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The American Trail

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AFTER a hectic century of politics by circus, torch-parade and skull-duggery certain elements in our American people are becoming doubtful as to the ultimate success of our efforts along this line of "enlightened self-interest." In fact, when they occasionally stop to measure the remaining distance to the goal of the ideal co-operative democracy they are unpleasantly surprised to find our political ideals—which we still revere in principle—actually disappearing in the dim distance. The apples of the gods of democracy are becoming so worm-eaten with perversion, trickery and buncombe that they have become unpalatable to those who really desire a government of, by and for the people. The principles of decency and neighborliness which kept the pioneer community functioning as a body has been all but lost in the opportunism and horse-trading of politics by special interest.

The fundamental cause of this is obvious. Our lines of personal contact have become over-extended, dulling the feeling of mutual responsibility. The fear of Oliver Wendell Holmes, expressed during the period of rapid expansion, that "the country is growing too fast for its heart" is now proven to have been well founded. Shelley made this observation which, I think, fully covers the situation, "The accumulations of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature."

For failing to hang together we now hang separately. Somewhere along the path we lost the grip on our neighbors hand in the head-long rush for special privileges and individual success. But people all over the land are dropping out of the scramble, looking backward to discover what went wrong, and, meeting other individuals with a like desire to recapture that first soul-warming sense of unity, begin the backward trek to find the lost trail. And on the lips of everyone is that forgotten word, **community**. That something which common dangers and common hopes gave to the pilgrims and the pioneers to know in all its

richness but which later generations failed to choose for its own sake.

We now seem more ready to make that choice because we realize that our happiness as individuals and as a people hang upon it: that we can never become truly human individuals until we have become truly social neighbors, and that our great national principles of freedom, justice and equality must wait for the day when we have the necessary tolerance and loyalty to realize them in daily contact with our fellow-men wherever we live. There will be no great statesmanship in Washington until there is fellowship in Folkville.

But here again our flair for dashing accomplishment may lure us astray. In our search for the "cell": the fundamental **living** unit of which a new organic national body may be created we are tempted to accept the physical community as such a social unit without making sure whether it is a **fit** body for a social spirit. Neither the family nor the physical community can be accepted as true primary groups of a greater spiritual entity because both are so largely **accidental** in their structural elements, biologically, occupationally or for a multitude of other reasons, while the true primary group must of necessity be one created by **choice**. It is tempting to accept the fact of neighborhood as sufficient ground for common interests and common objectives but bitter experience has convinced us that in many cases the status of good neighbors rests not upon the proximity of the fields but upon the good fences that separate them.

If our desire is for high purpose and realization of American ideals within our people when it inally comes of age, then we must prepare a seed bed that is adequate and rich to give growth and nourishment to these ideals in the lives of our people. To accomplish this much more is required of the individual than to support a program of community activities. There can be no unified group until the individuals composing it have ceased to exist as sovereign entities with primary consideration for personal success and only such consideration for the group as can be spared without detracting from the chances of that success. In other words: our true primary group emerges only when and where its component members discover in the life of the group the realization of their own hitherto inactive potentialities, raising them above their own limi-

tations and permitting them to partake of the life and strength of the group. This experience is characterized not by the more or less voluntary renunciation of personal interests "for the good of the whole," in which loss is weighed against gain, but by the self-realization of the individual as a social being freed from the fetters which shackled him to the limits of his self-sufficiency and doomed him to confinement within his own ego. He is now free to partake jointly with his fellow-men of the common spiritual wealth of the race.

In order to create free, fearless and united primary groups we must look for something more than the mere pooling of our individual abilities and endeavors. It is a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts because the objective of the common effort: an organic spiritual unity, is no longer a distant goal but a present vitalizing incentive acting upon the individual with an intensity that far exceeds his own contribution. There is nothing new or strange in this. The process has been witnessed repeatedly in the course of human history. Again and again small minorities have shaken the world with a dynamic truth that apparently dominated the group and gave them an effectiveness entirely out of proportion to their number.

But, as has previously been indicated, this can only take place on the condition that the group attains a degree of internal tension sufficient to fuse into one body the hitherto dispersed and disjointed units. Anything short of this will prove more or less disappointing in that it requires a constant exertion of human effort to sustain the movement. And even the most ardent zeal has its limits. Neither can the function of such a group be conducted along conventional democratic lines. We have talked so much about our democratic society and institutions that we have come to accept majority-determined policy as some inherent principle in the eternal order of things. It is, of course, nothing of the sort. No advance in the history of mankind has ever been initiated by a majority. The function of the majority of any group, institution or nation embodying a cross-section of men is unfailingly that of resisting the advance until it has become an established fact which can no longer be blocked. In fact, majority rule is so effectively reactionary that it is difficult if not impossible to find a social, political or religious institution which has permitted its own reform or renewal, so that these have been accomplished only by separation of the regenerating element from the parent institution. Every forward movement in history has been signalized by a Declaration of Independence. And let us not forget that always "the shot heard around the world" was aimed at some patriot's—or heretic's—heart!

From the nucleus of this group, large or small, the impact is transmitted to the larger community in ever-widening circles until they meet the influence of similar cells in a thousand cities, towns and country-sides all over the land. It is the modern frontier; the fields are almost virgin but deeply fertile. There is the saga of America to explore and to understand. The untold story of what transpired along the many, many trails from the Atlantic to the Pacific; the greatest drama of peaceful conquest ever enacted in history: how America made a people out of refugees and wanderers. There are their songs to sing their music to play their crafts to relearn—all the symbols they

left to us an inheritance that we, too, may know the defeats and the victories they knew and become wise and patient and trusting; and find that our homes are in the bosom of a **people—our** people. That we may not be without a country. There is the poetry of the people, the scouts and the vanguards, searching out strange new territories of the mind and the soul in the dim uncertain light of dawn. There are the prophetic scriptures of statesmen-idealists: Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson, Wallace—beacons at the beginning of the trail but beamed at the horizon.—There are all these things and many, many others to cherish and to make real: the embodiment of a great dream in the flesh and blood of a people—the American People.

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The Challenge of Teaching as a Profession

MISS FLORA RENDLEMAN, Audubon, Iowa

WE OFTEN ask ourselves what our schools should do for our children and wonder if the process of education should be changed. Methods change and subjects change but, it seems, the fundamental objectives remain the same. The children should learn to think, to use the tools of language, reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic, to consider facts and not be fooled by the oratory of unscrupulous leaders. They should recognize real worth and select the most important bases for a complete and satisfactory way of life. They should be imbued by their teachers with a desire to learn, an eagerness to know what great men and women have thought and observed, an appreciation of beauty, a thirst for knowledge and a responsibility for discovering new ways of improving our lives.

We have grown up in a mechanical and industrial age. There is a shortage of thoughtful writing of great books, a need for more appreciation of music, books, art and drama. We have been told by some older nations that we are giants in industry but pygmies in culture. The choice of the present generation often seems to be to sit passively and be entertained rather than actively entertaining themselves by becoming proficient in some of the arts which would give them lasting pleasure.

We do not want to become a nation willing to let others do our thinking, to accept canned music and film pictures, it is better to be original and creative, to read and think, to form our own conceptions of the authors' messages and characters rather than to wait for some producer to interpret his impressions.

What should education do for our boys and girls? It should give them a realization of their abilities, some feeling of fitness for certain types of work and a knowledge of what kinds they would not be able to do satisfactorily or with enjoyment. We should not be bothered with people trying to sell goods and contacting a prospective customer with the words, "You don't want to buy this equipment, do you?"

This is just one example which could be amplified by hundreds of reports of square pegs and round holes—people unhappy, misfits and yet capable of a totally different outlook if they only had a clearer understanding of their own capabilities. This is a picture which should be rea-

lized by the schools and a gradual desire to fit education to the individual should evolve in our educational picture of the future.

Recently a father, writing to a school to which he wished to send his daughter, was answering the question included in their questionnaire, "Is she a leader?" by stating, "No, but she is an enthusiastic follower." The college president wrote to this discerning parent, "It will be fine to have one enthusiastic follower for the five hundred leaders." Parents should not expect too much of their children and should not show disappointment and displeasure when a child fails to measure up to some mark they have set.

A mother may have an inordinate desire to make her son an outstanding musician but the mother's ambition does not communicate itself to the child. There is often no ability corresponding to the height reached by the fond parent's hopes. It is very cruel and unfair to blame a child for not attaining these dreams of the parents. If children could feel their parents are interested in them as separate and interesting individuals, that the mechanically minded son of the learned professor would be praised for his skill instead of pressed in a scholastic mold we would have happier homes—less agonies of personality adjustments to alien fields and more harmony between parents and children.

We hear, "I want Mary to be a teacher—do you have a school for her?" Mary says, "I really want to be a beauty operator", the mother hurriedly says, "I want her to teach for a year or two, I think she'll like it." Is it fair to the prospective teacher or her pupils? The same illustration could be given in any field of work.

If we could only have those who really want to teach, even if half the schools are closed, we would have better teaching and learning situations, higher salaries, more satisfied parents, more happy pupils and more enthusiastic teachers.

People study law, medicine or the ministry because they feel adapted to the work chosen, and are proud to make it their life work. This should also be true of the important profession of teaching. When we place our children, our most precious gifts to the world of the future, in the hands of teachers for twelve years of training, we know the influence of those teachers will be a lasting one. There is no excuse for a nation failing to make teaching requirements high and wages adequate. There is no lasting future for a nation which says, "We have plenty of teachers, why pay more than we have to?" Rather the question should be "How much should be paid to attract the best people available in all communities to the work of teaching?" We should plan a campaign to eliminate the unfit and disinterested teachers and to honor the real teachers in the profession so that there will be a national wave of enlistment of people who will be proud to enter the life work of teaching. We have many unselfish and wonderful teachers in our schools today. They are there in spite of low salaries, uncertain positions and lack of provision for their future because they love the work of teaching. They deserve praise and honor and appreciation. The public should see that they get it. It seems the teachers we remember as outstanding are not uniform in preparation, their excellence is not based on college work. It is rather a realization of the importance of the work, a desire to serve humanity and a love of children.

A community should value such a teacher, who can-

not be overpaid, just as the importance of the work cannot be overestimated.

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For a Hundred Midnights

OVE R. NIELSEN, Perth Amboy, N. J.

Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp from *The Creation* by James Weldon Johnson

I WIPED irritating perspiration from my face and hands. My handkerchief was soiled and wet from the repeated action. I sat in the sweltering heat of my upstairs room and looked out through the screened window.

All leaves in the pecan grove were motionless. They would begin to sway only upon the belated arrival of the morning breeze from Metagorda Bay. That breeze would drive gnats to the shelter of grass leaves. That breeze would decrease the temperature. It would make my room a fit place in which to work.

Keenly aware of an increasing desire for a cooling beverage, I placed my pen in its holder, looked for a moment at my sweat-soaked, ink-blotted pages, and then lazily left my room and descended the stairs, enroute to the refrigerator in the kitchen.

Upon entering the kitchen of the house in which I was a guest, I observed a Mexican girl working at the ironing board. She was short in stature and typically wore her hair long, so that it draped down over her shoulders. I gave her a glance of greeting, to which she did not respond, before I got my drink from the refrigerator. The methodical movement of her body, as she wielded the electric iron, suggested her complete submission to the circumstances which had placed her there.

I returned to my room, which now had a cooler air through the advent of the Metagorda breeze, and continued my work, oblivious to the compassionate thoughts that had welled forth momentarily, while I beheld the Mexican girl in the kitchen.

When my hosts invited me downstairs for lunch, and we were seated, I glanced to the kitchen and observed the girl, still in the same position at the ironing board, and so she was in the evening when I came down to dinner.

Following the conclusion of the evening meal, when with my host and hostess I had retired to the front room, and I had smoked. I asked my hostess whether I might interview the Mexican girl. She smiled briefly—teasingly, then consented graciously, even when I asked whether I might invite the girl into the front room. She said, though, that she was skeptical as to whether Emelia would accept my invitation, should I invite her to join us. She knew her place. She knew it was not in the front room.

She told me further that Emelia was but one of the Mexican girls who, with their folks, lived in the shacks out beyond the pecan grove. She was but one of many who were employed on the large cotton farm, descendants of earlier Mexicans who had entered Texas shortly after the Mexican war, and after these many generations had nothing to call their own but their families.

I excused myself momentarily from the front room, walked through the spacious living room and into the kitchen. I found the kitchen dark. Upon making light, I saw Emelia sitting on a stool in the corner of the room.

She was sitting with her head resting in her hands. She had not looked up as I had switched on the light.

I greeted her with a: "Good Evening, Emelia!" She did not return my greeting but continued to sit as though she was unaware of my presence. I greeted her again, and this time with a slight air of command in my voice. This time her dark eyes looked up for a brief interval, and then she was again alone in her corner.

I pulled up a chair and sat on it so that I faced Emelia and so that my arms rested on the chair back. I continued in that position for a few moments before I asked her whether she liked to sing. She hesitated until I repeated the question, and then she nodded assent. I asked her whether she liked the Mexican songs or the American best. She spoke now for the first time since I had entered the kitchen, and said that she liked the Mexican best. I asked her why she preferred the Mexican, and she replied in broken English: "Because they say so much more what I feel." She told me then that she sang for their gatherings, when the Mexicans of the region would gather for their fiestas occasionally. I asked her to sing one for me.

An ominous darkness had prevailed since dinner time. Suddenly it began to rain without. It was a hard rain. Occasionally thunder rolled and lightning flashed. Inside it had become stifling hot.

My hostess, curious concerning my progress in my attempt to bring Emelia into the front room, now came into the kitchen. She was a kindly woman of not yet middle age. She gave Emelia an assuring smile as she entered, and then asked her to join us in the other room.

Emelia looked startled. Her eyes revealed her thoughts for possible escape. Then, after a moment looked pleadingly at my hostess. She was assured by the lady that there was none in the front room at the moment but my host, and that she would be alone there with only the three of us.

After a quarter hour of encouragement, she finally arose from her stool, and slowly and with hesitant steps, followed us into the front room. I indicated a large easy chair and suggested that she might sit in it. There was a straight back chair between her and the easy chair, and she sat down on it, sitting on the extreme edge of the chair, her back rigid. Her hands moved restlessly, nervously. Her one foot rested cross wise on the other. Her little lips quivered.

Again I asked her to sing. She looked again pleadingly. This time to my host. But he, too, suggested that she should sing for us.

When she did begin to sing for us, her voice was hardly audible during the first several phrases. But it grew louder and more distinct as she sang about the great El Campo. When she had completed her first song we voiced our appreciation, and it took little encouragement for her, then, to sing several others.

They were all songs about her beloved people, yet songs of vanished greatness. In her clarion voice there was an expressed longing for something unexpressed in words. Perhaps the longing was unexpressable in words. Yet through her songs, we seemed to become one with her, one with her in that deep longing so adequately expressed in the lore of her people. She was no longer the girl at the ironing board. She was the voice of millions of her kind, not alone in Texas, or in Mexico, but throughout the world.

Suddenly it seemed time to ask her about herself. The

rain had stopped. It was cooler within. I asked her about her parents. Her brother, Jose, and herself.

She told us that her parents had for many years worked in the fish cannery at Palacios. She told us that they had worked hard and had lived very frugally so that they might save their meager wages. Her Father had wanted to buy land. Not much land. Just a little land to call their own. To call home. Land from which they might live. Land upon which they could work and eventually earn sufficient money so that Emelia could go to school and become a nurse, and so that her brother, Jose, might become a doctor. The father had planned all this. He had planned that Emelia and Jose should then return to help their people in southern Texas. People who were cursed with venereal disease and tuberculosis.

The money had finally been saved. The land had been purchased from an American land agent. A swindler. For when the land had been purchased and paid for, it was found that nothing would grow there. All of their money had gone for the purchase of the land. The father had lost heart. He did not want to go back again to the fish canneries to be ridiculed by his fellows. He wanted never to see Palacios again. He became one with the thousands who worked on the cotton acres. He would work there until he died. His children would work there after him. So now, and never any different. His children would always live in the shacks. They would continue to be superstitious.

I asked Emelia how far she had advanced in school. She told me she had attended a part of each year for four years. I asked her whether she had ever married. She said happy together for six months, when his parents had the marriage annulled, because she was a Mex. She still loved him but had not seen him since the annulment. She was now seventeen.

I queried whether she liked to read. She said she did. She told me that they bought one magazine each week. It was the Saturday Evening Post. That was all her father could afford to buy. I wondered why they had bought that particular journal, and she said: "Because I read about Foreign Legion—about other countries." Under the circumstances I certainly thought it commendable that she should have that much interest for the world beyond. A world she would never see. A dream world. Our world.

The next question I placed to her was cruel. I asked her why she did not remarry. She looked at me sadly, reproachfully, and asked: "Do you not believe in the Church?" She said she could never remarry. She could only live in the shacks. She could never have children. She could only grow old in the cotton fields. I asked, then, whether the boy she had once married, could remarry. "Yes," she said, "he does not believe in the Church."

I sensed that I would not be able to question her much longer. The ordeal was too much for her. It was too trying for her to talk about that which she could never know.

Suddenly she looked at me. Her eyes were tear filled. Her face expressed deep emotion. She almost cried: "Always I want to get over the walls. The walls are too big. I can not get over them. I want to get over them. I want to help my people. They need me. They need Jose. They need Jose for doctor. But it can never be. Now Jose, too, has tuberculosis." She broke down and sobbed. We helped her into the kitchen. She put on her wraps and was soon on her way to the shacks. American shacks. American shacks for Mexican cotton workers.