UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE. LOCAL LECTURES, SUMMER MEETING, 1906. THE XVIIITH CENTURY. OPENING ADDRESS. THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649753789

University of Cambridge. Local Lectures, Summer Meeting, 1906. The XVIIIth Century. Opening Address. The Rise of the United States by Whitelaw Reid

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THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES

BY

WHITELAW REID.

HARRISON AND SONS, PRINTERS,
LONDON, 1906.

THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES.

In discharging the duty with which I have been honoured, for the opening of the present course of Cambridge lectures, I am asked to speak to you as briefly as may be on the greatest fact in modern history, the rise and development of the United States.

Neither George Canning nor his King called this New World into being, and it was not called into being by anybody for the purpose of redressing the balance of the Old. As to its most significant, and, for a long time, its leading settlements, it was called into being by Charles I., when he pursued Separatists, non-Conformists, and others, in the professed interest of the Church of England. Its growth was checked by the rise of Oliver Cromwell ; and while the Protectorate lasted the Puritan emigration ceased. Charles II. revived it, and he and his brother James, by their treatment of the Puritans in England, and the Covenanters in Scotland, did more than any other human power to make New England and other large sections of the United States what they are.

Tudors and Stuarts alike, whatever their intentions, were helpful to the infancy of the new nation, and there is fitness in its possessing enduring monuments to commemorate them, Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, Jamestown, and James River.

At the beginning of this period, say at the opening of the Seventeenth Century, and near the close of Queen Elizabeth's long reign, all England was much less than London is now. The total population of England was a little over four millions, and what is now far the greatest city in the world had then possibly a quarter of one million within its limits. A rapid increase was prevented, in fact, a material decrease had been caused, by the enormous death rate, due to epidemics which science had not learned to control, to unhealthful surroundings, to constant wars, and

to a deplorable waste of human life in the ordinary administration of justice. Between 1592 and 1665, London had eight visitations of the plague. The sweating sickness and the smallpox were almost equally dreaded and equally uncontrollable. The unsanitary habits of the people were extraordinary. The very King for whom the first settlement in Virginia was named, according to the declaration of James Balfour, never washed even his hands. Prisoners were tortured, robbers were hung, witches and religious men whose orthodoxy was not our doxy, were burned. For trivial offences men and women were whipped or set in the stocks, or nailed by their ears to the pillory. Witchcraft was so firmly embedded in the faith of the people that the greatest legal writer of his time, Sir William Blackstone, said as late as when the American Colonies were on the point of revolting, that every nation in the world had borne testimony to it, and that to deny it was to deny the revealed word of God.

This is, of course, not a fair picture of the England from which the Colonists went out, though some of the noticeable features are accurately portrayed. You can faintly conceive the limitations of the England of that day, how little it was like the present world, when you add that it knew nothing of the circulation of the blood, of vaccination, of gravitation, of the velocity of light, of illumination by petroleum, gas or electricity, of communication by fast or cheap mails, of the telegraph or the telephone ; that it had no newspapers, and that its books were few and dear.

Yet this England had Magna Charta, and parliamentary government ; had greater and better secured personal liberties than any other country in Europe, and was more jealously watchful of them ; had an inbred respect for law, and for its officers, and, in spite of a degree of illiteracy that seems now surprising, probably led Europe also in diffused intelligence and in a reasoning devotion to religion. In the gallery of England's immortals, Milton was soon to be added to Shakespeare ; and the nation was rapidly approaching the great contest in which religious zeal and a passion for civil liberty in an almost equal co-operation were to precipitate a revolution and execute a King.

The New World and its Colonists.

Meantime, the land in which the new nation was to spring up, a land of rivers and lakes and unbroken forests, beyond the Atlantic, lay palpitating with wild life under summer suns or blanketed under winter snows, practically unpeopled. The first feeble colony arrived at Jamestown seven years after the opening of the century; the little company borne by the *Mayflower* to Plymouth Rock thirteen years after that. The only inhabitants at the beginning of the seventeenth century were the mysterious Aborigines, whose origin, languages, and customs were alike unknown, whose trails through the forests were the only roads, whose patches of Indian corn were the only agriculture, whose clusters of wigwams were the only cities. Between the Great Lakes and the Gulf, from the Atlantic to the Alleghenies, there were in all less than 200,000 of them, in limits which now contain the second city in the world, seventeen great States, and a total population of over thirty millions.

At the beginning of the century you are studying, this New World had started into full life among the forests. Scattered and still feeble Colonies, controlled and mainly peopled by Great Britain, lay in isolated settlements along the Atlantic coast, from Massachusetts to the Gulf of Mexico, and at several points were spreading westward toward the Alleghenies. By this time they had come to include a sprinkling of several Northern races—soon to melt wonderfully into the Anglo-Saxon mould and to renounce other allegiance in order to seek the privileges of British subjects. There were Dutch in New York—in fact New York was, for about half a century, a Dutch city. There were Swedes in Delaware, and Germans in Pennsylvania, and to these were added the best France had to give in a considerable influx of the persecuted and exiled Huguenots. There were many sects too, and these did not melt so readily into one mould. There were Puritans in most of New England, Baptists in Rhode Island, Episcopalians in New York and Virginia, Presbyterians in New Jersey and the Carolinas, Quakers and Lutherans in Pennsylvania, Roman Catholics in Maryland. All of them insisted on freedom to enjoy their own religion—many of them had come to an

uninhabited country for that purpose—but not all were ready to tolerate other people's religion.

At times there had been efforts to impose upon them the Established Church of England, but to this they thought consent impossible. Religion and education they fostered alike. The Church and the schoolhouse went with every fresh pioneer settlement. But many of them left England to escape Bishops, others to escape the ruling classes, and in their new homes they would submit neither to a Prelacy nor to a Nobility. They demanded the right of the English-born to participate in the government, but they were not ready to let everybody share it with them. In the early days of New England none but Church members could vote or hold office. As late as 1679, hardly one grown man in Massachusetts out of five could vote. Cotton denounced democracy, thinking no doubt with Montesquieu, that liberty may be least safe under a rule of the mere majority; nobody dreamed of letting Indians or negroes vote; till long after the Revolution a considerable property qualification was required from every voter.

In one way or another they were ruled by officers from England; and they brought with them the general body of English law. But they had organised parliamentary government in most of the Colonies, on the English pattern, with more exact representation and under written constitutional arrangements more precise than England had ever employed. They looked to England for protection, spoke of it habitually as home, and held themselves under its authority; yet they already exercised a large measure of local self-government, rightly considered this a necessity of their remote situation and peculiar perils, and regarded any infringement upon it with even more than the historical Anglo-Saxon jealousy.

The old ideas of blind loyalty to the throne had been shaken, first by the Puritan revolt against Charles, and later by the deposition of James. They had twice seen Parliament set aside a King, and it was only a step from this to the belief that not the King but the representatives chosen by the people must always be, in the end, the controlling power of the State. From that again, the

distant Colonists found it only a step farther to the belief that in their remote isolation they should choose their own representatives instead of submitting to a rule by representatives chosen back in England for English purposes. Thus early had the "Mother of Parliaments" taught the sons of Great Britain beyond seas to better her instructions.

And yet a personal sense of loyalty to the Sovereign remained down to the very outset of the Revolution, often as strong in America as in England, sometimes stronger and generally more disinterested. Benjamin Franklin wrote privately, in 1768, to his friends at home of George III. as "the best monarch any nation was ever blessed with." In 1769, when he had to report the refusal by the House of Commons to repeal offensive customs duties, he used even stronger language :—

> "I hope nothing that has happened or may happen, will diminish in the least our loyalty to our Sovereign or affection for this nation in general. I can scarcely conceive a King of better dispositions, or more exemplary virtues, or more truly desirous of promoting the welfare of all his subjects. The body of this people, too, is of a noble and generous nature, loving and honouring the spirit of liberty, and hating arbitrary power of all sorts. We have many, very many friends among them."

Seven years later, came the bitter arraignment of the same Sovereign in the Declaration of Independence, and the richest possession of the English crown was lost for ever.

From the outset the Colonists were thrown on their own resources, in a wild continent and among savage people. The survival of the fittest made them a picked body, a real *corps d'élite.* Their faculties were quickened by necessity, by danger and by climate. The lonely life and the necessity for quick decisions, often without much opportunity for consultation, led to a marked personal independence, an ever-ready resourcefulness, and an absolute freedom of individual initiative, which speedily became general characteristics.

But at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, their opinions and their traits had not worked out to the logical

conclusion. With all their personal independence, the Colonists never dreamed of standing alone; with all their free personal initiative they still looked implicitly to the Mother Country for guidance.

The growth of these Colonies, which for a long time was slow, painful, and intermittent, had of late become more rapid. Their population was only about 200,000 when James II. was deposed and William and Mary came to the throne. A quarter of a century later, when the House of Hanover came in with the accession of George I., the tables compiled for the Board of Trade, giving in detail the whites and negroes in the Colonies, showed an aggregate of 434,000. The number had thus more than doubled. In the next half century this again was trebled. By 1754, when the movements for taxing America were about to begin, there were 1,165,000 whites and 253,000 negroes, say, in round numbers nearly a million and a half.

England in the XVIIIth Century.

The England which after a variable, but on the whole not unmotherly care of the Colonies, was now to enter upon that unhappy experiment of arbitrary taxation, presented almost as strong a contrast to the England we have seen in the closing days of Elizabeth, as did the 13 Colonies of 1754 to the New World before Jamestown and Plymouth. In numbers it had grown from four millions to perhaps ten. In government it had passed from Essex to Newcastle and Bute. Landmarks on that long road were a civil war, a Commonwealth, a restoration, more discontent, a deposition, the choice of a new Sovereign from abroad, and enormously increased power in Parliament. And now at last another royalist reaction, with revival of old prerogatives through parliamentary methods by purchased majorities, was to precipitate a crisis in the American possessions. Meantime, the nation had enjoyed an enormous extension of commerce, beginning with the revolution in 1688, had prospered on Colonial trade, had won glory in foreign wars. Of its entire exports one-fourth was taken by its Colonies in America; under the inspiring guidance of Chatham, England was rapidly coming to the