

**OF THE BIRTH AND DEATH
OF NATIONS. A
THOUGHT FOR THE CRISIS**

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Of the birth and death of nations. A thought for the crisis by James McKaye

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BIRTH AND DEATH OF NATIONS.

IN the primitive ages of the world, long before the dawn of history, while Prometheus lay chained to the rock, and the men of Shinar, dispersed by the divine anger, settled themselves in new habitations, there was sent into that far off eastern country, the earliest home of the race, a messenger from the celestial powers. With a virgin's head and face, she had the stalwart body of a lion and the strong wings of an eagle. She had been taught by those primeval intelligences and instructors of the gods, the Muses, and knew all the wisdom of the ages, past and to come; and her commission was to stand on the waysides, and in the great thoroughfares of the people, and put questions—riddles—to the passers by. Questions, doubtless very apt, significant and necessary to be put, but often, to that infant race, most obscure, enigmatical, and difficult of right answer. And yet there was no escape; answered they must be, wisely, justly, and to the point, under penalty of a sudden and sure destruction,—for such was the inexorable decree of the inscrutable Powers that ruled

that ancient world. To-day even, whoever likes and can afford it, may see her colossal image cut out of a black basaltic spur of the Libyan mountains, overlooking the Nile, a neighbor and meet companion of the great Pyramid of Cheops.

To the Greeks the SPHINX was the offspring of the Chimera. In disparagement of her authenticity, the sceptics call her a MYTH, as if the Myths were not the oldest and most indestructible facts in the history of the world. But by whatever name she may be called, from that remotest period of the ethnic formations of humanity, the beginnings of nations, even unto this day, have her arduous questions been propounded, and always with no jot or tittle of the old penalty abated—a right true answer or certain overwhelming ruin.

On no habitable summits of the earth, in any age of human history, have questions of a higher import or involving mightier interests, secular and eternal, been put to the sons of men, than those that to-day so urgently press themselves upon the consideration of the people of these United States. Nor can their just solution be any longer avoided or delayed, under forfeitures more disastrous and deplorable than any people ever before were called upon to pay. For this is the nineteenth century of the Christian era, and we live under its Master's unfailing word—"Unto whom much is given, much will be required." Very necessary is it then, that we should lift ourselves intelligently to the moral level of these questions, and in the faith that truth alone has the right to reign over the world and to govern its facts, without attempting to anticipate or forestall the

final dispositions of the Infinite Providence, make our answer fearlessly, in the light of that WORD, and of history.

And first of all, in the order of events as well as of the argument, it is demanded of us to answer by what RIGHT we call ourselves a nation, and claim to hold and rule as one INDIVISIBLE DOMAIN, all these broad territories, stretching from ocean to ocean?

The question is asked upon quite another and higher authority than that of any Confederate States' president or congress. Nor does the roar of their cannon constitute the most urgent reason for its prompt answer. That became necessary only in consequence of the obdurate dulness of the national ear to "the still small voices." Even so has it been from the beginning—"the still small voices" once became inaudible, and the Supreme Powers must needs commission the loud and ever louder ones, even unto the roar of whole batteries of rifled cannon. Already at Sumter, Bull Run, and elsewhere have these batteries belched forth such a denial of the nation's right to national existence, as leaves no doubt of the internecine nature of the hatred that so vents itself, and demonstrates the imminency of the crisis that urges us to a thorough examination of the grounds upon which the great battle must be fought, in order that *our* batteries may be planted upon the immovable foundations laid by the fathers, and our cannon charged not alone with the elemental forces of carbonized saltpetre, but, consubstantial with these, with the far more invincible logic of that Divine Word which in the beginning became flesh in this nation, and will, in

defiance of all the powers of darkness that assail it, have free course and be glorified in its history.

Let us, then, to begin with, clear our minds of that atheistical, impious, secession vagary—that a nation is a species of heterogeneous, accidental aggregation of men or of states, held together by a sort of “balance of interest treaty” or contract of copartnership, entered into for the purpose of establishing and carrying on the highly profitable business of stump oratory “for Buncombe,” securing “the spoils of victory” in certain annual games of ballot-box stuffing, and breeding “colored chattels” for the shambles of king cotton. This notion of the essential nature and purposes of our national existence, has now for several years been entertained, and by many distinguished politicians and leaders of the people, with no little energy, reduced to practice in these United States,—with what effect begins to be apparent enough. No more false or fatal emanation from the bottomless pit ever lodged itself in the human understanding, and the necessity of dislodging it with the truth seems just now very urgent indeed, to the present writer.

The truth being that, even in the most rigorous scientific definition of it, a NATION is an organized body, and by no means a mere aggregation of individual men or independent communities; and so, like every other organized body, must from the very nature of things, incorporate its own distinctive organic force or Idea. Indeed, it is only in virtue of this distinctive organic idea, that it becomes a nation at all. To this merely formal statement of the truth, history, irradiated by the light of eighteen Christian cen-

turies, adds a far sublimer derivation and broader scope. It declares, that in the great epochs of the world, the Omnipotent Providence confides to a chosen people the revelation of a great truth, a great regenerative IDEA; and that from thenceforth, that idea becomes for that people the germ of its national life and civilization—its soul, without which it could no more be a nation, than the human body could be a man without the human soul. For in this more excellent sense, a nation is but a larger form of humanity, a grander Cosmos or receptacle of the Divine Presence in the world. And it is this Presence, this fundamental idea, which constitutes the real substance of the national life, and determines the legitimate character and course of the national development and civilization.

This presence of a divinely posited fundamental idea, as vital force in the ethical evolution and growth of nations, is the highest, grandest fact in the history of the race. The sublimest theme of the oldest Scriptures is this doctrine of the genesis of all things from the Spirit "moving upon the face of the deep." The first product being light, thought, idea—and then the idea emerging into articulate word, a FACT in time. Not only the solid earth, upon which to-day beats the heavy tramp of our armies, was so founded, but so were embodied and established all the several nations that have dwelt upon its surface, even unto that one whose "covenant of life" bears date on the fourth day of July, 1776, and contains these ever-memorable words, then first in the providential unfolding of the ages made audible to the ears of men:

"ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, ENDOWED BY THEIR