Ideas that Did Not Migrate from England to America

At a time when rival ideologies are spreading from country to country and from continent to continent, it is a challenge to those of us accustomed to trace the migration of ideas from England across the Atlantic to the new British world to undertake the contrariwise task of finding ideas which did not take ship and enter America, or, which arrived but did not root themselves, or, which arrived much later and then naturalized themselves.

This challenge is particularly intriguing to students of British and American social reforms who have one leg on each side of the Atlantic, and who study co-operative efforts including methods and techniques of agitation. To such students, the world of high endeavor appears singularly united. It may well be, however, that subtly hidden differences would not be noted by either the reformer or his opponent, who, in the heat of battle, would emphasize the similarities of a common situation or problem rather than stress the intangible differences. A more scientific observer of Anglo-American civilization might well find these numerous intangibles, but such a detached observer is rare, with only an occasional Tocqueville or Bryce to analyze the American scene. While it is true that the skilled, detached observer may avoid bias and prejudice by conscious effort, yet, as Baron Meyendorff, Russian emigré at the University of London, has pointed out, the whole Anglo-Saxon world, as with all others, has many biases of which it is utterly unaware. The unconscious bias that he has most resented is that of the idea of progress. Moreover, there is, of course, no absolutely impartial observer in the field of human relationships as one might be impartial in the field of geology.

Space does not permit the discussion of many ideas that did not migrate, nor an analysis of thousands of intangibles which in their subtle ways make one civilization or culture different from another. In the field of language, for example, these differences have been recognized
by the determination to produce a dictionary of American English, which will run to several volumes, in itself a striking body of evidence of how extensive are the variations of our common language. Again, during the days of the prohibition crusade, while property rights were respected on both sides of the Atlantic, the manufacture and sale of spirits was regarded as a business in England, but as a nuisance in America, and one which was abated here without compensation. Slavery, too, was swept away without compensation, although, as is well known, compensation was discussed for many years and many proposals were considered. Probably the idea of the English public school was not transplanted, nor did other forms of class education root themselves here. Even today there is no Oxford or Cambridge in the United States. Differences in newspapers, likewise, as well as in the varying manners and customs of our daily behavior, are obvious to the most casual observer. Moreover, although it cannot be discussed here, the question may be raised whether the extremes of American temperament do not make the regulation of many economic and social problems more difficult in America. Perhaps the idea of the middle of the road, or medium position, did not migrate across the Atlantic.

Again, words and phrases as in the case of coroner, sheriff, justice of the peace, did migrate, but the character of the institution in its real substance probably has been changed with us. In addition, there are innumerable officers, from the King’s proctor to many municipal and village functionaries, more or less unknown to us. In long discussions with an English rector in the Midlands some years ago, it became apparent to me that English local government was but dimly understood by many American students of the subject.

Granted that the new colonial society lacked the diversity required for the arts and graces in its early stages, yet the idea of art and especially of dramatic art was present no matter how crudely it was expressed. This situation has been described aptly by a Frenchman under the pseudonym of Max O’Rell in his *John Bull and Company*, in which work he relates that on the frontiers of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, the pioneer art gallery was made up of calendars from London business houses. In a puritanical, as well as boisterous, new society, the theater drew a barroom patronage and
neither skilled playwright nor actor found a congenial atmosphere at first. A distinguished actor, Charles Coburn, is my authority for putting the time lag in the migration of the high-class theater at almost 100 years; that is, not until 1840, was the American theater on a level comparable to that of Great Britain. The difficulties confronting the American theater were such that the lyceum, the athenaeum, and public readings were used as substitutes and employed by Dickens, and Thackeray, as well as Fanny Kemble. In this connection it may be remarked that Dickens, in 1842, expected to meet only the American literati, but instead he was greeted first by longshoremen. In 1843, James Spedding, writing in the Edinburgh Review, defended the Americans against Dickens' satire by saying they were all of one class, uninhibited and boisterous. This was in sharp contrast to England, where society moved in well channeled grooves, and where James Fenimore Cooper had been received by his own professional caste. These few random selections from the immense reservoir of differences will suggest the innumerable subjects that could be scrutinized more minutely.

In order to choose specific topics for presentation, a point of departure was suggested to the writer by an article in The Listener in which the six chief British offices were analyzed, viz., those of the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Governor of the Bank of England, the editor of The Times, the permanent Secretary of the Treasury, who is the head of the Civil Service, and the director of the British Broadcasting Company. During crises such as that created by the abdication or the invasion of Czecho-Slovakia, the united forces of diplomacy, of the Church, of finance, of a semi-official press, of a skilled civil service, and of a restrained radio, guide and focus national opinion in a way difficult for Americans to comprehend. With this suggestive list of names in mind, it is intended to confine this discussion to but two of these officials, namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose great authority in lay and ecclesiastical affairs is not matched by that of any single official in the United States; and to the permanent Secretary of the Treasury. In the writer's opinion, neither the basic conceptions nor the functions of these two officials are found in the United States in comparable or adequate reproduction.

Turning first to the broad significance of the established church,
Anglicanism between 1560 and 1640 represents a flowering of British civilization which historians have considered too largely from the standpoint of political history as a struggle for power between King and Parliament rather than as an epoch-making cultural conflict. It was not merely literature, but painting, music, and all the other arts which flourished in the Elizabethan Age. Indeed, leaders of these arts were well aware of a rising new spirit bitterly hostile to their achievements. The sale of the great art collection of Charles I, the finest in Europe, to the Pope and the King of Spain, the closing of the theaters, and the neglect of music, certainly marked the close of a cultural epoch. Orlando Gibbons in the *Silver Swan* bitterly lamented the coming to power of the Puritans, who all but extinguished the great Elizabethan music which had made England a "nest of singing birds."

Farewell all joys, O Death, come close mine eyes,
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.

During the last ten years of this rich Anglican period, 1630-1640, a great Puritan migration from the more cultured Home Counties of England to New England occurred, as is of course well known, and the descendants of these people form perhaps one-third of the population of the United States today. These Puritans, who might have carried the evening of the Elizabethan Age across the seas, were, however, the aggressive, the discontented, and the dissenting, and they represented a different cultural outlook from that of the preceding generations. This aggressive temper was reflected not only in the migration to the New World but it soon gathered sufficient strength to capture England and disestablish Anglicanism for a time. Of the opposition party, the so-called Cavaliers, who migrated in considerable numbers to the New World in their turn, it may be said that they, too, being exiles, suffered the upheavals and social adjustments of isolation on a new frontier. In short, whether the immigrant was a Puritan in New England or a Cavalier in Virginia, he only partially represented the Anglican culture of the Age of Elizabeth and James I, and both groups, in time, reflected the tone of the dissenting community rather than that of the Anglican traditions of England.

While Anglicanism recaptured its hold on England in 1660, it is an open question, worthy of more minute study, as to whether large
scale migration from the Home Counties again occurred. After that
time, much migration, as we know, was from Northern England, Scot-
land, Wales, and Ireland, where the dissenting sects were strong.
Huguenots from France and large numbers of Germans from the
Rhineland continued to swell the stream of those opposed to an estab-
lished church. And by the end of the Stuart period the new American
society had become markedly sectarian in temper, both through origin
and subsequent environmental influence. Even in Virginia, where the
Anglican church was most at home, the English village community
with its squire, its church and its parson, was not a feature of the land-
scape. In its wide rural plantation Society, the beautiful colonial
churches of Virginia stood, with few exceptions, not nestled in a vil-
lage mellowing under the great trees of a wood but at the crossroads,
without rectory or a house within sight.

Undoubtedly the Anglican element made notable contributions to
New-World culture, especially through the Society for the Propaga-
tion of the Gospel. Nevertheless, long before a separation was effected
between the American colonies and Great Britain, an established
Anglican church had become associated in the minds of the colonists
with a tyrannical King and an unreasonable Parliament and all three
were deemed intolerable hindrances to a full enjoyment of civil and
religious liberties.

The difficulties of assessing the effect of Puritanism upon the crea-
tive spirit in the arts and sciences will appear in this question. If Puri-
tanism under John Knox had conquered England in 1560, as it did
Scotland, rather than two generations later, would there have been an
Elizabethan Age? If the answer is no, why did Holland with its
Calvinism have a contemporary Renaissance? Or why did Scotland,
a century later, enjoy a striking intellectual age, that of the eighteenth
century, with such figures as Hume, Adam Smith, Robertson, and
great medical pioneers? However these puzzling questions may be
answered, the early failure of the aristocratic Anglican tradition, with
its castes in the arts and sciences as well as in social ranks, to migrate,
before 1714, has meant statistically that today out of a population of
130 millions, there are probably only two million Episcopalian com-
municants, or as Burke in his speech on conciliation remarked, the
Establishment, in America, is but a "small private sect." Students of
the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel records have found that the Anglican leaven has, nevertheless, been a big cultural factor, and that its intellectual contributions, whether at Columbia, Codrington in the West Indies, or at other centers, established by missionary efforts before the Revolution, have been significant. A rapid survey of the attempts to establish the Anglican Episcopate in the new settlements beyond the seas shows how the exigencies of British politics and the resistance of a non-Anglican religiously democratic society delayed it until 1784. Despite these conditions and the identification of the Anglican church in many places with the Tory in politics, an American Episcopate was set up and these cultured contacts were resumed.

The eighteenth century dissenting revivals in turn produced interesting effects peculiar to America. Whitefield, Wesley and their American assistants diverted Anglican strength; by sweeping the colonies they helped to make permanent the fact that Anglicanism would be a minority religion in the United States, and that these dissenting religious bodies would greatly influence American culture. During the Revolution, disestablishment was effected even in predominantly Anglican colonies like Virginia, and when Bishop Seabury was consecrated the first American Bishop in 1784, the religious tours of Whitefield had already helped forge a non-Anglican force of great strength. What might be denominated as a second blow to an embryonic Anglican and aristocratic tradition in the New World occurred at the time of the American Revolution when 100,000 loyalists suffered property confiscations and were driven out; and equalitarian ferment received a new impetus, a story well told by J. Franklin Jameson in *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*. These levelling powers of this revolutionary ferment were strong enough to alarm John Adams, Washington and all the conservatives, and are well enough understood to carry the classical title, *The Critical Period in American History*.

Before turning to the second division of this analysis, it may be well to emphasize that the failure of the Anglican aristocratic cultural tradition to migrate in its completeness with its tremendous intellectual and artistic front, and the violence of the Revolution with its disestablishment of the Episcopal Church, the abolition of entails,
and the removal of the loyalists, were powerful factors in hindering an early rooting of an aristocratic society. The equalitarian freedom of the frontier, the spread of democratic religious bodies, the change of the presidency from the Virginia and New England dynasties into the new Scots-Irish Presbyterian family of Andrew Jackson, the churning movement of the people as they emigrated from the older settlements, which tended to maintain class levels, to new lands in the west, might all be regarded as additional factors in the creation of a one-class society.

Turning now to the second arbitrarily chosen topic, the development of a skilled and highly centralized civil service, it may be noted that, while the Tory reaction at the time of the French Revolution was more violent in England than in the United States and continued there many years after the election of Jefferson had marked its decline here, it is, nevertheless, true that the demand for a modern state with its trained officials arose much earlier in England than in the United States, and that the philosophical radicals were winning their first great victories in England in the very years of the administration of Andrew Jackson (1829–1837) when the theory of the spoils system was crystallized.

It has been well said that at the end of the eighteenth century England was a nation of great men and meager institutions. Yet soon to come, were the matchless departments staffed with civil servants including the post office, which the world now envies, the department of public health and hundreds of other civil functionaries. Curiously enough the instigator of the new order, Jeremy Bentham, was hard at work before the fall of the Bastille, but the reaction, which came to an end with us about 1800, continued in England until the 1820’s and delayed his program for a generation. Then Benthamism, although doggedly resisted by the established order, began to put into effect its program. The object was to enlarge the powers of the state, in order to meet the exigencies of the new industrial and agricultural society. It is impossible in a brief article to trace the effective career of all the leading philosophical radicals. Rowland Hill built the modern post office. Edwin Chadwick reformed the poor law and created the public health movement. The intensity of the resistance he encountered is illustrated by the fact that after his work was largely done, the
public recognition of knighthood was delayed forty years. Of him it was said that coming from a farmhouse in Lancashire where the children were washed all over every day, he wished to wash the people of England all over every day by administrative order, and suggested to Napoleon III a similar treatment for the French.

The story of the creation of an efficient police system follows similar lines. Not all the sponsors of social and administrative reform were Benthamites, but Benthamism stressed the idea of a trained personnel which was generally accepted as an integral part of the organization of government bureaus. In the field of many social reforms, evangelicalism, or pietism, accomplished much. It is here merely necessary to cite the interesting careers of Wilberforce and of the seventh Lord Shaftesbury, as two examples of the crusading power of religious fervor. And besides, leisured county families, secure, and free to advocate reform, were able to bring pressure to bear in influential quarters for the benefit of the lower orders.

Obviously, while similar reforms crossed the Atlantic and reformers here showed unity and co-operation, many of the British ideas came too early for adoption, or fell victim to the spoils system or to other forms of opposition in America. It is perhaps interesting to note that Cecil Rhodes apparently wished that the young men who benefitted by the scholarships he established would become civil servants following in this the Oxford and Cambridge practice. He seemed unaware of the fact that American methods of training government servants in city and county political machines were so thoroughly entrenched that even today the idea of filling administrative posts, whether in the service of the state or the nation, with political appointees is regarded with a cynical indifference as being the inevitable concomitant of the two-party system. A British subject lately spoke to the president of an American university of the duty of calling on the newly elected mayor in his large city, as would customarily be done in England, to express community respect for the office. She was amazed to be told that such calls would be made only by spoils seekers, rather than by prominent, respectable, academic citizens.

This comparison, of course, does not imply that no career civil service exists in the United States but rather indicates that, together with other reasons, from top to bottom we have not yet dignified and stabi-
lized these services sufficiently to attract the type of men who in England from cabinet minister to junior clerk in the Board of Trade fill these posts.

The illustration of the permanent Secretary of the Treasury, the head of the British Civil Service, has been used to suggest comparisons between the highly centralized British administration and our federal system of government supported by our varied local forms of administration. G. M. Young, in his *Early Victorian England*, states the matter aptly in these words, "the Radicals had conceived the possibility of applying disinterested intelligence to social problems." The greatest of the Benthamites, Edwin Chadwick, had his first opportunity in the reform of the old poor law where he developed the Benthamite formula first used in the anti-slavery campaigns: inquiry, legislation, execution, inspection and report, a technique used over and over again in the nineteenth century until the trained staff of the civil service was incorporated solidly into every department of government.

This glance into one feature of the government of Great Britain attempts to show that the migration of ideas across the Atlantic did not insure their adoption by the United States in a form identical or even similar to that shown in their place of origin. Otherwise, there would have been one Anglo-American civilization merely separated into two areas. On the contrary, the migrations were so incomplete that while the younger society developed its provincial variations, England continued its insular achievements. Nevertheless, there exists a unity of outlook, a conception of the basic rights of man, a belief in democratic processes for arriving at conclusions, conspicuous in the hold that English common law has on both sides of the Atlantic. Here in conclusion a reference may be made to the brilliant statement by Lord Haldane in his Montreal address before the American Bar Association, in 1913, in which he portrayed the unity of the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Burke, as well as the S. P. G. missionary, in the 18th century, had described the general interest in law as a provocative unifying force, the people being lawyers, smatterers at law, buyers of Blackstone in excess of any book, other than the Bible, and finally printers of their own copies. This higher unity overshadows the differences here presented. Intangible though most
of them are, and numerous beyond ingenuity to describe, these few suggestive probings and samplings indicate trends and divergences of other kinds.

These enriching differences, creative of new language and of new intellectual values, the Anglo-Saxon world can well afford. Even what might be called the lamentable differences have given us a body of literature, impressions, surveys, and satires that we cannot do without. From Mrs. Trollope, Joseph Sturge and Mrs. Kemble, to the current best sellers of wit or malice, as country cousins, we have read, if not enjoyed, this literature and returned the compliment. The new medium of the air, commanded by the newest of the six chief officials named at the beginning of this paper, the Director of the British Broadcasting Company, is a force as yet imperfectly assessed, and may add to the body of our differences or make for greater unity.

In conclusion, students of the westward movement seem not to have noted sufficiently that a perfect piece of Old England was never floated across the Atlantic; that the emigrants were largely dissenting from one or more of the institutions established in their native countries and that they left many ideas behind them. This selective process of emigration determined that before landing in the New World the colonists already constituted a new and different society. The westward movement began in Europe, not on the Atlantic seaboard. Consequently, all the new British societies began as variants of the old even before the new environment had produced its effects and before the new frontier could make significant changes. In the 150 years since separation, the two governments have diverged in many points of practical operation, of which one contrast, that of administration, has been briefly sketched.

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