

Fourth of July Article
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THE REHABILITATION OF THE FOURTH OF JULY.

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HOLIDAYS are intended to strengthen sentiment. From a physical point of view, mere relaxation is, of course, of value to an over-burdened people like ours; but occasional festivals are not of much importance in relieving the over-wrought body and brain. The influence of a day of mere unrestrained, untempered general jollification, too, must always be discounted by the crime and demoralization resulting from unusual license. The Fourth of July is a festival worth observing only as a stimulant of patriotic sentiment.

Of recent years this holiday has lost much of the patriotic quality; it has mostly become a mere gala day, distinguished from other gala days only by the more general display of the national colors. Base-ball games, excursions, beer and booziness, have come to be its special features. Anarchism is almost as often the subject of eulogium on that day as patriotism. From a laboriously compiled census of its public observance in 1887, the writer concluded that the Declaration of Independence was publicly read less than 200 times in twenty States, and that less than 200,000 people heard it on that day. We are told that this is the natural result of the evolution of the practical and the elimination of the sentimental in American thought. Just what constitutes the "practicality" of the ball-game or the crowded, aimless, sweltering excursion it would be difficult to say, but that this method of observing the national holiday is fatal to patriotic sentiment there can be no doubt. Let the fathers and mothers of a single generation grow up with such pabulum as the Fourth of July of the present furnishes, and patriotism as a popular impulse will be well-nigh eradicated. To be millionaires, political bosses or reckless conspirators, will be the only social ideas to which the young American of the future will aspire.

Yet patriotic sentiment—the popular exaltation of the national ideal—is the foundation of all true and reliable nationality. "Our country, right or wrong," is, after all, the only secure basis of national strength. Of course, no one desires it to be wrong and every one desires it to be right; but when the die is cast and the decision must be made, the only hope in any threatening conjuncture is in a patriotic sentiment so strong that the individual sinks his own ideas of policy—even his own conviction of political right and wrong—and rallies to the support of the country with cheerful self-sacrifice and entire devotion.

That this was the tendency of the old-time Fourth of July celebration there can be no doubt. The yearly gathering, the solemn prayer, the reading of the Declaration of Independence, the impassioned address, left a most vivid impression on the minds of the young who were being prepared for the tremendous shock of battle which awaited them. The effect of this training was distinctly seen in that marvelous uprising which followed instantly upon the first assault upon the national flag. Young men trembled with rapture at the thought of serving the land they loved; old men wept bitter tears because their day was past. Why was this? The political sentiment of the North was not only divided, but neither wing of it was in hearty accord with the conduct of the war. One portion was opposed to interfering with slavery, not a few were uncompromising believers in the doctrine of State sovereignty. Another portion believed not only that slavery was wrong, but that its eradication was essential to the perpetuity of the Republic. One of these moieties trembled with apprehension at the invasion of a State's territory by national forces; the other grew hot with rage as they saw the Government troops used to return fugitive slaves. Yet they fought shoulder to shoulder for the flag around which such a tender, intangible sentiment clung. In the same company—the writer remembered more than one instance of it—were to be found the followers of Calhoun and the disciples of Garrison. Neither believed the Government to be altogether in the right; yet both fought bravely because the nation was first in their thought and above all questions of policy and method. What had produced this harmony of action between elements so diverse in character? Hardly one who felt it will deny that the old Fourth of July celebration was a most important factor in the creation of that patriotic fervor which inspired his action.

But the public Fourth of July celebration, we are told, is no longer possible. It cannot be made a success. It has no attraction for the young people of to-day. As a spectacle it is grotesque. The lines of society have grown too hard and sharp to allow its extremes to meet even for a day upon a common level. Multiplied diversions have made its simple ceremonies stale and

unattractive. It will not draw a crowd as well as a game of base ball, and as a display is meager in comparison with the monster parades of modern political campaigns. The old Fourth of July is generally conceded to be too tame, too crude and sentimental for our practical, overburdened present.

This is not altogether a remarkable result. We have worked very industriously for a quarter of a century or so, to eliminate sentiment from the field of politics and statesmanship, apparently forgetful of the fact that it is the most important element of both. We have labored to inculcate in the minds of the coming generation the idea that "government is business," and that economics is the highest field of statesmanship. Cheapness has become the measure of political excellence, and dollars and cents the test of party efficiency. Instead of subrogating political economy to its natural and proper place as a mere instrument of good and wise purposes, we have made it the highest duty of citizenship to worship the Golden Calf. Instead of basing our national hope upon the patriotism, morality and devotion to high ideals of the American people, we have rested our claim to superior excellence as a government upon our aggregate wealth and the wonderful development of our material resources. As a natural result, the Fourth of July has become unpopular. What has a nation devoted merely to money-getting, "practical politics" and political economy to do with a day that demands enthusiasm and is consecrated to patriotic sentiment? It will not do to discuss economics on that day; one feels at once the incongruity of it. If the Fourth of July means anything in the world's life and thought, it means liberty, inherent right, individual privilege, human progress—a higher ideal of manhood and government. It means government *for the sake of the governed* and government *by the governed*.

There can be no question that we have reached a point in the development of the Republican idea, when it has become necessary to recast our ideals. "Government by the people," cannot be made strong and lasting unless the sense of individual responsibility is extended to every constituent atom of the Republic. *How we govern ourselves*, according to what system, by what plan, are not nearly so important factors of the future as the character of the people who govern. There is no use of trying to find a specific method by which public evils may be avoided and the general welfare promoted. The only safe reliance is on the patriotic purpose of the people. Good administration and successful policy, in a republic, must always be bottomed on the *individual patriotism* of the citizen. Government is the highest duty of every American, and the most "dangerous

class" of citizens are those who fail to perform their political functions with patriotic earnestness, sincere conviction and an ever-present consciousness of individual responsibility. Patriotism needs to be taught as the highest virtue—the supremest quality of manhood, the fairest flower of Christianity. "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free," sang our American Miriam, and those about to die repeated with pale lips her words as they marched into the crater of battle. To live or die for the good of others—to promote by might, mind and strength, the good of others, is the matchless lesson of Christian patriotism.

This sentiment should come into every home, into the nursery, into the school. Americanism should be the distinctive quality of American life. Patriotic impulse should be not only our hope and reliance for the future, but the specific means by which we shall seek to elevate, develop, flex and exalt the world's life. The Stars and Stripes—the symbol of self-government, of individual responsibility as well as individual opportunity and equality—has done more for humanity than American commerce, American wealth, American charity, American schools, American prosperity—more than all other things American, because it is the beacon lamp which invites all the world *not* to come to this free land, but to make other lands free, and make universal the American idea of "government by the people and for the people."

This result can only be accomplished by fostering the patriotic impulse which the Fourth of July represents. Patriotism alone is not, it is true, sufficient for good government; but popular patriotism is the only source from which good government in a republic can possibly spring. The stream does not rise higher than the fountain, and the government of a republic will never rise above the patriotic ideal of the masses of its people. The statesman is the instrument of public thought; not the shaper of the popular ideal. The politician *never leads*, but always follows the general trend of public thought. A republic must always be built up from the bottom. The towers and steeples may be the most showy, but are always the least important parts of an edifice. Ordinarily their highest function is to support a weather-vane. It is the foundation which is the most essential thing, and in a self-governing state, as in architecture, the quality of the foundation is more important than the style in which it is laid. A foundation of soft, crumbling stone can never be made secure, no matter how artistically the blocks may be arranged or with what nicety they may be joined. Security depends on the vital supporting strength of the blocks themselves. The Republic rests upon the people—not on the highest,

the richest, the wisest, but on the common people—and not upon their wisdom or wealth so much as upon their devotion. If their patriotic ideal is high, the nation will be strong and enduring; if their ideal is low and base, all the wealth of the world and all the wisdom of the ages cannot save it. This patriotic impulse the Fourth of July should stimulate and promote.

But how shall this be done? Some means should be devised which will reach all classes and affect all conditions. The old Fourth of July celebration was based very largely on the almost universal sense of equality. Riches counted for but little in those days. Neighborhood was a common bond. Social circles met and overlapped without fear of contamination or reproach. This condition of affairs no more exists. Proximity has developed repulsion among the atoms of society. The city separates men, classes, households. Money outranks worth, merit, brain—everything. Public displays have come to take on the character of the games of the amphitheater—they are “shows for the people” instead of popular demonstrations. No doubt the old Fourth of July celebration will eventually return in some modified form when we have ceased to measure manhood and womanhood by a gold standard; have gotten over the silly rage of trying to assimilate ourselves in everything to other nations and developed once more a genuine and universal pride, not merely in our national wealth, our marvelous productiveness, our inventive capacity, our creative energy, our commerce, our “surplus,” our railroads and our syndicates; but, above all, in that far nobler and more worthy product of American life—the American people. But, in the mean time, it is quite within the scope of practical effort to devise some means which shall unite the whole mass of the people in observance of this day, not so much as the anniversary of our separation from old England, but as a recurring jubilee of that greater England which greets its morning sun as the other sinks into the shadow of the night.

First among such influences, I count the universal display of the national banner. A flag is within the compass of the poorest, and with a little taste and skill gives scope to the desire for display of the richest. It is unquestionable that the most impressive forms of decoration and display are of this sort—uniform in character, yet infinitely varied in application. A city flaming in every part with the bright emblem of national power, is a spectacle at once significant and impressive. This would naturally lead to the more ornate and striking decoration of the grounds and residences of the more wealthy. Such displays should not be reserved for political campaigns, but should be more universal and im-

posing on this day than any other. The Fourth of July should be one wave of rosy light from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In connection with this the family and social Fourth of July may easily be made a means of cultivating the patriotic impulse which would be thoroughly in accord with the spirit and tendency of the times. The country picnic, with flags, patriotic devices, the reading of the Declaration of Independence, a paper on some matters of national interest, patriotic songs, and perhaps a few stories of the olden time, is one of the most restful and agreeable ways of observing the holiday, and at the same time one of the most impressive methods of imparting the lesson of patriotism to the young. This might be extended to lawn parties, Fourth of July receptions, or any other form of social entertainment that links the patriotic idea with home and social life.

In the few public gatherings of a patriotic kind which are still held upon that day, not only should matters of a partisan character be generally eschewed, but perhaps especially the discussion of reformatory ideas and economic theories. The day should be sacred to liberty, human rights and the past. Very few of us begin to realize to how great an extent we have led and shaped the thought of the world during our little more than a century of organic life; and in any company, however small, there will always be one who by a little exertion can open up some line of thought which will add to the knowledge and appreciation which the others have of the Great Republic, her glorious past and her magnificent destiny.

There might, perhaps, be easily found some method, too, of linking the school with the Fourth of July. The movement in favor of raising the flag above every school-house during school hours is an object lesson in patriotism of infinite value. A Western teacher informed the writer that he had greatly improved the schools of a town which were under his superintendence as well as brought them nearer to the people and given a new impulse to popular love of country, by offering prizes for patriotic declamations and by public competition by pupils of a certain standing in answering questions in regard to some particular phase of American history which had been given out a year previously. The exercises were held in a grove, if the weather permitted; the Declaration was read; a sort of patriotic catechism which had been taught the children, embracing the chief facts attending the adoption of that instrument, was recited by them in concert; and, with music, recitations and competitive examinations, the day was filled with patriotic sentiment and sensible recreation. He said he was particularly impressed with the popularity of this

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plan with the parents, many of whom followed the children in their year's reading.

But, above all, it is necessary that every citizen should recognize it as a clear and bounden duty that he should do what he can to popularize, socialize and familiarize the Fourth of July as a day consecrated to the cultivation of patriotic sentiment—not merely a boastful love of country, but an impulse to serve it truly and faithfully in every conjuncture of affairs and in every capacity that may confront the citizen. Thus, alone, may the Kings of the Republic be inspired to rule with patriotic devotion to the welfare of all. If this is done, we need have no fear of ignorance or any social vice among the lowly. Indeed, the one great lesson of the world's history is, that oppression, evil and national debasement, spring always from the ambition, greed or lethargy of the rich, the wise, the strong, and never from the poor and weak. To promote this end, I would propose, if I were permitted to suggest, the organization in every town, village, city and ward, of a Fourth of July Society, to stimulate, promote and encourage the sensible, recreative, worthy and patriotic observance of the National holiday, not forgetting over all the land to see to it that

“... the heavens shall bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder.”

The cannon, if not essential to the lesson of patriotism, is no doubt one of its most impressive teachers; and the roar that salutes the rising sun of that day tells every one who hears that the American Republic has consecrated “blood and iron” to the service of liberty and humanity.