

Canadian-American Commonsense

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NOTE: As the *Kiwanis Magazine*, in reproducing this address says—"In view of the observance of United States-Canadian week throughout *Kiwanis* next month, this treatment of the above subject is indeed timely. It is a pity that every citizen of both countries cannot read this. Dean Coleman is an educator whose life has been more or less equally divided on both sides of the imaginary line, and he is, therefore, peculiarly able to write clearly, fairly and intensively." We give this article precedence over another in our hands by Dean Coleman. (Ed. B.C.M.)

The eminent English historian, John Richard Green, writing for his countrymen, has said, "Modern England—the England in which we live—began at the Battle of Naseby." The Battle of Naseby, you will recall, was the deciding battle in the Civil War carried on for many years between Charles I and the Long Parliament. The question at issue was the doctrine of the right of the people to rule themselves through their elected representatives as against the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. The great leader of the forces of the English Parliament was Oliver Cromwell, and it is interesting to note that, a little over twenty years before, he had seriously considered the advisability of casting in his lot with a small body of adventurers who left Plymouth Harbor in a small vessel to plant a colony in the New World. This vessel was the *Mayflower* and its human cargo, the Pilgrim Fathers. They met the issue of religious intolerance and political oppression by emigrating to America and becoming, under the hand of Providence, the first of the many communities which in later years became the great self-governing community of the United States. Their brethren who remained behind met the issue in another way and with results which, we believe, were no less fruitful for the good of mankind than was the planting of the New England Colonies.

We see, then, that early in the seventeenth century the stream of British freedom which in the noble lines of Wordsworth's sonnet "has flowed on from dark antiquity with pomp of waters unwithstood," divided itself into two

main currents: one which has taken its majestic course through the three centuries of American history, and the other which has flowed on with ever increasing volume through the history, or rather, the histories, of the other English-speaking peoples.

While these two rivers, like those of which our geographies tell us, have found each its own channel, there has occurred with them a phenomenon unlike any which physical nature shows, namely, the frequent replenishing of the waters of the one from the waters of the other.

Historical Survey

Democratic movements in Britain have influenced in many ways the trend of political thought and action in the United States, and it is scarcely necessary to call attention to the obvious fact that the wider political freedom which existed in the United States from its beginning as a nation, was a direct challenge to certain narrower and less democratic conceptions which, until recently at least, have exercised a potent influence in the Mother-land.

Let us return now to our historical survey and let me, for brevity's sake, connect what I have to say in this particular with three dates: 1776, the date of the Declaration of Independence and of the beginning of the War of the American Revolution; 1812, the date of the outbreak of the last—not the *latest* but the *last*—war between the United States and Britain, and 1917, the date of America's entry into the World War. With the passing of Oliver Cromwell there ensued the dark days of the Stuart Restoration during which the sun of liberty seemed to have gone permanently into eclipse. But it was only seeming, for in 1688 the spirit of British freedom again asserted itself and the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings went the way of all exploded heresies and cruel superstitions. Unfortunately the British Parliament, which then assumed control of the national destinies, was only in a very imperfect way the voice of the English people and in the hands of stubborn and stupid ministry, supported by a stubborn and stupid king, it became an agency of oppression to Britons abroad as well as to Britons at home. The sequel in America is well known, but the sequel in Britain is not so well-known—to Americans, at least—for there are still Americans, I fear, who think of the England of George V: in terms of the England of George III., and who have a suspicion that the spirit of the latter still controls British foreign and domestic policy. The full reaction of the American Revolution upon British politics was postponed by the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars, for in times of grave national peril political reform—though long overdue—must wait. Following the disappearance of the Napoleonic menace, the tide of democracy rose again in Britain and in a series of Reform Bills, beginning in 1833 and terminating in 1918, overwhelmed one by one the entrenchments of political privilege. In the great School of Democracy your Englishman does not shine as brilliantly perhaps as some of the other pupils, but he has this virtue at least, he sticks at his lessons until he has learned them—even if it takes a thousand years.

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