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Trail's End

HOLGER J. KOCH

The period of the Great American Exile is drawing to a close, and the time has come for our immigrant groups to discover themselves as living parts of the greater community: the people. Not because it is the "patriotic" thing to do, but because without it they have no future. It is a matter of life and death. The thought of establishing in this country little isolated outposts where the culture, religion and folk life of the home-land—in our case the Danish—were preserved, for the good of both the group and the people, was alluring and idealistic, but just not in harmony with the laws of growth. None the less it was important that the Danish heritage should be preserved strong and vital during the uncertain years of transplantation. Where the spiritual and cultural values were quickly discarded or forgotten it usually meant that a facile transition was made from Danish shallowness to American superficiality. The error—and a very pardonable one—was not in the fidelity to the Danish heritage, but in the belief that that heritage was to sustain the life of the group forever after.

Doubtless it would be possible to continue the spiritual life of the home-land under the new stars, but only if the group had the vigor and moral courage to continue its evolution as an independent organism. This, for better or for worse, we did not have. There is no doubt in my mind, that the so-called "Nebraska Movement" in the Twenties was the final offer of spiritual regeneration made to the only group within the Danish dispersion that had at least the possibility for continuing the further cultivation and growth of Danish church and folk-life in this country. As many will remember, the offer was flatly rejected by the "responsible" leadership of the church. Any attempt to perpetuate the forms of this already arrested growth can end in nothing but stagnation. If continued renewal and evolution of that peculiarly Danish spiritual heritage were the only alternative to that hardening of the arteries now in evidence, then the future has indeed little to offer. Happily another door is open and inviting the hesitant group to a vital, regenerating experience. It is the passage into full participation of the life of the American people. It is not a question of languages but of capacities. Whether trivial thoughts and uninspiring platitudes are given greater dissemination by the use of the English language is of no importance. Nor is it a question of how we may best transmit our Danish heritage to the American people—for we have little more to give. Our songs and hymns which we prize so highly have lost too much of their spiritual power and clarity in translation, and we have not had the vigor to keep the folk-school alive even among ourselves. Such contribution as we have been able to make to American life HAS BEEN MADE LONG AGO. Now we need America far more than America needs us. If we still have the capacity for growth, the difference between languishing on a steadily decreasing stream of vitalizing influences from the mother-country or entering into a vital, invigorating participation of the historic life of the new mother-land, will mean nothing short of a regeneration. Let me repeat, it is not a question of language nor the adoption of American methods and ideologies, but a question of complete and whole-hearted naturalization. It means the joyful acceptance of a new devotion, of being restored by the warmth of a new fire-side, of being enriched by the discovery of a whole new world of spiritual and human values reserved for those who love this America. Incidentally this experience is also awaiting millions of native-born,—even unto Daugh ters of the American Revolution! Make no mistake about it, this regeneration will not be given in return for any half-hearted, reluctant acceptance of the "inevitable." The change from one language to another may be inevitable, but is not inevitable to miss the hidden glory of the new attachment by a million miles! Our old stock argument for a deep attachment to the mother-country: must a man hate his mother because he takes a wife? comes back to us; for must a man be cool to his wife because he has the best mother in the world?

It is obvious to everyone who is willing to believe his own eyes by now that the linguistic transition is going to be completed sooner or later; because neither the flag-waving nationalistic, the sweetly sentimental nor the tra-
Americanization

AAGE MØLLER

I

This time I want to show some pictures in my album. Here is the first: One day, when I was about ten years old, I came walking toward the church. There was a funeral. I had been delayed and came late. Outside the church walked two children. They attracted my attention for they were strangers, half-breed Indians. I had seen so many of their kind, but it was odd that they were at the church. They did not belong. This was a Danish church and, according to what I had heard, it was there to secure and continue Danish culture. The two children looked beseechingly at me. It was evident that they wanted me to speak to them. Under different circumstances I would have done it for curiosity’s sake, but not here. Not that I despised them, no, but they were not “of ours.” In the evening I told about the incident and added that the children looked a bit forlorn. Then my father said, “You should have talked to them and taken them along into the church.” That stunned me for here was something new. The Indians had so often come to my home. I had met them in the woods and listened to their pow pow music. Many stories had been told about them. They were already an integral part of my being. The little remark was a key which gave me access to a continuous study of the Indians. We both belonged to the woods and lakes of Wisconsin.

Here is another picture: At the age of twenty I taught vacation school ten miles from my home. On my first trip to the school I stopped overnight in a Norwegian home. The man was so bearded that facial skin could hardly be seen. In the evening I fell off a log into the lake. My clothes had to be dried at the stove during the night. On the first day Benny was there. His mother came over imprinting on me the duty of using a strict catechism and the rod. I told her that I should prefer to tell stories and sing songs. She withdrew her children, but I had Benny for two days. In the evening he and I went fishing. He spoke “jidsk” fluently but he was black and curly, a true Negro boy. Why is it that Benny has held so prominent a place in my memory? Most likely, because he introduced
me to and aroused my interest in what is a basic American problem.

We turn a leaf to a picture of more excitement. It shows the first farmers institute held in the community. Much discussion had preceded it. Farm problems had become more and more pressing. Some had started to read Hoard's Dairyman and similar publications. Now finally the institute was prepared by J. P., M. C., etc. It was to be held in the common school. Three teachers who all had experimented were to instruct, particularly about the silo. Would people understand these men? That was the question. To some it was a foregone conclusion that they wouldn't so they stayed home. The rest met in the school room with all ears open. Our free school released her time so that we children could get our share. To the happy surprise these men had a way with them which broke down all suspicions. They were not at all stuck up; they could tell a lot of funny stories and speak in such plain language that everyone could follow them. The silo was definitely put on the community map. Yes, it was a success and now we knew that we belonged to the farmers of Wisconsin. It was no less exciting and thrilling when we soon after planned and built the first silo. We were really making history.

Again another picture. It was customary in my native community that the young people went on an excursion to a lake or river on the second day of Pentecost. Big boys were permitted to go along. We drove in lumber wagons, three and a half miles per hour, singing all the time. We generally had a hot argument as to whether we should eat before boat riding or after. The most memorable tour we made was when we went to the lake, where Frederic now is. Teams were left at Peter Sorensens and we walked through the woods to the lake. There were some love scenes on the way, but that was not interesting, nor the romance of the woods. Our minds were set only on one thing, the railroad construction work. The possibility of getting a railroad through the community had been in the minds from the start and now it was happening. We saw how the grades were made, how trees were removed, how swamps were filled, how ties were laid down. We saw how the workers were clothed and heard their language. It was so absorbing that we were exhausted. We became part and parcel of the Soo Line, and the Soo led on to a study of the Milwaukee, the Northwestern, and Great Northern. We even heard about the Union Pacific.

Some of the elders placed the accent on the last syllable and that was so funny. I dreamt about traveling, and when I for the first time sat down on a reed seat I laughed uncontrollably. The tension broke. The awful, terrible, big city of Minneapolis was the goal. It confused me and depressed me. From looking upward so much the muscles of my neck were sore. I saw saloons and the inhabitants. Even the log cabin was shown to me. It was a wicked city and I was so happy to be back home in Paradise, but Minneapolis became what it is now, a neighbor community.

Shall we go on with the pictures. Hans Christian went to Vancouver Island, and we all went with him, for we were inseparable from him. In spirit we traveled, oh, so far, by rail and boat. We cut timber on the island, built log houses and killed bears. We caught salmon in the river. While we shoveled snow in Wisconsin we enjoyed rain on Vancouver. When our friend returned in body and told us tall tales we knew all about the west, and it has been a part of us since then.

Goodbye Hans Christian. No more devout man was there in the church and he could say humorous things. He loved "Gronkaal" so well that he predicted "Gronkaal-suppe" in heaven. Alas, what happened? All of a sudden he became fanatically a socialist. Oh sure, we knew socialism. It had been discussed numberless times, but the deliberations had been somewhat academic. Appeal to Reason was not altogether a stranger. Jesper and Anna read it with gusto; but they were not staunch church people. It was astounding that Hans Christian should take the bug. He slackened off in his church going and even criticized the Church severely.

What was socialism? Why was it in conflict with the Church? Where was Appeal to Reason published? He raised those questions and later in life I voted for Gene Debs and Norman Thomas. I followed the Sacco Vanzetti case with clenched fists and swallowed Sinclair's "Boston" when published.

Fortunately another seed was dropped in the community, the Henry George seed. Not until I visited Denmark did I realize that it had grown in me. I have become more and more in tune with the Henry George school and consider it to be the truest and most American antidote of communism.

I have in my album a number of pictures showing the peddlers. They played a big role in the community. The dogs didn't like them but the children did. They flocked around the swarthy man when he opened his telescope cases showing his wares. We knew he was trying to get the best of us, but had the money been available, we would have bought the trinkets, neckties and salves. The man himself, however, was the chief object for our keen observations. One Jewish peddler became a member of our household. It was his stopping place. We waited for him and we were never tired of looking at him when he lifted the glass of water up to the light to see if it was clear. We had heard of the Jews who refused to eat pork; but here we saw with our own eyes a man who would not eat pancakes if baked in grease. How could he resist? We kept on studying his tattooed hands until we finally asked him why his hands were painted. He held out his hands in Jewish fashion, saying, "Just for the looking nice." Gradually the Jewish problem became one of the standing topics in the home and community. Many a time have I since been weak but so far the army of Jew-baiters has not been able to embitter my mind against the Israelites.

I have a picture showing a group of boys out in the cow barn. That was the place where they gathered for mirth. They got a kick out of talking about their elders, the way they pronounce American words and the way they behaved, also the comparison they drew between Denmark and United States. Fish were fatter there, flowers had more fragrance, beech trees were more beautiful than maple trees. We knew it was bunk. They couldn't even name the one kind of apple from the other, and they couldn't spy a gentian at noon whereas we could find it in moonlight. They cared so little for swimming and skating. The boys knew that nothing could be better than our brooks and lakes, our winters and summers. They were
Art and the People

HOLGER J. KOCH

I

Human society, in its present stage of evolution, is rapidly moving away from the stratiform arrangement of groups in so-called upper and lower classes. The fanciful fiction that the capacity for culture, refinement and artistic appreciation falls as a sort of divinely ordained concomitant of some mystic “quality of birth” is rapidly evaporating before the rays of a new day’s sun. In the light of that day the supposition that the economic division into rich and poor and the social division into titled aristocracy and “commoners” implies a variance in QUALITY is found to have no foundation in fact. The genuine and the shoddy in human nature keep cropping out in high places and low without regard for social elevation. The titled elite can certainly pride itself—if it finds pride so indispensable—on its culture, refinement, social graces, nobility of character etc., but the assumption that it holds this distinction in contrast to the poor benighted “lower classes” is pure imagination. Anyway, no vulgarity on earth can compare with the colossal snobbery with which the blue-blooded repudiate their essential human kinship with the “proletariat.” The real “wave of the future” will be the inauguration of a social order in which every man is accorded equal opportunity to enjoy our common economic and cultural wealth, and in which every man is considered worthy of honor until he proves himself otherwise. We shall then come to understand that the one superlative treasure shared by rich and poor is our COMMON HUMANITY, and that the only way to experience and express it is by standing shoulder to shoulder and not on top of one another.

Through many centuries, now, the moneyed and titled estates have considered it both their special privilege and their solemn obligation to patronize the Fine Arts. First because they alone had the cultural development to understand and appreciate the art; secondly because they alone had the means to support the artist and thereby make possible the unhampered exercise of his creative talent. Both assumptions were wide of the mark. The very fact that such a large proportion of the artists was in need of their “generous” support should have indicated that the unprivileged classes were at least eminently capable of PRODUCING artists, and that it would be reasonable to assume that a class of people able to produce musicians, painters, sculptors, poets and actors with or without titled patronage also possesses the temperament and emotional capacity for understanding its own creations. And as for the “support” were not the noble rich themselves largely responsible for the poverty they so hypocritically deplored? A decent economic system would have obviated the “rich man’s burden” and freed the artist from the status of court retainer. Whatever one’s opinion of Soviet Russia’s cure for the ills of maldistribution, no one can dispute the fact that the Russian common man has proved himself equally able to write his own drama and poetry, compose his own music and choreography, paint his own pictures and fill his concert halls, theaters and exhibits without condescension.

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not cynical, but they had to do some laughing. They knew they were not proficient in the use of the new language but they had the pronunciation and they were at home with it.

There are many other pictures in my album showing how the intuitions and imaginations were effected by the new land and how many ties bound them. How did all that influence the innate quality and form of the Danish community? We shall talk about that some other time.

* * * * *

Universal Peace

(Melody—America)

Hall Thee, United States,
Favored by all the Fates,
Land of the free.
Land where all nations meet,
ALL NATIONS you shall greet
To make it understood—
WE'RE FOR BROTHERHOOD.
Sing it o'er mount and hill,
Sing it abroad until
All nations feel:
THAT U. S. takes the lead,
Earnestly NOW to plead,
Plead for what's RIGHT and GOOD—
Plead for BROTHERHOOD.
Peace shall our motto be.
Oh, that we all could see
This as our aim:
Peace to our fellowman,
Unto each race and clan.
May it be understood—
WE'RE FOR BROTHERHOOD.

Let Europe, Asia—all
Feel the old system fall—
War blotted out.
Put tanks and bombs away
No more thus go astray.
From WAR bring all release—
UNIVERSAL PEACE.

Sigurd Pedersen, Ruthton, Minn.
November 8, 1944

* * * * *

Dear friend:—Just read your article, “Out of the Mist,” and it reveals a fine ideal for future freedom for all. It brot to mind a shot in one of my poems on Universal Peace, especially the third verse.

I think that universal peace and universal liberty are cousins and go hand in hand to build up the world.

Yours truly, Sigurd Pedersen.

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The VANGUARD AMERICAN will be sent free upon request to any address in the United States and Canada.