimilate such hordes.

There were still some far-sighted and able statesmen in congress and in administrations at Washington, but in the main the country was treated as a ring chalked off for the greediest and cunningest to disport themselves in. Little or no concern was shown for the future of the race, ~~and very little for the future~~ ^{or} of the land and its resources. The debauchery of our politics through the "spoils system" had begun under Andrew Jackson and been carried to its worst in the horrible days of "reconstruction". Politicians were not likely to be more squeamish than businessmen. Moreover business had preempted most of the best ability of the country. The pursuit of political place and power was carried on as ruthlessly as the pursuit of money. In many large cities the two, indeed, were the same thing. Brazenly corrupt machines grew up. In the train of all this mad greed, came unscrupulousness, haste, insincerity, and superficiality; the gambling spirit, eager to discount the future, and exaggerated optimism. There were frivolity and cynicism, to escape facing facts, and a love of short cuts for lack of the patience for thoroughness.

This free-for-all of materialistic self-seeking had already been intensified by mass arrivals of money-hungry foreigners. The good of the nation seemed almost forgotten, and interest in government was mostly confined to a conception of it ^{in terms of office-holding, or} as a possible fountain of favors. Into this cultural atmosphere poured more hordes of immigrants in their millions. Largely herded into factories and slums, citizenship was tossed to them practically without qualification. In a peaceful country, they were not thought of as potential "cannon fodder". But they were useful workers and very handy ^{election-} ~~veto-~~ fodder. Most of them had come here to make money, and quickly, if possible, in the American fashion.

Many of those immigrants had had no great reason to love the governments they had previously lived under, and brought with them an instinctive dislike of even the mildest authority. There was little in the scene to inspire in them either idealism or patriotism. The melting-pot might teach them English, as Esperanto might teach diverse races to communicate with one another. Even this was retarded by the foreign language press, which informed them, in a way, but retarded their Americanization by keeping alive ~~the~~ previous national ties or ~~their~~ racial consciousness.

The most characteristic Anglo-Saxon and other congenial and assimilated stocks of the nation had been decimated by the war between the States. Needlessly brought on by greed and fanaticism in North and South, it weakened the potency of the "melting-pot". And by creating a scism between old-fashioned Americans, it stultified American politics (to this very day), as a genuine expression of

American ideas and ideals, and so helped clear the way for the contents of the "melting-pot" to begin to melt and transform the "melting-pot" itself. Belatedly, during the Great War, it was at last realized that the nation had begun to fall apart; that outside the still dominant generality of citizens who saw pretty well eye to eye and whose reactions were similar, there had come into existence groups that had not been assimilated, that still were swayed by a European national tie or a racial solidarity.

The purifying and amalgamating effects of the cooperative effort of the nation in the Great War were dulled by confusing sentimental slogans. As a far-seeing measure of national defense ^{our participation in that war} it was adapted to the inspiration of a united patriotism that might carry over into peace times. Those desirable results were to a great extent obliterated, also, by a good deal of the profiteering spirit among great and small alike, and by the emergence of a new pressure group, eager to "cash in" on military service, however insignificant. The phenomenon was sadly characteristic of the spirit of the times.

It was after the turn of the century that annual arrivals of immigrants ^{had} reached their most tremendous numbers; and it was observed that with this great increase in the rate of immigration there synchronized a very marked change in the origin and type of those arriving. They came, in great part, from Southern and Eastern Europe and were different in tradition and racial characteristics from the bulk of previous immigration. For example, Italy, Poland, and Russia sent a very small percentage before 1900; and, as to the

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rate of arrival, the census shows that, of all foreign-born in the country in 1930, 64.7% had arrived since 1900. As further illustration of what was happening, in the 1917-1927 decade the number of Jews in the United States increased nearly 25% from immigration alone.

Our absurdly lax immigration laws were occasionally amended, but nothing of much consequence was done until the law of 1924, by which quotas were adopted based on 2% of the number of nationals of each country shown by the census to have been here in 1890. What the Great War had revealed, and the fresh rush of foreigners that occurred a few years after it,-- which was notably objected to by American labor,-- gave rise to that legislation. There is disappointingly little evidence that the general welfare of the nation was broadly considered. For example, natives of Caribbean, Central American, or South American republics are exempt from the quota limitation, irrespective of race. And, most absurd of all, the quotas for every country are based on nationality, that is citizenship, instead of upon race, with the result that the quotas of the nations generally most assimilable ~~can be~~ ^{are} employed to syphon into the United States large numbers of the races that are least assimilable. Meanwhile, immigration of the most adaptable stocks has long been lagging.

Of course people of a great variety of races have given of their brain and brawn in the building of America; and races seemingly the most alien, particularly after a generation or more here, have produced citizens imbued with the spirit and traditions of the country and devoted to its institutions. No question of racial superiorities is relevant to this discussion; and no question of "racial" purity, with few exceptions non-existent in the world, is raised.

The point is that this nation was founded and grew up as a Nordic, "Aryan", and preponderantly Anglo-Saxon one, with a long tradition of free constitutional government, of ethics, and of attitude towards life. The inheritance, or the full and sympathetic

adoption of this spiritual heritage ^{all} by citizens is necessary to the continuance of America. ^{as we have known & loved it.} ^{has meant} If America ~~means~~ anything, it ^{has meant} ~~means~~ those

things. Otherwise it ~~may~~ become just a geographical expression, inhabited by a sort of federation of racial, national, and occupational groups. There is room for only one loyalty in the United States, and only one solidarity, that of the American people. And that be-
^{if we are no longer able to assimilate and would recent arrivals & their children} comes impossible ^{when} the least assimilable races grow too numerous or too disproportionately influential.

If anyone doubts that the trend of immigration over the last three or four decades has been too much for the national digestion, let him con the stories of crime and racketeering in the newspapers. Let him note the cultural value and the tendencies of much that is inculcated over the radio, on the stage, and in word and picture. Let him look at American politics and at the new disrespect for all that is decent or old and tested by experience. These new and growing influences tend to weaken what is best and to draw forth what is worst in the national character. It was the real America that grew great. It was the real America that was a magnet to foreigners. It is to the interest of all, including the latest worthy immigrant to arrive, that that America be restored and preserved. A nation may be conquered from within as well as from without.

It is shocking to observe ² how many Americans who resent the too rapid intrusion of ¹ too great proportion of alien blood are themselves

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childless. There is now ^{days} ~~here~~ a tendency for national character, like international preponderance, to be determined by the results of a race of birth-rates. In the face of this, what, in the future, will "America" mean, unless characteristic American stock, ^{whether original or assimilated,} where it is sound, is carried on by a greatly increased birth-rate? ~~XX~~

^ The ethics and the attitude towards life held in common by the English-speaking peoples, whether these be ^{born} inborn or absorbed from environment, ^{are} ~~are~~ more essential than the form of government.

obvious mistakes to be made in dealing with

There are three ~~wrong ways to deal~~ with immigration. One is to do it in a fashion to offend other nations. Another is to admit individuals who are not first-class in character, mind, and body, including heredity for a couple of generations. A third is to admit disproportionate numbers of persons of races ~~that-a~~ whose assimilability is difficult, or even impossible. American immigration policy has ~~revealed in~~ ^{made} all three of these mistakes. It continues the same fatal mistakes to this day. Chinese were excluded with quite unnecessary brusqueness. After two great secretaries of state, Root and Knox, had settled the Japanese immigration question to the satisfaction of ^{the pride and the interests of} both nations, self-seeking politicians reversed the policy and gratuitously offended Japan, with no benefit to anyone, and great detriment to our relations with Japan. More Japanese arrived ~~after~~, per year, ^{after} than before ^{that} ~~this cheap~~ ^{political} sectional, ~~rabble-rousing~~ manoeuvre, of West coast politicians.

^{some} Nearly twenty-five years ago there was introduced in Congress a bill that covered ^{all} these matters and which would have confined immigration virtually to the most easily assimilable races. It made ^a ~~one~~ ^{besides other tests, of} criterion the ratio between the wage scale in the country of origin and that in the United States, - a provision presumably welcome ~~too~~ to American labor and all those desiring to uphold, so far as possible, the national standard of living. Being designed, for the good of the whole country, rather than for the flattery of any pressure group, the bill was scarcely noticed in Congress. Nobody really cared.

* and unless reproduction of the unfit and immigration of the unassimilable are decreased?

11 We Americans generally are rather reasonable and kindly people. Although the war draft is said to have revealed no very flattering average mentality, we can nevertheless think. Like other English-speaking peoples, we do not particularly enjoy it. We are inclined to hide thought and feeling behind a masque of levity as the English do behind a masque of manner. We are a bit vague as to what we wish to be and do, but we have a strong, ~~if latent~~, streak of idealism. It is one of the saddest things in the world that during these most critical years of depression and suffering, crying to Heaven for unselfishness and sacrifice by all for the common good, the current leadership has made no genuine appeal to the soul of the nation but has rather engendered materialism and cynicism. Men of common sense and goodwill must take the situation in hand lest we ^{come to} impersonate as a nation "that wandering ship of the drunken pilot, the mutinous crew and the angry captain, called Human Nature".

Let us not have as our epitaph the Biblical story that tells of a great herd feeding on the mountain side, and of how the devils entered into them, and the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea, and perished in the waters. If that is our fate, it will have been, in our case, the devils of greed, folly, and indifference.