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Social Forces in American History

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SOCIAL FORCES IN AMERICAN HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

THE transformations through which the United States is passing in our own day are so profound, so far-reaching, that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that we are witnessing the birth of a new nation in America. The revolution in the social and economic structure of this country during the past two decades is comparable to what occurred when independence was declared and the Constitution was formed, or to the changes wrought by the era which began half a century ago, the era of Civil War and Reconstruction.

These changes have been long in preparation and are, in part, the result of world-wide forces of reorganization incident to the age of steam production and large-scale industry, and, in part, the result of the closing of the period of the colonization of the West. They have been prophesied, and the course of the movement partly described, by students of American development; but after all, it is with a shock that the people of the United States are coming to realize that the fundamental forces which have shaped their society up to the present are disappearing. Twenty years ago, as I have before had occasion to point out, the Superintendent of the Census declared that the frontier line, which its maps had depicted for decade after decade of the westward march of the nation, could no longer be described. To-day we must add that the age of free competition of individuals for the unpossessed resources of the nation is nearing its end. It is taking less than a generation to write the chapter which began with the disappearance of the line of the frontier—the last chapter in the history of the colonization of the United States, the conclusion to the annals of its pioneer democracy.

It is a wonderful chapter, this final rush of American energy upon the remaining wilderness. Even the bare statistics become eloquent of a new era. They no longer derive their significance from

<sup>1</sup> Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Indianapolis, December 28, 1910.

the exhibit of vast portions of the public domain transferred to agriculture, of wildernesses equal to European nations changed decade after decade into the farm area of the United States. It is true there was added to the farms of the nation between 1870 and 1880 a territory equal to that of France, and between 1880 and 1900 a territory equal to the European area of France, Germany, England, and Wales combined. The records for 1910 are not yet available, but whatever they reveal they will not be so full of meaning as the figures which tell of upleaping wealth and organization and concentration of industrial power in the East in the last decade. As the final provinces of the Western empire have been subdued to the purposes of civilization and have yielded their spoils, as the spheres of operation of the great industrial corporations have extended, with the extension of American settlement, production and wealth have increased beyond all precedent.

The total deposits in all national banks have more than trebled in the present decade; the money in circulation has doubled since 1890. The flood of gold makes it difficult to gauge the full meaning of the incredible increase in values, for in the decade ending with 1909 over 41,600,000 ounces of gold were mined in the United States alone. Over four million ounces have been produced every year since 1905, whereas between 1880 and 1894 no year showed a production of two million ounces. As a result of this swelling stream of gold, aided by a variety of other causes, prices have risen until their height has become one of the most marked features and influential factors in American life, producing social readjustments and contributing effectively to party revolutions.

But if we avoid those statistics which require analysis because of the changing standard of value, we still find that the decade occupies an exceptional place in American history. More coal was mined in the United States in the ten years after 1897 than in all the life of the nation before that time.<sup>2</sup> Fifty years ago we mined less than fifteen million long tons of coal. In 1907 we mined nearly 429,000,000. At the present rate it is estimated that the supply of coal would be exhausted at a date no farther in the future than the formation of the Constitution is in the past. Iron and coal are the measures of industrial power. The nation has produced three times as much iron ore in the past two decades as in all its previous history; the production of the past ten years was more than double that of the prior decade. Pig-iron production is admitted to be an excellent barometer of manufacture and of transportation. Never until 1898

<sup>2</sup> Van Hise, *Conservation of Natural Resources*, pp. 23, 24.

had this reached an annual total of ten million long tons. But in the five years beginning with 1904 it averaged over twice that. By 1907 the United States had surpassed Great Britain, Germany, and France combined in the production of pig-iron and steel together, and in the same decade a single great corporation has established its domination over the iron mines and steel manufacture of the United States. It is more than a mere accident that the United States Steel Corporation with its stocks and bonds aggregating \$1,400,000,000 was organized at the beginning of the present decade. The former wilderness about Lake Superior has, principally in the past two decades, established its position as overwhelmingly the preponderant source of iron ore, present and prospective, in the United States—a treasury from which Pittsburg has drawn wealth and extended its unparalleled industrial empire in these years. The tremendous energies thus liberated at this centre of industrial power in the United States revolutionized methods of manufacture in general, and in many indirect ways profoundly influenced the life of the nation.

Railroad statistics tell the same story of unprecedented development, the formation of a new industrial society. The number of passengers carried one mile more than doubled between 1890 and 1908; freight carried one mile has nearly trebled in the same period and has doubled in the past decade. Agricultural products tell a different story. The corn crop has only risen from about two billion bushels in 1891 to two and seven-tenths billions in 1909; wheat from six hundred and eleven million bushels in 1891 to only seven hundred and thirty-seven million in 1909, and cotton from about nine million bales in 1891 to ten and three-tenths million bales in 1909. Population has increased in the United States proper from about sixty-two and one-half millions in 1890 to seventy-five and one-half millions in 1900 and to about ninety millions in 1910.

It is clear from these statistics that the ratio of the nation's increased production of immediate wealth by the enormously increased exploitation of its remaining natural resources vastly exceeds the ratio of increase of population and still more strikingly exceeds the ratio of increase of agricultural products. Already population is pressing upon the food supply while capital consolidates in billion-dollar organizations. The "Triumphant Democracy" whose achievements the iron-master celebrated has reached a stature even more imposing than he could have foreseen; but still less did he perceive the changes in democracy itself and the conditions of its life which have accompanied this material growth.

Having colonized the Far West, having mastered its internal

resources, the nation turned at the conclusion of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century to deal with the Far East, to engage in the world-politics of the Pacific Ocean. Having brought to its logical conclusion its long continued expansion into the lands of the old Spanish empire by the successful outcome of the recent war, the United States became the mistress of the Philippines at the same time that it came into possession of the Hawaiian Islands, and the controlling influence in the Gulf of Mexico. It provided early in the present decade for connecting its Atlantic and Pacific coasts by the Isthmian Canal, and became an imperial republic with dependencies and protectorates—admittedly a new world-power, with a voice potential in the problems of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

This extension of power and undertaking of grave responsibilities in new fields, this entry into the sisterhood of world-states, was no unrelated event. It was, indeed, in some respects the logical outcome of the nation's march to the Pacific, the sequence to the era in which it was engaged in occupying the free lands and exploiting the resources of the West. When it had achieved this position among the nations of the earth, the United States found itself confronted, also, with the need of constitutional readjustment, arising from the relations of federal government and territorial acquisitions. It was obliged to reconsider questions of the rights of man and traditional American ideals of liberty and democracy, in view of the task of government of other races politically inexperienced and undeveloped.

When we turn to consider the effect upon American society and domestic policy in these two decades of transition we are met with palpable evidences of the invasion of the old pioneer democratic order. Obvious among them is the effect of unprecedented immigration to supply the mobile army of cheap labor for the centres of industrial life. In the past ten years, beginning with 1900, over eight million immigrants have arrived. The newcomers of the eight years since 1900 would, according to a writer in 1908, "repopulate all the five older New England States as they stand to-day; or, if properly disseminated over the newer parts of the country they would serve to populate no less than nineteen states of the union as they stand". In 1907 "there were one and one-quarter million arrivals. This number would entirely populate both New Hampshire and Maine, two of our oldest states." "The arrivals of this one year would found a state with more inhabitants than any one of twenty-one of our other existing commonwealths which could be named." Not only has the addition to the population from

Europe been thus extraordinary, it has come in increasing measure from southern and eastern Europe. For the year 1907, Professor Ripley,<sup>3</sup> whom I am quoting, has redistributed the incomers on the basis of physical type and finds that one-quarter of them were of the Mediterranean race, one-quarter of the Slavic race, one-eighth Jewish, and only one-sixth of the Alpine, and one-sixth of the Teutonic. In 1882 Germans had come to the amount of 250,000; in 1907 they were replaced by 330,000 South Italians. Thus it is evident that the ethnic elements of the United States have undergone startling changes; and instead of spreading over the nation these immigrants have concentrated especially in the cities and great industrial centres in the past decade. The composition of the labor class and its relation to wages and to the native American employer have been deeply influenced thereby; the element of sympathy with labor has been unfavorably affected by the pressure of great numbers of immigrants of alien nationality and of lower standards of life.

The familiar facts of the massing of population in the cities and contemporaneous increase of urban power, and of the massing of capital and production in fewer and vastly greater economic units, especially attest the revolution. "It is a proposition too plain to require elucidation", wrote Richard Rush, Secretary of the Treasury, in his report of 1827, "that the creation of capital is retarded rather than accelerated by the diffusion of a thin population over a great surface of soil." Thirty years earlier Albert Gallatin declared in Congress that "if the cause of the happiness of this country were examined into, it would be found to arise as much from the great plenty of land in proportion to the inhabitants which their citizens enjoyed as from the wisdom of their political institutions." Possibly both of these Pennsylvania financiers were right under the conditions of the time; but it is at least significant that capital and labor entered upon a new era as the end of the free lands approached. A contemporary of Gallatin in Congress had replied to the argument that cheap lands would depopulate the Atlantic coast by saying that if a law were framed to prevent ready access to western lands it would be tantamount to saying that there is some class which must remain "and by law be obliged to serve the others for such wages as they pleased to give". The passage of the arable public domain into private possession has raised this question in a new form and has brought forth new answers. This is peculiarly the era when competitive individualism in the midst of vast unappropriated opportunities changed into monopoly, by huge aggregations of capital, of

<sup>3</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1908, CII. 745.

the fundamental industrial processes as the free lands disappeared. All the tendencies of the large-scale production of the twentieth century, all of the energies of the age of steam, found in America exceptional freedom of action and were offered regions of activity equal to the states of all western Europe. Here they reached their highest development.

The decade following 1907 is marked by the work of Mr. Harriman and his rivals in building up the various railroads into a few great groups, a process that had gone so far that before his death Mr. Harriman was ambitious to concentrate them all under his single control. High finance under the leadership of Mr. Morgan has steadily achieved the consolidation of the greater industries into trusts or combinations and has effected a community of interests between them and a few dominant banking organizations, with allied insurance companies and trust companies. In New York City have been centred as never before the banking reserves of the nation, and here by the financial management of capital and speculative promotion there has grown up a unified control over the nation's industrial life. Colossal private fortunes have arisen. No longer is the per capita wealth of the nation a real index to the prosperity of the average man. Labor on the other hand has shown an increasing self-consciousness, is combining and increasing its demands. In a word, the old pioneer individualism is disappearing, while the forces of social combination are manifesting themselves as never before. The self-made man has become, in popular speech, the coal baron, the steel king, the oil king, the cattle king, the railroad magnate, the master of high finance, the monarch of trusts. The world has never before seen such huge fortunes exercising combined control over the economic life of a people, and such luxury as has come out of the individualistic pioneer democracy of America in the course of its competitive evolution.

At the same time the masters of industry, who control interests which represent billions of dollars, do not admit that they have broken with pioneer ideals. They regard themselves as pioneers under changed conditions, carrying on the old work of developing the natural resources of the nation, compelled by the constructive fever in their veins, even in ill-health and old age and after the accumulation of wealth beyond their power to enjoy, to seek new avenues of action and of power, to chop new clearings, to find new trails, to expand the horizon of the nation's activity, and to extend the scope of their dominion. "This country", said the late Mr. Harriman in an interview a few years ago, "has been developed by



a wonderful people, flush with enthusiasm, imagination and speculative bent. . . . They have been magnificent pioneers. They saw into the future and adapted their work to the possibilities. . . . Stifle that enthusiasm, deaden that imagination and prohibit that speculation by restrictive and cramping conservative law, and you tend to produce a moribund and conservative people and country." This is an appeal to the historic ideals of Americans who viewed the republic as the guardian of individual freedom to compete for the control of the natural resources of the nation.

On the other hand, we have the voice of the insurgent West, recently given utterance in the New Nationalism of ex-President Roosevelt, demanding increase of federal authority to curb the special interests, the powerful industrial organizations, and the monopolies, for the sake of the conservation of our natural resources and the preservation of American democracy.

The past decade has witnessed an extraordinary federal activity in limiting individual and corporate freedom for the benefit of society. To that decade belong the Conservation Congresses and the effective organization of the Forest Service, and the Reclamation Service. Taken together these developments alone would mark a new era, for over three hundred million acres are, as a result of this policy, reserved from entry and sale, an area more than equal to that of all the states which established the Constitution, if we exclude their western claims; and these reserved lands are held for a more beneficial use of their forests, minerals, arid tracts, and water rights, by the nation as a whole. Another example is the extension of the activity of the Department of Agriculture, which seeks the remotest regions of the earth for crops suitable to the areas reclaimed by the government, maps and analyzes the soils, fosters the improvement of seeds and animals, tells the farmer when and how and what to plant, and makes war upon diseases of plants and animals and insect pests. The recent legislation for pure food and meat inspection, and the whole mass of regulative law under the Interstate Commerce Clause of the Constitution, further illustrate the same tendency.

Two ideals were fundamental in traditional American thought, ideals that developed in the pioneer era. One was the ideal of individual freedom to compete unrestrictedly for the resources of a continent—the squatter ideal. The other was the ideal of a democracy—"government of the people, by the people and for the people". The operation of these ideals took place contemporaneously with the passing into private possession of the free public domain and the



natural resources of the United States. But American democracy was based on free lands; these were the very conditions that shaped its growth and its fundamental traits. Thus time has revealed that these two ideals of pioneer democracy had elements of mutual hostility and contained the seeds of its dissolution. The present finds itself engaged in the task of readjusting its old ideals to new conditions and is turning increasingly to government to safeguard its traditional democracy. It is not surprising that socialism shows noteworthy gains as elections continue; that parties are forming on new lines; that the demand for primary elections, for popular choice of senators, initiative, referendum, and recall, is spreading, and that the regions once the centre of pioneer democracy exhibit these tendencies in the most marked degree. They are efforts to find substitutes for that former safeguard of democracy, the disappearing free lands. They are the sequence to the extinction of the frontier.

It is necessary next to notice that in the midst of all this national energy, and contemporaneous with the tendency to turn to the national government for protection to democracy, there is clear evidence of the persistence and the development of sectionalism. Whether we observe the grouping of votes in Congress and in general elections, or the organization and utterances of business leaders, or the association of scholars, churches, or other representatives of the things of the spirit, we find that American life is not only increasing in its national intensity but that it is integrating by sections. In part this is due to the factor of great spaces which make sectional rather than national organization the line of least resistance; but, in part, it is also the expression of the separate economic, political, and social interests and the separate spiritual life of the various geographic provinces or sections. The votes on the tariff, and in general the location of the strongholds of the Progressive Republican movement, illustrate this fact. The difficulty of adjusting railway rates to the diverse interests of different sections is another example. Whether the South should be supplied with salt from Kansas or from Michigan, whether Chicago and its tributary prairie areas should be supplied with lumber from the far Northwest, from Louisiana, or from some other area, depends upon the settlement of rates and involves adjudication by federal authorities, who are forced to recognize sectional interests. Without attempting to enter upon a more extensive discussion of sectionalism, I desire simply to point out that there are evidences that now, as formerly, the separate geographical interests have their leaders and spokesmen, that much Congressional legislation is determined by the contests, triumphs, or

compromises between the rival sections, and that the real federal relations of the United States seem likely to be shaped by the interplay of sectional with national forces rather than by the relation of state and nation. As time goes on and the nation adjusts itself more durably to the conditions of the differing geographic sections which make it up, they are coming to a new self-consciousness and a revived self-assertion. Our national character is a composite of these sections.

Obviously in attempting to indicate even a portion of the significant features of our recent history we have been obliged to take note of a complex of forces. The times are so close at hand that the relations between events and tendencies force themselves upon our attention. We must deal with the connections of geography, industrial growth, politics, and government. With these we must take into consideration the changing social composition, the inherited beliefs and habitual attitude of the masses of the people, the psychology of the nation and of the separate sections, as well as of the leaders. We must see how these leaders are shaped partly by their time and section, and how they are in part original, creative, by virtue of their own genius and initiative. We cannot neglect the moral tendencies and the ideals. All are related parts of the same subject and can no more be properly understood in isolation than the movement as a whole can be understood by neglecting some of these important factors, or by the use of a single method of investigation. Whatever be the truth regarding European history, American history is chiefly concerned with social forces, shaping and reshaping under the conditions of a nation changing as it adjusts to its environment. And this environment progressively reveals new aspects of itself, exerts new influences, and calls out new social organs and functions.

I have undertaken this rapid survey of recent history for two purposes. First, because it has seemed fitting to emphasize the significance of American development since the passing of the frontier, and, second, because in the observation of present conditions we may find assistance in our study of the past.

It is a familiar doctrine that each age studies its history anew and with interests determined by the spirit of the time. Each age finds it necessary to reconsider at least some portions of the past, from points of view furnished by new conditions which reveal the influence and significance of forces not adequately known by the historians of the previous generation. Unquestionably each investigator and writer is influenced by the times in which he lives and

while this fact exposes the historian to a bias, at the same time it affords him new instruments and new insight for dealing with his subject.

If recent history, then, gives new meaning to past events, if it has to deal with the rise into a commanding position of forces, the origin and growth of which may have been inadequately described or even overlooked by historians of the previous generation, it is important to study the present and the recent past, not only for themselves but also as the source of new hypotheses, new lines of inquiry, new criteria of the perspective of the remoter past. And, moreover, a just public opinion and a statesmanlike treatment of present problems demand that they be seen in their historical relations in order that history may hold the lamp for conservative reform.

Seen from the vantage-ground of present developments what new light falls upon past events! When we consider what the Mississippi Valley has come to be in American life, and when we consider what it is yet to be, the young Washington, crossing the snows of the wilderness to summon the French to evacuate the portals of the great valley, becomes the herald of an empire. When we recall the titanic industrial power that has centred at Pittsburg, Braddock's advance to the forks of the Ohio takes on new meaning. "Carving a cross on the wilderness rim", even in defeat, he opened a road to what is now the centre of the world's industrial energy. The modifications which England proposed in 1794 to John Jay in the northwestern boundary of the United States from the Lake of the Woods to the Mississippi, seemed, doubtless, to him significant chiefly as a matter of principle and as a question of the retention or loss of beaver grounds. The historians hardly notice the proposals. But they involved, in fact, the ownership of the richest and most extensive deposits of iron ore in America, the all-important source of a fundamental industry of the United States, the occasion for the rise of some of the most influential forces of our time.

What continuity and meaning are furnished by the outcome in present times of the movements of minor political parties and reform agitations! To the historian they have often seemed to be mere curious side eddies, vexatious distractions to the course of his literary craft as it navigated the stream of historical tendency. And yet, by the revelation of the present, what seemed to be side eddies have not seldom proven to be the concealed entrances to the main current, and the course which seemed the central one has led to blind channels and stagnant waters, important in their day, but cut off like ox-bow lakes from the mighty river of historical progress by

the more permanent and compelling forces of the neglected currents.

We may trace the contest between the capitalist and the democratic pioneer from the earliest colonial days. It is influential in colonial parties. It is seen in the vehement protests of Kentucky frontiersmen in petition after petition to the Congress of the Confederation against the "nabobs" and men of wealth who took out titles to the pioneers' farms while they themselves were too busy defending those farms from the Indians to perfect their claims. It is seen in the attitude of the Ohio Valley in its backwoods days before the rise of the Whig party, as when in 1811 Henry Clay denounced the Bank of the United States as a corporation which thrived on special privileges—"a splendid association of favored individuals taken from the mass of society, and invested with exemptions and surrounded by immunities and privileges". Benton voiced the same contest twenty years later when he denounced the bank as

a company of private individuals, many of them foreigners, and the mass of them residing in a remote and narrow corner of the Union, unconnected by any sympathy with the fertile regions of the Great Valley in which the natural power of this Union, the power of numbers, will be found to reside long before the renewed term of the second charter would expire.

"And where", he asked, "would all this power and money centre? In the great cities of the Northeast, which have been for forty years and that by force of federal legislation, the lion's den of Southern and Western money—that den into which all the tracks point inward; from which the returning track of a solitary dollar has never yet been seen." Declaring, in words that have a very modern sound, that the bank tended to multiply nabobs and paupers, and that "a great moneyed power is favorable to great capitalists, for it is the principle of capital to favor capital", he appealed to the fact of the country's extent and its sectional divergences against the nationalizing of capital.

What a condition for a confederacy of states! What grounds for alarm and terrible apprehension when in a confederacy of such vast extent, so many rival commercial cities, so much sectional jealousy, such violent political parties, such fierce contests for power, there should be but one moneyed tribunal before which all the rival and contending elements must appear.

Even more vehement were the words of Jackson in 1837. "It is now plain", he wrote, "that the war is to be carried on by the monied aristocracy of the few against the democracy of numbers; the [prosperous] to make the honest laborers hewers of wood and drawers of water through the credit and paper system."

Van Buren's administration is usually passed hastily over with hardly more than mention of his Independent Treasury plan, and with particular consideration of the slavery discussions. But some of the most important movements in American social and political history began in these years of Jackson and Van Buren. Read the demands of the obscure labor papers and the reports of labor's open-air meetings anew, and you shall find in the utterances of so-called labor visionaries and the locofoco champions of "equal rights for all and special privileges for none", like Evans and Jacques, Byrdsall and Leggett, the finger points to the currents that now make the main channel of our history; you shall find in them some of the important planks of the platforms of the triumphant parties of our own day. As Professor Commons has shown by his papers and the documents which he has published on labor history, an idealistic but widespread and influential humanitarian movement, strikingly similar to that of the present, arose in the years between 1830 and 1850, dealing with social forces in American life, animated by a desire to apply the public lands to social amelioration, eager to find new forms of democratic development. But the flood of the slavery struggle swept all of these movements into its mighty inundation for the time. After the war, other influences delayed the revival of the movement. The railroads opened the vast prairies after 1850 and made it easy to reach them; and decade after decade new sections were reduced to the purposes of civilization and to the advantages of the common man as well as the promotion of great individual fortunes. The nation centred its interests in the development of the West. It is only in our own day that this humanitarian democratic wave has reached the level of those earlier years. But in the meantime there are clear evidences of the persistence of the forces, even though under strange guise. Read the platforms of the Greenback-Labor, the Granger, and the Populist parties, and you will find in those platforms, discredited and reprobated by the major parties of the time, the basic proposals of the Democratic party after its revolution under the leadership of Mr. Bryan, and of the Republican party after its revolution by Mr. Roosevelt. The Insurgent movement is so clearly related to the areas and elements that gave strength to this progressive assertion of old democratic ideals with new weapons, that it must be regarded as the organized refusal of these persistent tendencies to be checked by the advocates of more moderate measures.

I have dealt with these fragments of party history, not, of course, with the purpose of expressing any present judgment upon them, but

to emphasize and give concreteness to the fact that there is disclosed by present events a new significance to these contests of radical democracy and conservative interests; that they are rather a continuing expression of deep-seated forces than fragmentary and sporadic curios for the historical museum.

If we should survey the history of our lands from a similar point of view, considering the relations of legislation and administration of the public domain to the structure of American democracy, it would yield a return far beyond that offered by the formal treatment of the subject in most of our histories. We should find in the squatter doctrines and practices, the seizure of the best soils, the taking of public timber on the theory of a right to it by the labor expended on it, fruitful material for understanding the atmosphere and ideals under which the great corporations developed the West. Men like Senator Benton and Delegate Sibley in successive generations defended the trespasses of the pioneer and the lumberman upon the public forest lands, and denounced the paternal government that "harassed" these men, who were engaged in what we should call stealing government timber. It is evident that at some time between the middle of the nineteenth century and the present time, when we impose jail sentences upon Congressmen caught in such violations of the land laws, a change came over the American conscience and the civic ideals were modified. That our great industrial enterprises developed in the midst of these changing ideals is important to recall when we write the history of their activity.

We should find also that we cannot understand the land question without seeing its relations to the struggle of sections and classes bidding against each other and finding in the public domain a most important topic of political bargaining. We should find, too, that the settlement of unlike geographic areas in the course of the nation's progress resulted in changes in the effect of the land laws, that a system intended for the humid prairies was ill-adjusted to the arid lands and coal fields and to the forests in the days of large-scale exploitation by corporations commanding great capital. Thus changing geographic factors as well as the changing character of the forces which occupied the public domain must be considered, if we would understand the bearing of legislation and policy in this field. It is fortunate that suggestive studies of democracy and the land policy have already begun to appear.

The whole subject of American agriculture viewed in relation to the economic, political, and social life of the nation has important contributions to make. If for example we study the maps showing



the transition of the wheat belt from the East to the West, as the virgin soils were conquered and made new bases for destructive competition with the older wheat states, we shall see how deeply they affected not only land values, railroad building, the movement of population, and the supply of cheap food, but also how the regions once devoted to single cropping of wheat were forced to turn to varied and intensive agriculture and to diversified industry, and we shall see also how these transformations affected party politics and even the ideals of the Americans of the regions thus changed. We shall find in the over-production of wheat in the provinces thus rapidly colonized, and in the over-production of silver in the mountain provinces which were contemporaneously exploited, important explanations of the peculiar form which American politics took in the period when Mr. Bryan mastered the Democratic party, just as we shall find in the opening of the new gold fields in the years immediately following, and in the passing of the era of almost free virgin wheat soils, explanations of the more recent period when high prices are giving new energy and aggressiveness to the demands of American democracy.

Enough has been said, it may be assumed, to make clear the point which I am trying to elucidate, namely that a comprehension of the United States of to-day, an understanding of the rise and progress of the forces which have made it what it was, demands that we should rework our history from the new points of view afforded by the present. If this is done, it will be seen that the progress of the struggle between North and South over slavery and the freed negro, which held the principal place in American interest in the two decades after 1850, was, after all, only one of the interests of the time. The pages of the Congressional debates, the contemporary newspapers, the public documents of those twenty years, remain a rich mine for those who will seek therein the sources of movements dominant in the present day.

The final consideration to which I ask your attention in this discussion of social forces in American life, is with reference to the mode of investigating them and the bearing of these investigations upon the relations and the goal of history. It has become a precedent, fairly well established by the distinguished scholars who have filled the office which I am about to lay down, to state a position with reference to the relations of history and its sister-studies, and even to raise the question of the attitude of the historian toward the laws of thermodynamics and to seek to find the key of historical development or of historical degradation. It is not given to all to bend the bow of Ulysses. I shall attempt a lesser task.



We may take some lessons from the scientist. Like the historian the scientist has learned that many of his fundamental assumptions are imperfect or false. He has enriched knowledge especially in recent years by attacking the no-man's lands left unexplored by the too sharp delimitation of spheres of activity. These new conquests have been especially achieved by the combination of old sciences. Physical chemistry, electro-chemistry, geo-physics, astrophysics, and a variety of other scientific unions have led to audacious hypotheses, veritable flashes of vision, which open new regions of activity for a generation of investigators. Moreover they have promoted such investigations by furnishing new instruments of research. Now in some respects this is an analogy between geology and history. The new geologist aims to explain the inorganic earth dynamically in terms of natural law, using chemistry, physics, mathematics, and even botany and zoology so far as they relate to paleontology. He does not insist that the relative importance of physical or chemical factors shall be determined before he applies the methods and data of these sciences to his problem. Indeed, he has learned that a geological area is too complex a thing to be reduced to a single explanation. He has abandoned the single hypothesis for the multiple hypothesis. He creates a whole family of possible explanations of a given problem and thus avoids the warping influence of partiality for a simple theory.

Have we not here an illustration of what is possible and necessary for the historian? Is it not well, before attempting to decide whether history requires an economic interpretation or a psychological, or any other ultimate interpretation, to recognize that the factors in human society are varied and complex; that the political historian handling his subject in isolation is certain to miss fundamental facts and relations in his treatment of a given age or nation; that the economic historian is exposed to the same danger; and so of all of the other special historians?

Those who insist that history is simply the effort to tell the thing exactly as it was, to state the facts, are confronted with the difficulty that the fact which they would represent is not planted on the solid ground of fixed conditions; it is in the midst and is itself a part of the changing currents, the interacting influences of the time, deriving its significance as a fact from its relations to the deeper-seated movements of the age, movements so gradual that often only the passing years can reveal the truth about the fact and its right to a place on the historian's page.

The economic historian is in danger of making his analysis and

his statement of a law on the basis of present conditions and then passing to history for justificatory appendixes to his conclusions. An American economist of high rank has recently expressed his conception of "the full relation of economic theory, statistics, and history" in these words:

A principle is formulated by *a priori* reasoning concerning facts of common experience; it is then tested by statistics and promoted to the rank of a known and acknowledged truth; illustrations of its action are then found in narrative history and, on the other hand, the economic law becomes the interpreter of records that would otherwise be confusing and comparatively valueless; the law itself derives its final confirmation from the illustrations of its working which the records afford; but what is at least of equal importance is the parallel fact that the law affords the decisive test of the correctness of those assertions concerning the causes and the effects of past events which it is second nature to make and which historians almost invariably do make in connection with their narrations.<sup>4</sup>

There is much in this statement by which the historian may profit, but he may doubt also whether the past should serve merely as the "illustration" by which to confirm the law deduced from common experience by *a priori* reasoning tested by statistics. In fact the pathway of history is strewn with the wrecks of the "known and acknowledged truths" of economic law, due not only to defective analysis and imperfect statistics, but also to the lack of critical historical methods, to insufficient historical-mindedness on the part of the economist, to failure to give due attention to the relativity and transiency of the conditions from which his laws were deduced.

But the point on which I would lay stress is this. The economist, the political scientist, the psychologist, the sociologist, the geographer, the students of literature, of art, of religion—all the allied laborers in the study of society—have contributions to make to the equipment of the historian. These contributions are partly of material, partly of tools, partly of new points of view, new hypotheses, new suggestions of relations, causes, and emphasis. Each of these special students is in some danger of bias by his particular point of view, by his exposure to see simply the thing in which he is primarily interested, and also by his effort to deduce the universal laws of his separate science. The historian, on the other hand, is exposed to the danger of dealing with the complex and interacting social forces of a period or of a country, from some single point of view to which his special training or interest inclines him. If the truth is to be made known, the historian must so far familiarize

<sup>4</sup> Professor J. B. Clark, in Commons, ed., *Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, I. 43-44.

himself with the work, and equip himself with the training of his sister-subjects that he can at least avail himself of their results and in some reasonable degree master the essential tools of their trade. And the followers of the sister-studies must likewise familiarize themselves and their students with the work and the methods of the historians, and co-operate in the difficult task.

It is necessary that the American historian shall aim at this equipment, not so much that he may possess the key to history or satisfy himself in regard to its ultimate laws. At present a different duty is before him. He must see in American society with its vast spaces, its sections equal to European nations, its geographic influences, its brief period of development, its variety of nationalities and races, its extraordinary industrial growth under the conditions of freedom, its institutions, culture, ideals, social psychology, and even its religions, forming and changing almost under his eyes, one of the richest fields ever offered for the preliminary recognition and study of the forces that operate and interplay in the making of society.

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