

CHAPTER XX

PATRIOTISM—VICE OR VIRTUE?

IT was a race of children who first populated the decks of the good ship *Earth*, and from whom we are descended; but not in all respects children like ours. They were very low in intelligence. They had much of the fierceness and cruelty of the beasts of the field and forest—and they never grew up. Our children pass through the various stages of low intelligence, deceitfulness, cruelty and the like very swiftly, and guided by our civilization. These remote ancestors of ours who once made up the passenger list of the old ship were every one of them cases of arrested development. They became men and women physically, but never passed mentally beyond the child stage of development.

We may easily understand this if we will consider such a tribe as the White Eskimos

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just discovered by Steffansson in Arctic Canada. They are probably descended from Norse emigrants who possessed all the progress our ancestors had a thousand years ago; but they have lost all the civilization that filled Iceland with poets, and produced a literature which is still studied in every cultured nation. They have no marriage rite, no books, no firearms, no aspirations. They only hunt and eat, beget descendants, and struggle with nature. Theirs is a case of arrested development—arrested by the very circumstances which stopped short of our racial stature all the early races of men.

Civilization is not a matter of inherent racial capacity. Rather it is a thing of racial accumulation, like the limestone reefs built by the coral insect. We seem greater because we stand on what our ancestors built. And in the course of the long millenniums there has been a slow race development, from the man of the Neanderthal skull to the man of to-day. But this is so slow that it can not be measured. We are in no perceptible way naturally

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superior to the German savages, the Norse vikings and their crews, the Romans, the Greeks, the Assyrians or the Babylonians. Our development has not been quite so quickly arrested—that is about all the difference.

Now these crafty, cruel, lying, thievish children, our ancestors, seem to have been inclined to live solitary lives like some other animals—the grizzly bear, the tiger, the lion. The wonderful strength of the family ties—which was the beginning of civilization—held them together into families, and from families the tribe sprung. The tribes preyed upon one another. Hate was the rule of life toward all but “our people,” and “our tribe.” Even the gods were tribal, with a divine jurisdiction stopping at the village limits.

As family grew to tribe, so strong tribes grew to nations. The germ of organization was germinating. And out of the strange, childish-savage hatred and cruelty of tribe to tribe, there was born a curious, glorious, contemptible, admirable vice-virtue called patriotism. It still persists, as the most univer-

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sally-claimed and the most generally-possessed of social qualities. All men are normally patriots, becoming traitors only under anomalous conditions. Scoundrels are quite as good patriots as decent people—and as a rule far more vociferous ones. The quality, therefore, is not possessed by good people alone, like unselfishness, nor by bad people alone, like cruelty. It inspires such literature as Scott's "Breathes there a man with soul so dead", Collins' "How sleep the brave", and Hale's *Man Without a Country*. Its most gross and obvious emblem is the flag, or the "Emperor's coat", and its cheapest badge is punctilious outward respect and worship of these emblems. It still carries with it much of the hate of olden times, and is the sentiment upon which the predatory powers play in securing public support for our monstrous militarism.

Now why should we, who inherit a portion of the deck of the good ship *Earth*, look any the less kindly on a fellow man because he lives across the line in Canada, or over the

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water in Japan or Germany? A man once sat dry-eyed and unmoved through a sermon which drew tears to all other eyes. "Why are you so cold and hard?" he was asked. "I don't live in this parish," said he, "I'm just passing through."

"My country!" ran the "patriot's" toast. "May she be ever right—but right or wrong, my country!" Such patriotism launches every battle fleet of aggression, and has put to the sword a thousand cities. Such patriotism fills the world to-day with the debt, destruction, waste and penury of the tremendous militarism which astonishes and appals every thinking mind.

But, as individual hate grew to family love, as family enmities were lost in tribal good will, and as tribal wars ceased in the wider brotherhood of the nation, so there is struggling into birth a new thing—Internationalism. When Great Britain attacked the Boers, there were great men in England who were frankly and openly pro-Boer, because the Boers were right. Many in the United States

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frankly and openly sympathized with the Filipinos in their resistance to our aggressions. Hundreds of thousands in Russia and Austria the day this is written, are protesting against war with the Balkan Allies, or the opposed powers of Europe, not because of cowardice or reluctance to take the chances of war, but for the sake of brotherhood.

Patriotism can not be dispensed with, any more than inter-family hate could have been in its time. Each is a sort of temporary defensive provision of nature, like the white plumage of birds in snow-time. But it is gradually blossoming into something higher. It can not be accounted among the eternal virtues. We shall gradually rise above the vulgar enmities implied in the hate of those who live elsewhere on the decks of the good ship *Earth*; and from these come most of what we call patriotism.

When men begin asking themselves as to the relations of their nations with other peoples, "Is our attitude right or wrong?" patriotism takes on a glorious new aspect. There

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was never so much of this international conscience as now. "My country, right or wrong," is giving way to "Is my country right, or wrong?"

Universal peace! Universal disarmament! Universal good will! These can come only with universal prosperity and universal understanding. When they come, patriotism in its present sense, will have died. Fraternity will have taken its place, and the old word patriotism, still holding place in the language, will have come to mean a localized phase of universal love and brotherhood.