

**CERTAIN DANGEROUS  
TENDENCIES IN  
AMERICAN LIFE,  
AND OTHER PAPERS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649366323

Certain dangerous tendencies in American life, and other papers by Jonathan Baxter Harrison

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**JONATHAN BAXTER HARRISON**

**CERTAIN DANGEROUS  
TENDENCIES IN  
AMERICAN LIFE,  
AND OTHER PAPERS**



CERTAIN DANGEROUS TENDENCIES  
IN AMERICAN LIFE, AND  
OTHER PAPERS.

[by  
Jonathan Baxter Harrison]



114083  
2/6/11

BOSTON:  
HOUGHTON, OSGOOD AND COMPANY.  
The Riverside Press, Cambridge.  
1880.

COPYRIGHT, 1880,  
BY HOUGHTON, OSGOOD & CO.

*All rights reserved.*

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:  
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY  
E. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY

## CONTENTS.



	PAGE
CERTAIN DANGEROUS TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN LIFE . . . . .	1
THE NATIONALS, THEIR ORIGIN AND THEIR AIMS . . . . .	51
THREE TYPICAL WORKINGMEN . . . . .	77
WORKINGMEN'S WIVES . . . . .	106
THE CAREER OF A CAPITALIST . . . . .	141
STUDY OF A NEW ENGLAND FACTORY TOWN . . . . .	157
PREACHING . . . . .	203
SINCERE DEMAGOGY . . . . .	226

## CERTAIN DANGEROUS TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN LIFE.

---

THE character of our nation is highly complex. It includes many elements, influences, and tendencies, of different degrees of strength and importance. In any real survey of the life and thought of the country the chief of these qualities and forces must be noted and compared with each other, and some estimate made of their relative significance. Some of the influences are wholesome and vital, and tend to national prosperity. Others are of the nature of disease, and depress the national strength, tending, so far as they are effective, to disorder and the decay of society. An exact measurement of intellectual and moral elements is of course impossible, but there can be no just estimate of our national character and tendencies as a whole which is not based upon some such careful study and comparison of the separate factors, some real knowledge of the principal influences which, reinforcing or opposing each other, are all included and summed up in the life and thought of the people. Such an examination has



not yet been attempted, I believe, though it would be difficult to overestimate the value of the undertaking if it should be successful; that is, if one who has observed widely and truly could report accurately and plainly what he has seen.

Since the civil war we have had new elements and conditions in our national life, and there have been important changes in the relative strength of certain of the old forces. We have been confronted by problems and dangers which we had thought could never arise in the path of a nation with institutions like ours. Not only had we come to regard our system of government as superior to all others, but we trusted still more to that wonderful perfection and vitality of character which we believed ourselves, as a people, to possess, and which, as we boasted, enabled us to receive from all other countries the most incongruous and unfavorable materials, and assimilate and transmute them all into the texture and substance of a noble national life. We had not, before the war, been prepared in any way for the tasks or difficulties which we have since encountered. We had little practical knowledge of pauperism or the labor question. Our politicians had but slight knowledge of political economy, and generally thought the study of such subjects unnecessary in our country. They knew little of financial theories or methods, or of the principles which the long experience of the civilized world had established in connection with

the relation of government to the money and industries of the people. Indeed, the politicians of those days cannot be said to have studied anything very deeply besides party politics, except the slavery question; and they were fond of repeating that history had no lessons for us, and that the experience of other nations was not in any way valuable for our guidance. We rejoiced in our exemption from the ills and dangers of European society.

The intensity of interest which the slavery question at last aroused, and the peculiar direction which it gave to the thought of our people, left no time or vitality for matters pertaining to the science of government. That agitation unavoidably exaggerated the sentimental character which already marked our politics, and gave them an impulse toward humanitarian and intuitive methods which has not yet spent its force. The war destroyed hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of property, and the government was compelled to borrow some two thousand millions of dollars to enable it to continue the struggle and maintain the existence of the nation. These two facts are, for any study of our present national life and conditions, the significant features and results of that contest. The more dramatic accompaniments, the emancipation of the slaves and the management of the revolted States after the war, have had far less influence upon the life and thought of our people. With our national wealth or productive property

#### 4      *CERTAIN DANGEROUS TENDENCIES*

so terribly reduced, and with the new, strange burden of an enormous debt, there was but one course of wisdom and safety, — that of the most rigid economy. But by a remarkable delusion our people came to regard the paper money, every note of which was a certificate and reminder of indebtedness and loss of property, as a real and boundless addition to our wealth, which not only made good our material losses, but made us far richer than we had been before the war. Under the influence of this astounding error the people and the government plunged at once into reckless extravagance of expenditure, thus greatly increasing the loss which the nation had suffered by the war. The heroic sacrifice and endurance of the people during the war should have passed afterward into the form of self-denial and renunciation of luxury till our debts were paid. But there was very little effort to pay what we owed. On the contrary, the indebtedness of the nation, and of the States, cities, and towns of the country, was prodigiously increased. Most people lost their heads, and acted as if debts were never to be paid, and as if wealth without limit could be created at will by acts of Congress authorizing the issue of paper promises to pay. A still farther reduction, of enormous extent, of the wealth of the nation was caused by the general purchase and construction of things which were not needed by the people — articles of luxury and display — at a cost out of all proportion to the wealth or income of the owners.