

The American Composite.

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Class of '97.

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The American Composite.

Introduction.

American national life in its complexity and simplicity is the latest form of civilization. It extends over a broad territory and touches widely diverse types of men and interests. European nations have long expected the division of the states into many independent governments and they but slightly understood what it is that holds them together.

Rome is history's great example of a composite nation, but she never developed a nationality. The nations were conquered and merged into the great army of Roman slaves. Their interest in Rome was that of a conquered people. She took from them their national life with all its vitalizing power and gave in return the peace of death. Her countless captives gave to her their learning in art, literature and the sciences and she returned no impulse to increase the store. All interests except the purely

personal one of self gratification were killed. Hence the soundless depths of her corruption politically, morally, ^{and} socially. It was this which made the wholesale plundering of her provinces possible and resulted in very nearly moral death for the whole empire.

Rome reached her zenith when no other power touched the Mediterranean. Her vast empire was built up to satisfy the greed for conquest and power. And like the veriest barbarian when the spoils were in her hands she ate, drank and gambled herself to death.

The analogy between American and Roman nationality exists only in the possibility in the latter for the fusion of her heterogeneous peoples into one. The possibility never became a reality.

The development of American nationality can be traced from the beginning and always it is the spirit of the Nation that has carried it forward.

The Continent.

The American continent in its physical features was not inviting to any but determined men. When once cleared the land gave good crops, but the clearing of forests required time and severe labor and in the mean while the colony subsisted the best way it could, fighting hunger, cold, wild beasts, savages and loneliness.

The greatest advantage the new land offered for the developement of a new nation was its emptiness of all civilization. The Indians offered desperate resistance to the Europeans, but they were never strong enough in numbers or organization to threaten the existence of the colonies.

Their contact with Europeans influenced the character of the latter only in a transitory way. The frequent Indian raids developed the military genius of the colonists and diverted them from quarreling among themselves. Again the French allies separated more widely the already broad enough breach between

Canada and New England. (Parkman)

The fur trade was for many years the great source of wealth for the colonists and it was the means of developing a bold, hardy class of adventurers who formed the advance line of civilization. They came more directly and practically into contact with the Indians than any other class. The numerous French Jesuits and the wonderful Elliot of New England with the explorers, La Salle, Champlain, and numerous later men all touched the Indian, but he was like the wild things they shot in the forests, after desperate struggles and subtle cunning he died or escaped to the West. The only impression they left on the land are the many musical names of their old haunts.

Colonization

For the better understanding of their later development it is well to take a hasty review of the different nations' colonizing efforts.

Spain.

The Spanish have the honor of discovering America for the last time but its civilization owes almost as little to Spain as to the original inhabitants. Her rich medieval tones are reflected in the pride of some Spanish Creole family with their picturesque houses and courts which now and then give quaintness to a vacation journey or richness to a novel setting.

Spain was rich in the sixteenth century with Mexican and Peruvian gold; but her colonists were soldiers, a class that seldom can develop a new country. Her common people were slaves and she steadily lost ground till now after four hundred years her last valuable province is fighting to escape into freedom.

France

France was the Catholic power that came so near moulding American ideas. The French influence was twofold. In Canada they fostered for many years a paternal government which in

the light of modern ideas was suffocating. Church and King succeeded in developing a people that were willing and eager to adopt the Indians life to escape to freedom.

We do not find them, however, struggling for self government, they had no principles that would prevent their accepting the King's constant gifts. They were the true children of their training and the cause of popular liberty was saved, in America, the menace of a catholic despotism on the north. Though it seems from the rapid increase of lawlessness in Canada and the inability of the Church to control it would have caused her to pass through some similar revolution to that of France. Her general drift was toward anarchy rather than strong independence.

The French Huguenots were quite different in character, as firm ^{in their religious} faith as the Puritans, they were never so intolerant, it may be because they never had a colony of their own.

The French protestants were found in all colonies. Many landed in the Carolinas, being from the middle class they were merchants and handicraftsmen and soon reestablished their business in the colonies in which they were very generally successful.

Their experience placed them always on the side of popular government and at the time of the war for independence they gave largely of their wealth. One Mons. Manigault gave his entire fortune. Boston received Faneuil Hall from a Huguenot. (Bancroft Vol II P. 182)

The Huguenots brought to the land of their adoption the learning and refinement of Europe. Their settlements were respected then, and today their regions and people are "noted for their affluence and refined hospitality." (Bancroft)

English.

The English colonies were noted from the first for their stubbornness. (Bancroft Vol II) The will of the people and

the king conflicted and sorry compromises resulted which like all their kind only served to put off the final settlement.

Virginia the most loyal of all the royal provinces was one of the first and strongest for self government. Living practically isolated their feudal power tended to develop individuality and independence. Bacon's rebellion just one hundred years before the Revolution is an evidence of their temper. They feared "disorder less than they did tyranny." (Bancroft)

Their popular assemblies elected by the people were the first held in America, (1619) they continued with greater and greater royal restrictions down to the Revolution, when they voiced the will of the people. During that trying time Virginians were the men that guided the course of events. The ablest speakers were here, Jefferson came from Virginia, she furnished the army with a leader and many brave officers and privates.

The South though unfortunate in

her later slavery policy has always been the friend of liberty. From Virginia some of our western states received their leading pioneers.

The northern colonies were formed for the express purpose of escaping the restraints of England. "God knows our greatest ambition is to live a quiet life, in a corner of the world. We came not into this wilderness to seek great things for ourselves."

having now above thirty years enjoyed the privileges of Government within ourselves. To be governed by rulers of our own choosing and laws of our own is the fundamental principal of our patent." So says a letter sent from Massachusetts to Charles II.

These New England colonies were declared "seditious and traitors to the king," who cling to the idea that they were settled for the express benefit of the mother country.

The succession of events which culminated in the Revolution are in themselves

trifling. The real question at issue was this "Great Britain offered its transatlantic dominions no unity but under a parliament in which they were not represented; the people of thirteen colonies by special instructions to their delegates in congress, on the fourth of July 1776, declared themselves to be states, independent and united, and began the search for a fitting constitution." (Bancroft, Hist. of Constitution of U. S. P. 10.)

From 1776 to 1789 is the critical period in the development of the U. S. (J. Fiske, Critical Period of American History.) The colonies passed through the war only to find the problem of their union confronting them. Experience soon proved the Confederation an efficient bond and the greatest revolution came to pass when they changed it. The states and people sanctioned the change and soon saw its wisdom. In a circular letter sent by the Hartford Convention to all the states the danger of the Confederation is clearly stated. "Our embarrassments arise from a defect in the present gov-

ernment of the United States. All government supposes the power of coercion; this power, however, never did exist in the general government of the continent, or has never been exercised. Under these circumstances, the resources and force of the country can never be properly united and drawn forth. The states individually considered, while they endeavor to retain too much of their independence, may finally lose the whole. By the expulsion of the enemy we may be emancipated from the tyranny of Great Britain; we shall however, be without a solid hope of peace and freedom unless we are properly cemented among ourselves." Happily the danger was safely passed. The union has been tested thoroughly and found strong. Every great struggle has been over some rendering of the constitution which constantly proves the wisdom of its framers.

Later America.

But what has been the result of this experiment in popular government? The result is satisfactory and

no American would entertain the idea of changing his system for the most limited and liberal of monarchies. The administrations have been many times in the hands of unscrupulous partisans but public opinion expressed in the daily paper is too strong for a single set of such officials to long keep their power.

The settlement of the West the building of railroads and telegraphs and the spread of the daily paper, facilitate the exchange of thought and increase wealth, both keep the East and the West, the North and the South in touch. And the American system of non interference in European politics except where they concern her has helped to make the people more peculiarly and intensely interested in their own affairs. The fact that American politics, national politics are not petty in any sense may account for the general broadness of the American's views. It has sometimes been urged that the agricultural interests of the West could

not be made to harmonize with the high tariff demanded by the manufacturers of the East. Here the population of each section fixed, unable to freely express their views and have them put to the test, it is very likely the two would long ago have parted. But the facilities for travel and the daily papers have made isolation impossible. The expression of the people's mind especially in cities is in strikes. The power of the strike is characteristic of the end of the present century. A big strike is felt all over the nation sometimes it affects the market abroad. So long as the strikers do not resort to violence public opinion is on their side, but when rioting commences the people will not submit to the destruction of their property.

The causes of strikes are usually some difficulty over relations between the employer and the workmen. The lawlessness comes from whisky and foreigners with too little knowledge of

laws they are breaking.

The menace to America's continuity today seems to be the infusion of foreigners whose indifference to her laws or willful desire to annihilate them has aroused among ^{the less} thinking people a feeling that the government in some way is oppressive.

Immigration may be a menace but the constant friction between the higher and lower civilization keeps the farmer from giving way to the tendency to find fault and say politics is a matter only for a certain class. They dare not trust it to one class if they would keep their laws pure. The infusion of new blood and ideas and customs is not great enough to withstand the force of American life and in the second generation the public school makes them American in language and the rapidity of the life around them soon makes them so in dress and social usage.

American life is lacking in local

color, because in the West at least the communities are not old enough.

The social structure it must be owned is reared by wealth. The family name if not upheld by wealth receives slight honor unless connected in some way with politics. Still a small growing aristocracy of culture is being built up. While the general characteristics are such, the strangeness is that ~~the~~ prejudice and frivolity of the European nations should have furnished the material. It is worth while thinking of that the people of the United States came largely from the middle class of Europeans and while they differed in language and religion they were united in their love for the home and general dislike of the extravagance of the nobility, traits very evident in the average American today. Manifest Destiny.

The "manifest destiny" of America according to John Fiske is the gradual extension of similiar governments

to all the nations on the Western hemisphere thence across the Pacific through Asia and into Europe.

As Bancroft says "We learn to think the thought and hope the hope of mankind."