

CHAPTER XVI
THE MELTING POT
AMERICAN STOCK

Fifty years ago the average American was regarded as as fine a type of producer as any country reared. Unfortunately at that time there were, in all great cities, disreputable persons who came prominently before the public notice, and occupied far too much space in the daily prints. There were shady politicians in that day; there were grafters and extortionate captains of industry; but add them all up, and find the sum of those who made so much noise, and they comprised only a very small part of the people. No matter where you wandered at that time, it was impossible not to be impressed with the fact that the great majority of the people were attending to their own business, and wished to be left alone to earn their livings as honestly as the system permitted. It was my good fortune through very hard times, to meet several entirely different sections of society. The laborers I had to work with were, on the whole, a decent lot of men. The middle class, save where the heads of families were closely connected with certain political organizations, conducted the affairs of their lives in a reputable manner. Men were proud of helping themselves. The generality looked for no favors and seldom sought them. The purchasing power of money was high; the debt of the country was scarcely worth mentioning; there was no income tax; tariffs were

low and, although the unemployment problem was fearfully aggravated by the inpouring hordes of immigrants, the people of the soil here lived well and thrived happily. There were rackets in those days, notably the charity racket. Rackets there had been in politics for a generation, or since the close of the Civil War. But there was no such thing as preying on men engaged in legitimate industry. There was grafting everywhere in Messalina's profession, but then the red-light districts were isolated, and not until the coming of Dr. Parkhurst were they scattered all over the cities.

PIONEERS

Pioneers were still at work, and many new lands were opened up to the people. I remember, as if it were yesterday, when the Oklahoma rush took place. A more cheerful, energetic, determined, self-reliant people than those who were native, could not be found. The future of the country was assured, so it was thought. Then came McKinley and high tariffs, and immigration was speeded up. In a decade the face of the country was changed. The migrations from the East to the West had been taking place for some time and, as the population increased, other peoples crowded into the cities and strange names replaced those of the older stocks—people from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean seemed, in numbers of congested districts, to be crowding out the folk of the more stable nations of western civilization. In the days when Israel Zangwill used to think about the melting pot, it did seem to me possible for wide assimilation to take place.

My mind goes back to an afternoon when Zangwill and his mother invited Fanny Bloomfield Zeisler and me to take tea at his house in St. John's Wood. At that

time I was closely in touch with him, regarding the dramatization of one of his books, to be produced by Charles Frohman. But the main subject of discussion was not about the play. Zangwill's mind was taken up with the conditions of the poor and, particularly, with those concerning his own people in America. I told him what my experience had been, and what great changes I had seen during the first twelve years I lived in this country. Notwithstanding the impositions of the McKinley Tariff, and the great influx of eastern European peoples, he still believed America was the true melting pot. But no one thinks of that now. Nothing of practical value was done to help the newcomers to understand the traditions of the country, and enter into the spirit of its genius.

IMMIGRATION

The flood of immigration was too much for the authorities to handle. The average of aliens entering the country from 1887 to 1896 was just above 400,000 a year. After the high tariffs were put into operation, the average increased mightily, and in the ten years 1900-1909, the average doubled—820,000 a year. Then, for the next five years, the influx was greater still—the average rose to over a million. The scandals connected with the immigration of that time, of how the people were collected, despatched, and then received, when they reached our shores; how they suffered under the "slave-driving *padrones*," caused no particular stir, and one seldom came across people who had any misgivings as to what it meant for the future. In these years there was no dearth of labor for rough work and what were called dangerous trades, and those who enjoyed the benefit of a congested labor market never stopped to consider that these people were breeding at a far greater

rate than the native stocks. Colonies were set up, and the denser the colony became, the more impossible the work of assimilation. Zangwill's "melting pot" before the War took place, seemed, when it was mentioned, to be merely the echo of some idealist's dream. What these hordes meant politically as voters can be imagined. The parrot-like story dinned into the immigrant for the purposes of gaining entry at the port, was forgotten in a few days, and no further attempt was made to teach him the principles of citizenship.

There were two problems that were quite bad enough, in all conscience, in the 'nineties, which the addition of over twenty millions of poor Europeans complicated to a tremendous extent, and these were the slum and the tenement house problems. Anyone who had experience with these seething districts of alien people knew the time was coming when very grave evils would arise. But honest reformers were checked at every turn by the local bosses, and the political powers at the city halls. Both parties were equally responsible for letting things take their course. They have taken their course, and there is scarcely one problem which engages the attention of serious thinkers today that is not affected by the descendants of aliens who were handicapped, because of race, or language, or characteristics, from any process of assimilation that can now be put into practice.

THE HIRED MAN

I had not been long in this country before I was shocked to hear a man refer to the President of the day as "the hired man," the man to do the national chores required by the people. When I remonstrated, I was told that I had come to a country where I would find

democracy was practiced in the raw. Whether it was practiced in the raw or not, it was political democracy, with all its shortcomings, of a particularly interesting and virile nature. There was little sloppy sentimentalism about it in that day, and a man had to stand on his own feet if he was capable of doing a day's work. Young men of my age who came fresh to the country seldom found it hard to get a job. Of course, more often than not, the job was not an attractive one, to begin with. Still, there was keep without luxury, no expense for gasoline, movie, dance hall, or any of the other tokens of the abundant life that surround us today. After all, men were men, not without hope and, in the main, it was true that everybody had a chance who had the intelligence and sinew to discover it. Discovery, indeed, was one of the outstanding features of life at that time, and the man who felt the urge did not bother about hampering himself or his family with many household belongings until he was tolerably sure that he had discovered what he could do, where he could do it, and that there was some security of tenure in the work. If that was practicing democracy in the raw, there can be no doubt that it was a healthy exercise for a robust people, no matter how crude the political conditions might be. It is not often, in these days, that I come across the designation, "the hired man," as applied to a public official, but, stripping the system of all its rodomontade and make-believe, the Executive of the United States is a salaried servant of the public, and the people who contribute, according to the tax returns, at least three-fourths of his salary, are those upon whom falls so much of his displeasure.

So far as more than one-third of the electorate is concerned, he seemed for some years to delight in

placing a fresh chip on his shoulder every morning, forgetful of the fact that these people comprise the vast majority of those whose taxes went far to consolidate the Solid South in his favor, and supply the money for the relief in other sections, which also went a long way towards giving him a Congress he could command. But the man who would look for gratitude in politics under any system would be following the example of the man who looked for the needle in a haystack. It is not gratitude that is expected in such a case; it is merely doing what an athlete does when he meets a competitor, and what a general does when, in battle, he meets an antagonist. Respect of an opponent is an intelligent policy to follow. And even in a democracy such as the Executive has within his power, it cannot be said that it is a wise procedure to pander constantly in speech and deed to the majority of the people; for in the majority there is always to be found, unfortunately, large sections whose seat of political intelligence never moves above the belt line.

SINISTER ELEMENTS

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, says that one million and a half felonies are committed each year within the boundaries of the United States, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science reports that five percent of the jobless are too inert to work. Dr. Feingold said that the education of today appears to be quite helpless in the matter of improving nature on a racial or national scale, and he suggested that "the school supplement the home on a twenty-four hour basis, taking in the whole family." The evidence that can now be collected anywhere, of the type of democracy we

have in this country, is sufficient to show that there are enough ignorance and venialty in a great mass of the people to be a positive danger to the Executive if he should for a moment fail to tickle their fancy. Even some of his supporters have pointed out this fact in their books. Mr. Soule, in *The Coming American Revolution*, says:

“Anyone can see with half an eye that many of the raw materials of Fascism are lying about within the United States. We have the suffering ranks of unemployed, veterans and farmers, the dwindling number of small business men fighting a losing battle against monopoly, the tradition of bumptious nationalism, the racial and religious prejudices, the tendency to violence and brutality, the proneness to organize about vague and mystical slogans. Nothing has been done for the victims of Mussolini or Hitler which is more revolting than the cruelty practiced by lynching mobs in the United States; the lawless suppression of strike and radicals by violence is an old habit in this country whether through the organization of vigilantes, citizens’ committees and veterans or through the hire of gunmen. We have a much larger class of professional gangsters accustomed to living by murder than had either Italy or Germany, and these would undoubtedly be employed by such a movement. . . . We have the most highly developed machinery for delusive propaganda in the world.”

THE POLITICALLY IGNORANT

But this is not all, although it is a severe commentary on the democracy which the Executive rules. There are many other sinister elements in this strangely mixed mass which congeals in large-sized lumps only at elec-

tion times. Probably the most dangerous element, politically, is that stratum which runs through all sections of society here, of people who are completely politically ignorant. Young, old, male, female, comprising, it is said, over fifty percent of the voters, can be won by a photograph, an ingratiating voice, a little romance about a person, and other such externalities. It is the same stratum which revels in police court news. It is all that section of society which is referred to in one of the most extraordinary books that have been issued for many years. It is called *Here's to Crime*, and it is written by Courtney Ryley Cooper, and published by Little, Brown and Company. Mr. Cooper has had access to the records and statistics of the Bureau of Investigation. He says:

"The legal profession, wittingly or unwittingly, has done more to clog courts, to delay prosecution, to open prison doors, to surround criminals with legal and statutory safeguards and to stultify justice, than any other single medium in our crime history."

Then, in connection with the working of a government bureau, so far as the investigation of crime is concerned, and the suggestion that there should be a national police to deal with the underworld, he says:

"... No Government bureau can afford to pick a fight with a locality. After all, the United States Government lives, not as an entity, but as the slave of the crossroads. There is nothing so outraged as the voice of a United States Senator as he rises to a point of order and delivers himself of an attack upon an investigative branch of the Government which, he insists, has resorted to the persecution of his community and the spoiling of its fair name. Bureaus live by the whim of

Congress. They may plan for the future, they may have dreams of accomplishment, they may have great ideals, but if some cantankerous old wart who heads a vital committee decides to block their appropriation, it amounts almost to a death blow.

“Senators and Congressmen come from localities. They often are elected by the same machines which take over control of city and state politics and are nervously appreciative of any desires on the part of the Boss back home. The blowing up of local corruption by official Governmental report would immediately have its repercussions in the Capital. Bureaus would be curtailed in expenditure, men lopped off, dishonesty attributed to their heads; and above all, the squawk would steam from the gilded dome of the Capitol that an American OGPU was in formation, seeking to pry into the lives of our citizens, regulate neighborhoods, emulate the Russian Secret Police.

“Therefore, those who desire a National Police may as well forget it. That will never happen, unless Congress itself wills such a thing. The stink that would be revealed at home by such a move is assurance that Congress would as soon touch the subject as stick a finger in the fire. There are not twenty first-class cities in the United States which could come through a searching inquiry by a fearless, vigilant, efficient and militant investigative body, free of political interference, without at least a dozen persons of so-called prominence in each community being headed for the penitentiary.”

THE CRIME INDUSTRY

Mr. Cooper says “an absolute minimum of fifteen billion dollars is spent on crime in all its phases of profit, expense and loss” and that “more than three million, five hundred thousand persons” are engaged in

crime, "thus forming by far the biggest industry in America." It would be well if the last chapter in this book could be circulated as a pamphlet and sent to every household in the land, for Mr. Cooper in this chapter, called *Paths Ahead*, gives one the impression that he thinks reform is possible. But I find in every paragraph of it, statements that convince me that reform is not possible. Take, as an example, two paragraphs which impress me as being black with discouragement. They are as follows:

"Attention should be given to judges of all sorts, especially the country justice of the peace—often a mere grafter subsisting on fees in trumped-up charges. The job of justice of the peace is, alas, conducive to the temptation of fraud and deceit. It must be remembered also that a justice of the peace can become a circuit or district judge and that if he has been a grafter in one place he will be a grafter in another. It sometimes happens that our most ferocious judges, those looked upon by a community as most ardent enemies of crime, can be our biggest deceivers. The man who roars and bellows at the defense, apparently eager to convict by allowing glaringly inadmissible evidence to be put over by the prosecution, and prone to give extraordinarily severe sentences, may be a crook of a dozen colors. By exhibiting a prejudicial attitude from the bench, he lays the case wide open to reversal by a superior court; by his severe sentences he causes a revulsion on the part of jurors against conviction. Naturally these jurors do not know that the apparent severity may be a device known to the underworld as a 'gimmick' or a 'gaff.' Palm-itching judges have often imposed severe sentences with one thought in mind: money from crooks who depend upon the parole board for shortening over-severe sentences. Judges

of this sort should be exposed. They should be unearthed by shrewd investigators. The district attorney who has accepted numerous 'copped pleas' under circumstances which will not bear publicity, should be named, and his record plastered in places of public view. The judge who has a record of continuous reversals should be forced to give an explanation of his ignorance, his bias, or the suspicion of monetary influence.

"Along with such miscreants, the persons who live on the fringes of crime should know that they are under investigation. Bar Associations could install competent vigilance committees to seek out and shame the shysters of the profession, whether in or out of the Association. The same should hold true in the Medical Association."

OUR LAWLESS DEMOCRACY

Mr. Cooper's terrible indictment of a lawless democracy reveals, alas, the utter hopelessness of any effort at effective reform. It shows conclusively that the great obstacles which lie in the path of those who would dare to clean the cesspool are three: political, legal, and public. He says, "The law enforcement official who may have pursued a devious course has an excellent alibi beyond any one of those listed in previous chapters. It is the actions of that strange headless, tailless, driving, yet directionless, jellyfish known as 'the public'."

We have had some pertinent examples in investigations, in several entirely different States, of what is taking place. There have been the trials in Kansas City in connection with the recent election frauds, and in New York, where Mr. Dewey has unearthed some powerful gangs of racketeers who preyed upon business men and prostitutes. There was, besides, the Samuel

Seabury investigation of corrupt local politicians in New York a few years ago.

Therefore, it seems to me that it is certainly worth while to analyze the elements that make up this democracy, in order to find out whether they are desirable electors, even for the purposes of the present administration. The very instability of the different sections, so far as social thought and action are concerned, should be enough to warn the Executive of what might happen when a severe slump comes; for if there is one thing certain about the great majority of the people, it is that armies of them will react electorally when relief is hard to find.

The humanity of the sentimental liberals will not bear critical analysis and, as for the poor and needy, governors of States and local legislators have had plenty of opportunity to do something for all the impoverished sections of society that had been victims of rackets. A system which is largely responsible for prostitution makes it doubly hard for the girl, when it permits racketeers to prey upon her purse. When, to this, is added the apathy of bar associations, as to the nature of the business of many of its members, it is detestable when even for political purposes, poor humanity is used as a pawn in the game. Now why in all this welter of crime, and the indifference to it, the folk whose only desire is to make a decent living should be included, is something that is difficult to understand. No differentiation is made by politicians when humanity is courted for electoral purposes. Every section is rucked together because every section under present circumstances has a chance to vote. When the politician refers to some measure that must reach the Statute Book for the sake of humanity, he includes in the term gangsters, rack-

eteers, prostitutes, pimps, as Mr. Cooper says, together with all those who are preyed upon by these undesirable elements, and, besides, all the other worthy sections of society which manage to escape the clutches of the criminal. And this heterogeneous mass is democracy!

HUMANITY

The opportunities that are overlooked by politicians for doing something worth while for humanity are so numerous that one wonders how it is possible for intelligent people to submit themselves to a course of deliberately deceiving themselves. Take, for example, the case of the Negro in the South. The politician from that part of the United States is just as prone in Washington to talk about doing something for humanity as a Congressman from the North. Think of the brave speeches that were made during Mr. Wilson's term of office when hundreds of thousands of American lads were sent to Europe to suffer the horrors of warfare, and were sent with flags waved by cheering crowds! Again, when the natives of Central America had to be brought into the ambit of "civilized" business, what methods the sponsors of humanity exercised in the proceeding! Think of the humanity in the phrase "dollar diplomacy!" Remember, too, when the "big stick" was the symbol of human progress.

As an example of the utter senselessness of political statements, one delivered by Senator Key Pittman is hard to beat. He said, "The cheapest thing this country can do would be to spend a few billion dollars for national defense to preserve the civilization, humanity and morality of the world." Presumably, he forgets that some twenty years ago the world spent something like three hundred and fifty billion dollars to save not

only "civilization, humanity and morality," but democracy in the bargain! And the total casualties were more than 8,500,000 dead and over 20,000,000 wounded. Yet after all the spilling of blood and destruction of property, "civilization, humanity and morality" are considered by many, now, to be scarcely worth saving.

The opportunities that come to the American politician and his supporters, for dealing impartially with humanity are so numerous, that it would take many pages to list them all. So it must be obvious that when the term humanity is used by the politician, it refers particularly to that section which may vote for him. All this is indicative of a childishness which most other nations have outgrown. Here, it has become a political obsession—an extremely dangerous one, because there are numbers of men who seem to believe that their humanity can be relied on at all times to play their game consistently. There will be a dreadful awakening some day!