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The Two Political Platforms

HAS anybody read the platforms of the two parties except campaign speakers, political editors, and the men who wrote them? Here and there a hand goes up, but the overwhelming mass of the voters sit stolid, their expression strongly suggesting "What do you take us for? We're not so hard up for ways to waste time."

Yet the national platform of a great political party ought to be a document that every "intelligent" grown person in the country would eagerly read. It ought to embody in good, simple English, and in words too well chosen to be numerous, the specific reasons why the party should keep or get the power to direct the National Administration—the things it could do if empowered, the things it would do.

Are these glittering generalities, these discursive and platitudinous vaguenesses put forth because we really have no great issues or because we have no great public men with courage and convictions and purposes?

When We Forget

THE Iroquois disaster is not a year old, and already the City Councils have begun to relax the severity of the enforcement of rules adopted for the regulation of theatres. At first the public safety was the only consideration. It made no difference whether a theatre could make money or not; it must give an absolute assurance that every person who entered its walls would come out alive.

But as the spell of the calamity has faded the old pulls resume their power. It is easy for councilmen to see now that it is not really necessary to have so many sprinklers, that it makes no great difference whether aisles lead directly to exits or not, that there has been an unnecessary amount of space between seats, and that gallery floors can just as well be pitched a little steeper.

If Congress had been in session at the time of the Slocum catastrophe there would undoubtedly have been a radical revision of the laws governing the construction, equipment and inspection of steamboats. But when the session opens it will have been six months since that funeral pyre blazed on the shore of North Brother Island, and the public will be thinking about the result of the election. The steamboat owners will not forget, though, and they will probably be able to convince Congress that it will not be wise to run amuck among time-honored institutions.

The effective range of the public memory is about three months, when the heart of the people is deeply stirred. At other times it is less. It is this that makes all reforms opposed by powerful special interests so nearly hopeless. If the proper legislative body happens to be in session at the very moment when the popular feelings are in eruption some appropriate law or ordinance may be passed; but in a few months the molten lava of the people's indignation will be cool enough to walk on, and then the measures extorted in a moment of irresistible emotion can be repealed or ignored.

Politicians and corporations systematically count on this shortness of the public memory. They are not greatly worried by outbreaks of frenzied indignation. They know that if a director of a homicidal company had to flee to Europe in disguise to escape the execrations of an outraged community he would be met at the dock three months later by admiring reporters asking him how he thought he should like the country.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" is a good saying, but at the same time we should be a better governed and a better served people if we had a little of the vindictive tenacity of the Indian.

Good Weapons for the Young Idea

IN HUNDREDS of cities, towns and townships the school-boards are now busy changing the textbooks for the public schools. Often this is an excellent idea; probably as a rule the new books are better than the ones they replace. But too often the change is for the worse, is due to influences that should not obtain; and still more often the members of the board know no more about the merits and demerits of the new books than they did about the old ones.

It is amazing how little interest parents take in this matter of schoolbooks, how little knowledge they have of the various kinds of books published for the same purposes, some well done, others bad, most of them as stupid and unattractive as their wonderfully interesting subjects permit.

The school-boards are busy. The parents ought to be busy also. They would be astonished to find how interesting and valuable their industry was.

The Japanese Home Army

THE military experts who said at the beginning of the war that Japan was bound to be overwhelmed by Russia based their opinion principally upon the fact that Russia's army was much larger than Japan's. Russia had a million men on a peace footing; Japan 158,000. On a war footing Russia counted on over three and a half millions; Japan on 632,000.

It was a reasonable calculation—almost as reasonable as it would be to say that Turkey could thrash the United States, because Turkey has 700,000 men under arms and the United States only 60,000.

The authorities who reasoned in this way seem to have overlooked the element of time, or, rather, they counted it on one side and not on the other. They admitted that the Russian forces in Manchuria might be overmatched at the start, but they said that reinforcements would be trickling in every day over the Siberian Railroad, so that in the course of six months or a year the Czar's forces would overrun the Far East. But they forgot to consider what the Japanese would be doing in the mean time. They forgot that a people alert, energetic, patriotic and warlike can create an army in a year.

The war has now been going on for nearly seven months. There is no reason why every man sent from Japan to Korea or Manchuria should not have been replaced in the ranks at home by another man taken from the plow and transformed by diligent training into a soldier. There is every reason to suppose that this has been done, and that, therefore, the Japanese home army is at least as strong as it was before the first regiment sailed for the mainland. Probably it is stronger. There is no lack of the raw material of armies. Japan has 8,000,000 more people than France, and the organized army of France, on a war footing, is almost as large as Russia's. It is simply a question of willingness to assume burdens, and certainly Japan has shown no lack of that. If she chose, she could organize a more numerous army than Russia could pour into Manchuria if the Trans-Siberian Railway were double-tracked and working night and day for the next two years. What reason is there to suppose that she will not do it, if necessary?

If the Japanese were willing to make such an effort in proportion to their population as Americans, North and South, made during the Civil War, they could put not less than 7,000,000 men into the field.

Of course, they could not be expected to equal our record in pensioning them afterward.

The Future of the City Dwellers

IF WE credit one-half the statistics and opinions of the experts, things are bad for city people and are getting worse. Figures tell us that the urban populations, without the rural influx, are not only not self-maintaining but are not producing the kinds of men and women fitted for leadership. Here is an instance from a reliable source told by a New York physician. He had as his guests eight men, each a potent factor in the affairs and business of the city. Not one was a native New Yorker. All were born on farms, rural hamlets or in villages. It is a kind of modern instance which we read from day to day in our newspapers, and the fact is proclaimed from forum and pulpit that the life of our greatest city is being kept strong and strenuous by the fresh blood of the country.

In these new conditions the native New Yorker becomes almost a lost equation.

But let the New Yorker take heart. There is always consolation in the knowledge that another fellow is in worse luck. Twenty years ago Doctor Cantlie, speaking of the rapidity with which any class of perpetual town-dwellers becomes extinct, declared that "in the whole course of his experience he had never discovered a family completely London in birth and living that had survived into the third generation." Twenty years after Doctor Cantlie has repeated his statement, before the Royal Commission, assembled to inquire into the physical deterioration of Scottish children. For twenty years nobody questioned Doctor Cantlie's declaration. Recently Mr. Everard Digby has solemnly gone into the figures, has combined tables and made deductions—but his results astonishingly support Doctor Cantlie. The remedy? This is rather neat: "Certain of Doctor Cantlie's remarks would seem to indicate that an annual fortnight or more at the seaside or in country places would largely stem the degeneration of the Londoner. If this be proved everything becomes much simplified.

The solution of the whole question will remain in the hands of some boldly imaginative Lord Avebury of the future, who will string fourteen Bank Holidays together as a yearly present to the people."

The Praise that Lies in Criticism

EVERY once in a while some publicist—to use a word big enough to include everybody who ever takes observation of the state of the public moral health—tries to score by offsetting against the thronging facts of corruption the even more numerous facts of substantial and even splendid achievement. This is laudable and valuable; and it is a pity that human nature is so constituted that it absorbs such facts far less greedily than the other kind. But, when all is said for this so-called optimism, it is more important that we see the errors and evils. The greatest force for progress, for individual or general progress, is intelligent criticism—the pointing out of what can and what should be done.

And that sort of criticism is, after all, the strongest and subtlest flattery. It implies that the person or the people to whom it is directed have done so well that there is hope of their doing better.

What we all need, individually and collectively, is helpful criticism. And any kind of criticism is better than the wholesale praise that lures to the bottomless bogs of self-complacency.

Why the Axe Paused

THE statistics say—and who would venture to dispute statistics?—that there are many hundreds of thousands fewer persons regularly employed now than were employed two years ago. And no doubt the waning of the boom has brought about conditions of less work to do. Nevertheless, these men who have been laid off or put on part time might use their leisure for a little thinking.

Why were they selected from the body of workers?

What was the matter with *them* that the axe passed over the most of their fellows to pause upon them?

The list wasn't made up by lot. It wasn't altogether, surely, an expression of the personal likes and grudges of the boss.

What was it, then?

The Sanctification of the Tip

PROGRESS is largely the multiplying of devices for providing man with what he wants without obliging him to ask for it. It is the bringing of comfort with a saving of mental and physical effort.

All things considered, progress has done very well. It has done ill mainly in its overdoing. For progress is like ambition—when it overleaps itself it falls on the other side in much unhappiness. Perhaps in no respect has it vaunted its excesses with more deplorable consequences for the human race than in its overreaching eagerness to add items to the bill-of-fare.

In great cities nowadays it is easy to get anything you want except just what you really do want. The overloaded menu is the cause. Man attacks it with awe and throws it down in desperation. Every day it becomes more hateful to him. From every meal he arises with a conviction that he should be happy if he could return to another age when there were not so many things to eat.

It is really a delight in the mystifications of the menu to find a waiter who will take the responsibility of the selection and place upon the table a simple repast that did not have to be laboriously selected from the card. There is, indeed, a future ready to hand for the humble waiter who will study his patrons as doctors study their patients and prescribe for them.

For this man there must be a reward, and if he will only keep up his good work he may succeed in robbing the tipping evil of all its shame and making the silver left upon the plate a shining proof of man's proper appreciation.