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AMERICA'S "LOST YEARS"

IN a lecture some nine or ten years ago, Nicholas Murray Butler referred to the period from 1781 to 1789 as the lost years of American history. Lost in the sense that not one child out of 10,000, he said, had any idea of the real meaning of that period in the story of this nation. He pointed out that the general idea planted or promoted in our teaching was that there was a clear-cut and immediate cause-and-effect relationship between the American Revolution and the founding of the American Constitution. Both these events had been conveniently though fallaciously tied together so tightly that the average youngster had naturally come to think of them as part of the same bundle.

Glossed over, he pointed out, was the fact that the individual states came out of the American Revolution as rigid entities—independent nations whose ties—and not too strong ties at that—were as former allies rather than as partners in a continuing enterprise. The peoples were largely heterogeneous; there were varying and frequently conflicting systems of political, economic, monetary, and social organization. Sovereignty, separation, and sectarianism—these fixed the thinking of the day. A man who went from one state to another found that his currency would shrink ten per cent just in the act of crossing the state line. Assuming he wanted to travel from Massachusetts to Georgia, and that he started out with one hundred dollars, he would be down to fifty dollars by the time he reached Maryland, and would wind up in Georgia with ten dollars—fare and expenses not included. Listen to John Fiske in his "The Critical Period of American History":

Acts were deliberately passed, obligating every Yankee sloop which came through Hell Gate, and every New Jersey market boat which was rowed across from Paulus Hook to Cortlandt Street, to pay entrance

fees and obtain clearances at the Custom House, just as was done by ships from London or Hamburg; and not a carload of Connecticut firewood could be delivered at the back door of a country house in Beekman Street until it should have paid a heavy duty. . . .

The New Jersey legislature made up its mind to retaliate. The City of New York had lately bought a small patch of ground on Sandy Hook and had built a lighthouse there. This lighthouse was the one weak spot in the heel of Achilles where a hostile arrow could strike, and New Jersey gave vent to her indignation by laying a tax of \$1,800 on it.

These, then, were the thirteen states after the Revolution. At one time, as Frederick Scott Oliver observed in his study of Alexander Hamilton as a federationist, war between Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York "seemed all but inevitable." The American Revolution was rapidly evaporating as a common bond. "The barbarities of the Pennsylvanians under Patterson . . . outdid even the legend of British atrocities and left a wrangling memory in Connecticut." This was only typical.

The citizens hardened their hearts, preferring, like Pharaoh, to endure the murrain, the locusts, and the darkness, rather than abandon their mean jealousies, their rivalries at once sordid and malicious; rather than part with a single shred of local sovereignty to clothe the shivering and naked form of federal government. . . . Finally, in their madness, they fell upon each other; each at the beginning looking merely for advantage to itself in injury to its neighbors, even as an end in itself.

When Dr. Butler criticized the schools for failing to give proper weight and clarity to the period of international anarchy in America following the Revolution, he was not attempting merely to plug a leak as a matter of sheer academic concern over completeness in the curriculum. His primary purpose was to call attention to a "critical period" not only in the history of America but in the history of the world. For the first time, a genuine union was made out of the stuff of disparity and in the face of seemingly irreconcilable jealousies. And the triumph belongs even more to the general political evolution of the world than it does to America alone. Here is the definitive answer to those who believe that the differences among peoples are automatically more important than their similarities. As an answer, too, it tells of a valid laboratory for the needs of the world today. That was the real meaning of the period.

On a somewhat smaller scale, there are yet other lessons offered up by the American laboratory. There is a

strange and dangerous chemical reaction that sets in after wars, of which Greece after the Persian Wars, Europe after 843, American after 1781, and Europe again after 1918, are only a few examples, causing peoples to fall to fighting among themselves. Once the common peril was lifted, the cement that held people together turned to water. Obviously, an equivalent was needed—the equivalent of a common government. Does anyone today doubt that once the common enemy is beaten Europe will tend to fall apart? What is already happening in Greece and Yugoslavia and France, where civil war is either brewing or raging, is only a skimpy preview of what we can expect unless we are prepared to work for a solid overall framework which can keep Europe tied together in one piece as well as to set up a central authority to deal with the struggles for power within each country.

What we have to face is the reality that only this central authority can hope to cope with the psychology of violence that is the dominating characteristic of the age. This is hardly unique, nor should it surprise us; after five or more years of war, men are not likely to regard their objectives as attainable in any way other than by direct force. After the Treaty of Verdun in the ninth century, from which date stems the political divisions and the interminable misery of Europe, the people turned to violence in their dealings among themselves as though it were as natural as passing the time of day. By the eleventh century, things got so violent in even the most casual dealings, as E. A. Freeman tells us in his "Norman Conquest," that a huge movement sprang up to limit the blood-letting. Accordingly, a Truce with God was arranged by which all good men and true agreed not to murder each other during the period from Wednesday evening to the following Monday morning of each week, after which we suppose all bets were off, unless of course the anniversary of Christ's supper or some other high holiday fell on a Tuesday, in which case murder was regarded as distinctly in bad taste.

This sounds farcical; but we have not yet reached the pinnacle of a Sinai from which we can point at ages supposedly less remarkable than our own. The fact is that before we can laugh at the past, we shall at least have to make the apparently virgin admission that there is some connection between yesterday and today. But that in turn would doubtless cause us to stumble into learning something that might be helpful now. The world must be full of these terrifying possibilities.

N. C.

If Writers Were Really Honest . . .

SIR: To decide whether a piece of writing is good or bad is difficult enough without trying to decide whether it is original. If, as Synge says, "All art is collaboration," most of our writers could be called unconscious kleptomaniacs.

A writer, if forced to acknowledge his indebtedness to persons and things that have influenced his work, would find the list hopelessly long. It would read somewhat like this:

"I wish to thank my father and mother, my grandfathers and grandmothers, and all my other ancestors who have conspired to produce in me this unhappy faculty known as literary talent. In particular, I am indebted to my Scottish forebears, not only in a direct way for my parsimonious use of the epithet, but also indirectly for the game of golf, which has given me a physique robust enough to withstand my rigorous hours of craftsmanship. I should here commend also the efforts of the late Anthony Aguecheek, who was my English teacher in high school.

"I claim little credit for myself, not even for the dialogue of my stories, for that I plagiarized by prowling around the streets of American cities at night, with notebook in hand, stealing phrases from anyone who would give them.

"Nor are my plots original, for I early discovered that 'Mother Goose' is a veritable seed catalogue of germ plots, and some day I mean to do justice to Little Tommy Tittlemouse, Taffy-was-a-Welshman, Bye Baby Bunting, the Three Blind Mice, and Needles and Pins.

"However, it must be evident to even the casual reader that among these plots there is little suggestion of the theme of love. This element I introduced in my early stories from ideas borrowed from the pulp magazines, which I read surreptitiously long before I came to appreciate Plato.

"Among other influences too numerous to mention, I shall merely acknowledge in passing my indebtedness to the English language, the Declaration of Independence, the American press, the public library, the climate, environment, and God."

Laura Jepsen.

University of Iowa.

Mr. Glovers Discovers

SIR: Your readers might be interested in a hitherto unpublished (at least in America) quotation I happened to come across in an old clipping from *The Manchester Guardian* of January 19, 1909. It quotes a postscript from a letter to Lady Georgiana Hogarth by the late Right Honorable Samuel R. Pidgeon. This clipping definitely establishes the correct author-



"The mystery stories are in the basement."

ship of a quotation which has since been variously attributed to Aeschylus, Rabindranath Tagore, Francis Bacon, William Congreve, and G. K. Chesterton, among others. The saying, which many of your readers will recognize, is:

The motivation of true greatness is often obscured by that which in itself motivates.

I trust that the various books of quotations will make a record of the correct authorship.

WYNNDHAM R. GLOVERS.

Cape Cod, Mass.

Mr. Van Loon and Simón Bolívar

SIR: It is difficult to believe that Mr. Hendrik Van Loon is serious when he writes that he could find little material on Simón Bolívar. When I wrote my biography of the Liberator three years ago, my chief trouble was the embarrassment of riches. If ever a man lived his whole life in the spotlight it was Simón Bolívar. His friends and his enemies were constantly in print, and among them they left him no private life at all.

I think perhaps the key to Mr. Van Loon's difficulty lies in his insistence on "buying your own books." Of course Larrazábal, Niles, Hippsley, and Reverend, to name only a few, are long since out of print and unobtainable by private purchasers. But San Marcos University at Lima has a very complete collection, and the University of Cartagena treasures Bolívar's own journal and many letters. The Library of Congress and our own New York Public Library have more volumes on Bolívar than most biographers would hope to find.

Neither can I understand Mr. Van Loon's difficulties on the pictorial side. In 1930, before A. Hitler upset the

record, there were in existence more portraits and statues of Bolívar than of any other secular person. By law, his portrait hangs in every public building of the five republics. The various uniforms that bother Mr. Van Loon, by the way, are the different ones of the Bolivarian republics, as well as special corps like the British Legion. Bolívar was entitled to wear about twenty-two different uniforms in 1825. As to landscape and historical spots, Hiram Bingham on his 1907 journey found them very little changed, and was able to give us vivid pictures by photograph and in words of the important battles and marches.

NINA BROWN BAKER.

Brooklyn, New York.

Mr. Rider's Limericks

SIR: "What Has Become of the Limerick?" [*SRL*, February 5] brings to mind the one attributed to the pen and originality of President Wilson.

While in the White House, the Wilson family found their entertainment the old-fashioned way—by games, written or oral. One of their favorite pastimes was writing limericks about themselves and each other. Here is one attributed to the President:

For beauty, I am not a star,
There are others more handsome by far,
My face, I don't mind it,
You see I'm behind it,
It's the fellow in front that I jar.

A limerick we might add to those that are clerical in theme is:

There once was a pious young priest,
Who lived almost wholly on yeast,
Said he, 'Tis quite plain,
We must all rise again,
And I want to get started at least.

So much for the limericks, and a