

CHAPTER XI - THE NEW PROBLEMS

Most of us were familiar in our youth with a sort of game or problem which consisted in taking a number, effecting a series of additions, multiplications, subtractions, etc., and finally "taking away the number you first thought of." Some such process might be taken as representing the later history of the Republican Party.

That party was originally founded to resist the further extension of Slavery. That was at first its sole policy and objective. And when Slavery disappeared and the Anti-Slavery Societies dissolved themselves it might seem that the Republican Party should logically have done the same. But no political party can long exist, certainly none can long hold power, while reposing solely upon devotion to a single idea. For one thing, the mere requirements of what Lincoln called "national housekeeping" involves an accretion of policies apparently unconnected with its original doctrine. Thus the Republican Party, relying at first wholly upon the votes of the industrial North, which was generally in favour of a high tariff, took over from the old Whig Party a Protectionist tradition, though obviously there is no logical connection between Free Trade and Slavery. Also, in any organized party, especially where politics are necessarily a profession, there is an even more powerful factor working against the original purity of its creed in the immense mass of vested interests which it creates, especially when it is in power--men holding positions under it, men hoping for a "career" through its triumphs, and the like. It may be taken as certain that no political body so constituted will ever voluntarily consent to dissolve itself, as a merely propagandist body may naturally do when its object is achieved.

For some time, as has been seen, the Republicans continued to retain a certain link with their origin by appearing mainly as a pro-Negro and anti-Southern party, with "Southern outrages" as its electoral stock-in-trade and the maintenance of the odious non-American State Governments as its programme. The surrender of 1876 put an end even to this link. The "bloody shirt" disappeared, and with it the last rag of the old Republican garment. A formal protest against the use of "intimidation" in the "Solid South" continued to figure piously for some decades in the quadrennial platform of the party. At last even this was dropped, and its place was taken by the much more defensible demand that Southern representatives should be so reduced as to correspond to the numbers actually suffered to vote. It is interesting to note that if the Republicans had not insisted on supplementing the Fourteenth Amendment by the Fifteenth, forbidding disqualification on grounds of race or colour, and consequently

compelling the South to concede in theory the franchise of the blacks and then prevent its exercise, instead of formally denying it them, this grievance would automatically have been met.

What, then, remained to the Republican Party when the "number it first thought of" had been thus taken away? The principal thing that remained was a connection already established by its leading politicians with the industrial interests of the North-Eastern States and with the groups of wealthy men who, in the main, controlled and dealt in those interests. It became the party of industrial Capitalism as it was rapidly developing in the more capitalist and mercantile sections of the Union.

The first effect of this was an appalling increase of political corruption. During Grant's second Presidency an amazing number of very flagrant scandals were brought to light, of which the most notorious were the Erie Railway scandal, in which the rising Republican Congressional leader, Blaine, was implicated, and the Missouri Whisky Ring, by which the President himself was not unbesmirched. The cry for clean government became general, and had much to do with the election of a Democratic House of Representatives in 1874 and the return by a true majority vote--thought defeated by a trick--of a Democratic President in 1876. Though the issue was somewhat overshadowed in 1880, when Garfield was returned mainly on the tariff issue--to be assassinated later by a disappointed place-hunter named Guiteau and succeeded by Arthur--it revived in full force in 1884 when the Republican candidate was James G. Blaine.

Blaine was personally typical of the degeneration of the Republican Party after the close of the Civil War. He had plenty of brains, was a clever speaker and a cleverer intriguer. Principles he had none. Of course he had in his youth "waved the bloody shirt" vigorously enough, was even one of the last to wave it, but at the same time he had throughout his political life stood in with the great capitalist and financial interests of the North-East--and that not a little to his personal profit. The exposure of one politico-financial transaction of his--the Erie Railway affair--had cost him the Republican nomination in 1876, in spite of Ingersoll's amazing piece of rhetoric delivered on his behalf, wherein the celebrated Secularist orator declared that "like an armed warrior, like a plumed knight, James G. Blaine strode down the floor of Congress and flung his shining lance, full and fair"--at those miscreants who objected to politicians using their public status for private profit. By 1884 it was hoped that the scandal had blown over and was forgotten.

Fortunately, however, the traditions of the country were democratic. Democracy is no preservative against incidental corruption; you will have that wherever

politics are a profession. But it is a very real preservative against the secrecy in which, in oligarchical countries like our own, such scandals can generally be buried. The Erie scandal met Blaine on every side. One of the most damning features of the business was a very compromising letter of his own which ended with the fatal words: "Please burn this letter." As a result of its publication, crowds of Democratic voters paraded the streets of several great American cities chanting monotonously--

"Burn, burn, burn this letter! James G. Blaine. Please, please! Burn this letter! James G. Blaine. Oh! Do! Burn this letter! James G. Blaine."

The result was the complete success of the clean government ticket, and the triumphant return of Grover Cleveland, the first Democrat to take the oath since the Civil War, and perhaps the strongest and best President since Lincoln.

Meanwhile, the Republic had found itself threatened with another racial problem, which became acute at about the time when excitement on both sides regarding the Negro was subsiding. Scarcely had the expansion of the United States touched the Pacific, when its territories encountered a wave of immigration from the thickly populated countries on the other side of that ocean. The population which now poured into California and Oregon was as alien in race and ideals as the Negro, and it was, perhaps, the more dangerous because, while the Negro, so far as he had not absorbed European culture, was a mere barbarian, these people had a very old and elaborate civilization of their own, a civilization picturesque and full of attraction when seen afar off, but exhibiting, at nearer view, many characteristics odious to the traditions, instincts and morals of Europe and white America. There was also the economic evil--really, of course, only an aspect of the conflict of types of civilization--arising from the fact that these immigrants, being used to a lower standard of life, undercut and cheapened the labour of the white man.

Various Acts were passed by Congress from time to time for the restriction and exclusion of Chinese and other Oriental immigrants, and the trouble, though not even yet completely disposed of, was got under a measure of control. Sumner lived long enough to oppose the earlier of these very sensible laws, and, needless to say, trotted out the Declaration of Independence, though in this case the application was even more absurd than in that of the Negro. The Negro, at any rate, was already resident in America, and had been brought there in the first instance without his own consent; and this fact, though it did not make him a citizen, did create a moral responsibility towards him on the part of the American Commonwealth. Towards the Chinaman it had no responsibility whatever.

Doubtless he had, as a man, his natural rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"--in China. But whoever said anything so absurd as that it was one of the natural rights of man to live in America? It was, however, less to the increased absurdity of his argument than to the less favourable bias of his audience that Sumner owed his failure to change the course of legislation in this instance. An argument only one degree less absurd had done well enough as a reason for the enslavement and profanation of the South a year or two before. But there was no great party hoping to perpetuate its power by the aid of the Chinese, nor was there a defeated and unpopular section to be punished for its "treason" by being made over to Mongolian masters. Indeed, Congress, while rejecting Sumner's argument, made a concession to his monomania on the subject of Negroes, and a clause was inserted in the Act whereby no person "of African descent" should be excluded--with the curious result that to this day, while a yellow face is a bar to the prospective immigrant, a black face is, theoretically at any rate, actually a passport.

The exclusion of the Chinese does but mark the beginning of a very important change in the attitude of the Republic towards immigration. Up to this time, in spite of the apparent exception of the Know-Nothing movement, of which the motive seems to have been predominantly sectarian, it had been at once the interest and the pride of America to encourage immigration on the largest possible scale without troubling about its source or character: her interest because her undeveloped resources were immense and apparently inexhaustible, and what was mainly needed was human labour to exploit them; her pride, because she boasted, and with great justice, that her democratic creed was a force strong enough to turn any man who accepted citizenship, whatever his origin, into an American. But in connection with the general claim, which experience has, on the whole, justified, there are two important reservations. One is that such a conversion is only possible if the American idea--that is, the doctrine set forth by Jefferson--when once propounded awakens an adequate response from the man whom it is hoped to assimilate. This can generally be predicted of Europeans, since the idea is present in the root of their own civilization: it derives from Rome. But it can hardly be expected of peoples of a wholly alien tradition from which the Roman Law and the Gospel of Rousseau are alike remote. This consideration lies at the root of the exception of the Negro, the exception of the Mongol, and may one day produce the exception of the Jew.

The other reservation is this: that if the immigration of diverse peoples proceeds at too rapid a rate, it may be impossible for absorption to keep pace with it. Nay, absorption may be grievously hindered by it. This has been shown with great force and clearness by Mr. Zangwill under his excellent image of the "Melting Pot." Anyone even casually visiting New York, for instance, can see on every side the

great masses of unmelted foreign material and their continual reinforcement from overseas, probably delaying continually the process of fusion--and New York is only typical in this of other great American cities.

A new tendency to limit immigration and to seek some test of its quality has been a marked feature of the last quarter of a century. The principle is almost certainly sound; the right to act on it, to anyone who accepts the doctrine of national self-government, unquestionable. Whether the test ultimately imposed by a recent Act passed by Congress over President Wilson's veto, that of literacy, is a wise one, is another question. Its tendency may well be to exclude great masses of the peasantry of the Old World, men admirably fitted to develop by their industry the resources of America, whose children at least could easily be taught to read and write the American language and would probably become excellent American citizens. On the other hand, it does not exclude the criminal, or at any rate the most dangerous type of criminal. It does not exclude the submerged population of great European cities, the exploitation of whose cheap labour is a menace to the American workman's standard of life. And it does not, generally speaking, exclude the Jew.

The problem of the Jew exists in America as elsewhere--perhaps more formidably than elsewhere. This, of course, is not because Jews, as such, are worse than other people: only idiots are Anti-Semites in that sense. It arises from the fact that America, more than any other nation, lives by its power of absorption, and the Jew has, ever since the Roman Empire, been found a singularly unabsorbable person. He has an intense nationalism of his own that transcends and indeed ignores frontiers, but to the nationalism of European peoples he is often consciously and almost always subconsciously hostile. In various ways he tends to act as a solvent of such nationalism. Cosmopolitan finance is one example of such a tendency. Another, more morally sympathetic but not much less dangerous to nationalism in such a country as America, is cosmopolitan revolutionary idealism. The Socialist and Anarchist movements of America, divided of course in philosophy, but much more akin in temper than in European countries, are almost wholly Jewish, both in origin and leadership. For this reason, since America's entrance into the Great War, these parties, in contrast to most of the European Socialist parties, have shown themselves violently anti-national and what we now call "Bolshevist."

But organized Socialism is, in America, almost a negligible force; not so organized labour. In no country has the Trade Union movement exercised more power, and in no country has it fought with bolder weapons. In the early struggles between the organized workers and the great capitalists, violence and even murder was freely resorted to on both sides, for if the word must be applied to the vengeance

often wreaked by the Labour Unions on servants of the employer and on traitors to the organization, the same word must be used with a severer moral implication of the shooting down of workmen at the orders of men like Carnegie, not even by the authorized police force or militia of the State, but by privately hired assassins such as the notorious Pinkerton used to supply.

The labour movement in America is not generally Collectivist. Collectivism is alien to the American temper and ideal, which looks rather to a community of free men controlling, through personal ownership, their own industry. The demand of American labour has been rather for the sharp and efficient punishment of such crimes against property as are involved in conspiracies to create a monopoly in some product and the use of great wealth to "squeeze out" the small competitor. Such demands found emphatic expression in the appearance in the 'nineties of a new party calling itself "Populist" and formed by a combination between the organized workmen and the farmers of the West, who felt themselves more and more throttled by the tentacles of the new commercial monopolies which were becoming known by the name of "Trusts." In the elections of 1892, when Cleveland was returned for a second time after an interval of Republican rule under Harrison, the Populists showed unexpected strength and carried several Western States. In 1896 Democrats and Populists combined to nominate William Jennings Bryan as their candidate, with a programme the main plank of which was the free coinage of silver, which, it was thought, would weaken the hold of the moneyed interests of the East upon the industries of the Continent. The Eastern States, however, voted solid for the gold standard, and were joined, in the main, by those Southern States which had not been "reconstructed" and were consequently not included politically in the "Solid South." The West, too, though mainly Bryanite, was not unanimous, and McKinley, the Republican candidate, was returned. The Democratic defeat, however, gave some indication of the tendencies which were to produce the Democratic victory of 1916, when the West, with the aid of the "Solid South," returned a President whom the East had all but unanimously rejected.

McKinley's first term of office, saw the outbreak and victorious prosecution of a war with Spain, arising partly out of American sympathy with an insurrection which had broken out in Cuba, and partly out of the belief, now pretty conclusively shown to have been unfounded, that the American warship Maine, which was blown up in a Spanish harbour, had been so destroyed at the secret instigation of the Spanish authorities. Its most important result was to leave, at its conclusion, both Cuba and the Philippine Islands at the disposal of the United States. This practically synchronized with the highest point reached in this country, just before the Boer War, by that wave of national feeling called "Imperialism." America, for a time, seemed to catch its infection or share its

inspiration, as we may prefer to put it. But the tendency was not a permanent one. The American Constitution is indeed expressly built for expansion, but only where the territory acquired can be thoroughly Americanized and ultimately divided into self-governing States on the American pattern. To hold permanently subject possessions which cannot be so treated is alien to its general spirit and intention. Cuba was soon abandoned, and though the Philippines were retained, the difficulties encountered in their subjection and the moral anomaly involved in being obliged to wage a war of conquest against those whom you have professed to liberate, acted as a distinct check upon the enthusiasm for such experiments.

After the conclusion of the Spanish war, McKinley was elected for a second time; almost immediately afterwards he was murdered by an Anarchist named Czolgosz, sometimes described as a "Pole," but presumably an East European Jew. The effect was to produce a third example of the unwisdom--though in this case the country was distinctly the gainer--of the habit of using the Vice-Presidency merely as an electioneering bait. Theodore Roosevelt had been chosen as candidate for that office solely to catch what we should here call the "khaki" sentiment, he and his "roughriders" having played a distinguished and picturesque part in the Cuban campaign. But it soon appeared that the new President had ideas of his own which were by no means identical with those of the Party Bosses. He sought to re-create the moral prestige of the Republican Party by identifying it with the National idea--with which its traditions as the War Party in the battle for the Union made its identification seem not inappropriate--with a spirited foreign policy and with the aspiration for expansion and world-power. But he also sought to sever its damaging connection with those sordid and unpopular plutocratic combinations which the nation as a whole justly hated. Of great energy and attractive personality, and gifted with a strong sense of the picturesque in politics, President Roosevelt opened a vigorous campaign against those Trusts which had for so long backed and largely controlled his party. The Republican Bosses were angry and dismayed, but they dared not risk an open breach with a popular and powerful President backed by the whole nation irrespective of party. So complete was his victory that not only did he enjoy something like a national triumph when submitting himself for re-election in 1904, but in 1908 was virtually able to nominate his successor.

Mr. Taft, however, though so nominated and professing to carry on the Rooseveltian policy, did not carry it on to the satisfaction of its originator. The ex-President roundly accused his successor of suffering the party to slip back again into the pocket of the Trusts, and in 1912 offered himself once more to the Republican Party as a rival to his successor. The Party Convention at San Francisco chose Taft by a narrow majority. Something may be allowed for the undoubtedly prevalent sentiment against a breach of the Washingtonian tradition

of a two-terms limit; but the main factor was the hostility of the Bosses and the Trusts behind them, and the weapon they used was their control of the Negro "pocket boroughs" of the Southern States, which were represented in the Convention in proportion to their population of those States, though practically no Republican votes were cast there. Colonel Roosevelt challenged the decision of the Convention, and organized an independent party of his own under the title of "Progressive," composed partly of the defeated section of the Republicans and partly of all those who for one reason or another were dissatisfied with existing parties. In the contest which followed he justified his position by polling far more votes than his Republican rival. But the division in the Republican Party permitted the return of the Democratic candidate, Dr. Woodrow Wilson.

The new President was a remarkable man in more ways than one. By birth a Southerner, he had early migrated to New Jersey. He had a distinguished academic career behind him, and had written the best history of his own country at present obtainable. He had also held high office in his State, and his term had been signalized by the vigour with which he had made war on corruption in the public service. During his term of office he was to exhibit another set of qualities, the possession of which had perhaps been less suspected: an instinct for the trend of the national will not unlike that of Jackson, and a far-seeing patience and persistence under misrepresentation and abuse that recalls Lincoln.

For Mr. Wilson had been in office but a little over a year when Prussia, using Austria as an instrument and Serbia as an excuse, forced an aggressive war on the whole of Europe. The sympathies of most Americans were with the Western Allies, especially with France, for which country the United States had always felt a sort of spiritual cousinship. England was, as she had always been, less trusted, but in this instance, especially when Prussia opened the war with a criminal attack upon the little neutral nation of Belgium, it was generally conceded that she was in the right. Dissentients there were, especially among the large German or German-descended population of the Middle West, and the Prussian Government spent money like water to further a German propaganda in the States. But the mass of American opinion was decidedly favourable to the cause of those who were at war with the German Empire. Yet it was at that time equally decided and much more unanimous against American intervention in the European quarrel.

The real nature of this attitude was not grasped in England, and the resultant misunderstanding led to criticisms and recriminations which everyone now regrets. The fact is that the Americans had very good reason for disliking the idea of being drawn into the awful whirlpool in which Europe seemed to be perishing. It was not cowardice that held her back: her sons had done enough during the

four terrible years of civil conflict in which her whole manhood was involved to repel that charge for ever. Rather was it a realistic memory of what such war means that made the new America eager to keep the peace as long as it might. There was observable, it is true, a certain amount of rather silly Pacifist sentiment, especially in those circles which the Russians speak of as "Intelligenza," and Americans as "high-brow." It went, as it usually goes, though the logical connection is not obvious, with teetotalism and similar fads. All these fads were peculiarly rampant in the United States in the period immediately preceding the war, when half the States went "dry," and some cities passed what seems to us quite lunatic laws--prohibiting cigarette-smoking and creating a special female police force of "flirt-catchers." The whole thing is part, one may suppose, of the deliquescence of the Puritan tradition in morals, and will probably not endure. So far as such doctrinaire Pacifism is concerned, it seems to have dissolved at the first sound of an American shot. But the instinct which made the great body of sensible and patriotic Americans, especially in the West, resolved to keep out of the war, so long as their own interests and honour were not threatened, was of a much more solid and respectable kind. Undoubtedly most Americans thought that the Allies were in the right; but if every nation intervened in every war where it thought one or other side in the right, every war must become universal. The Republic was not pledged, like this country, to enforce respect for Belgian neutrality; she was not, like England, directly threatened by the Prussian menace. Indirectly threatened she was, for a German victory would certainly have been followed by an attempt to realize well-understood German ambitions in South America. But most Americans were against meeting trouble halfway.

Such was the temper of the nation. The President carefully conformed to it, while at the same time guiding and enlightening it. For nearly two years he kept his country out of the war. The task was no easy one. He was assailed at home at once by the German propagandists, who wanted him, in defiance of International Law, to forbid the sale of arms and munitions to the Allies, and by Colonel Roosevelt, who wished America to declare herself definitely on the Allied side. Moreover, Prussia could understand no argument but force, and took every sign of the pacific disposition of the Government at Washington as an indication of cowardice or incapacity to fight. But he was excellently served in Berlin by Mr. Gerard, and he held to his course. The Lusitania was sunk and many American citizens were drowned as a part of the Prussian campaign of indiscriminate murder on the high seas; and the volume of feeling in favour of intervention increased. But the President still resisted the pressure put upon him, as Lincoln had so long resisted the pressure of those who wished him to use his power to declare the slaves free. He succeeded in obtaining from Germany some mitigation of her piratical policy, and with that he was for a time content. He probably knew

then, as Mr. Gerard certainly did, that war must come. But he also knew that if he struck too early he would divide the nation. He waited till the current of opinion had time to develop, carefully though unobtrusively directing it in such a fashion as to prepare it for eventualities. So well did he succeed that when in the spring of 1917 Prussia proclaimed a revival of her policy of unmitigated murder directed not only against belligerents but avowedly against neutrals also, he felt the full tide of the general will below him. And when at last he declared war it was with a united America at his back.

Such is, in brief, the diplomatic history of the intervention of the United States in the Great War. Yet there is another angle from which it can be viewed, whereby it seems not only inevitable but strangely symbolic. The same century that saw across the Atlantic the birth of the young Republic, saw in the very centre of Europe the rise of another new Power. Remote as the two were, and unlikely as it must have seemed at the time that they could ever cross each other's paths, they were in a strange fashion at once parallel and antipodean. Neither has grown in the ordinary complex yet unconscious fashion of nations. Both were, in a sense, artificial products. Both were founded on a creed. And the creeds were exactly and mathematically opposed. According to the creed of Thomas Jefferson, all men were endowed by their Creator with equal rights. According to the creed of Frederick Hohenzollern there was no Creator, and no one possessed any rights save the right of the strongest. Through more than a century the history of the two nations is the development of the two ideas. It would have seemed unnatural if the great Atheist State, in its final bid for the imposition of its creed on all nations, had not found Jefferson's Republic among its enemies. That anomaly was not to be. That flag which, decked only with thirteen stars representing the original revolted colonies, had first waved over Washington's raw levies, which, as the cluster grew, had disputed on equal terms with the Cross of St. George its ancient lordship of the sea, which Jackson had kept flying over New Orleans, which Scott and Taylor had carried triumphantly to Monterey, which on a memorable afternoon had been lowered over Sumter, and on a yet more memorable morning raised once again over Richmond, which now bore its full complement of forty-eight stars, symbolizing great and free States stretching from ocean to ocean, appeared for the first time on a European battlefield, and received there as its new baptism of fire a salute from all the arsenals of Hell.