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Nationality and the Hyphenated American

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THE United States of America are at peace with all the world. Our government is not taking sides in the great war; officially we are the friends of all the embattled powers. And yet—we have but to take up any newspaper, anywhere in America, to find violent praise of one side, violent blame of the other. The sentiment of our country is divided. On all sides, our diverse populations are emphasizing afresh their European origins and background. The German in German-American, the Slav in Slavic-American, the Briton in British-American, have awakened, have become demonstrative and emphatic. The President, observing this, has declared his official and personal boredom with the "hyphenated American," and the conception expressed in this phrase has become an issue in the written and spoken discourse of our country.

Why, in an officially neutral country, has this come to pass? When we look closely to the ground and principle of the division of sentiment in our population, we discover this significant fact: the division is not truly determined by the merits of the European issue; it is determined by the lines of our population's European origin and ancestral allegiance. The Americans of German and Austrian and Magyar ancestry are pro-German; those of French or British or Russian ancestry favor the Allies. Only the Jews seem to be an exception to this rule. Being mainly from Russia, their favor should go to the Russians, but their newspapers, almost without exception, favor the Germans. The case of the Jews, however, is an exception that proves the rule. Although the majority of them came from Russia, they have had no part in the Russian polity; they have been oppressed, persecuted, terrorized, as their brethren still are in Russian territory. As[80] Americans, what portion and what hope have they in Russia that they should desire Russian victory? None. But they are not for this reason in favor of Germany. The headlines of their newspapers do not celebrate German victories, but Russian defeats. The Ghetto's partiality to

Germany is a consequence of its loyalty to Jewry. Kinship of blood and race, ancestral allegiance, determine with the Jewish masses in America also, what side they take in this war. Although they have no political background in Europe, and their civil allegiance is absolutely American, they too are hyphenated in sentiment—Jewish-Americans.

Such is the fact. Its significance lies in what it reveals, and what it reveals is a force much deeper and more radical, distinctly more primitive and original, than anything else in the structure of society. It hyphenates English and Germans and Austrians and Russians and Turks no less than it hyphenates Americans, and, in the failure of the external socio-political organization of Europe to give it free play, it is the chief, almost the only, cause of the present unendurable European tragedy. Its name is nationality.

Two Mosaics of Nationalities: A Contrast

NATIONALITY is not nationhood, although it is the most important constituent of nationhood. Many nationalities may compose a nation (such is the case of the British, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires, of the Swiss Republic, of our own Union), and then the relation between the nationalities will determine the strength or the weakness of the nation. Again, a single nationality may be divided among many nations (such is the case of the Poles, of the Serbs and other Slavs, of the Jews), and then the stability of the nations will be largely determined by their effect on the nationalities divided among them.

The Swiss Republic, for example, is a nation composed of three nationalities, two of which belong to powers at war with each other. These are the French and the German; the third is the Italian. Yet the nationhood of Switzerland is the most integral and unified in Europe to-day, because Switzerland is as complete and thorough a democracy as exists in the civilized world, and the efficacious safeguard of nationhood is democracy not only of individuals but of nationalities. The German, French and Italian citizens of the Swiss Republic are to-day under arms to defend the neutrality of their nation from possible violation by German, French or Italian belligerents, and in defending their nation, they are defending also the autonomy of each other's nationality. In Switzerland, nationhood, being democratic, is the safeguard and insurance of nationality.

Contrast Swiss nationhood with Austro-Hungarian nationhood. Austria-Hungary is the immediate and direct occasion of the great war by reason of the fact that, although she is a mosaic of nationalities like^[81] Switzerland, her government, instead of being a democracy, has in the long run been directed toward the control and exploitation of many nationalities by one or two. Hungary contains a population of seven million Magyars among twelve million Slavs; yet the Hungarians, having the economic and political upper hand, have sought to Magyarize by force and trickery this almost doubly greater and culturally equal population. They have tried to compel Magyar forms and standards in language, in literature, in history, the arts, the sciences, religion, law, in every intimate or remote concern of the daily life and national genius of their Slavic subjects. The result has been the steady disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian mosaic, the increasing use of force to hold it together, the corresponding increase of restlessness among the subject-peoples, plot and counterplot, the assassination of the Archduke, and the attack on Serbia, which precipitated the war. In this war Austria has come off worst of all the combatants, and for the same reason: the attempt to maintain the unity of a nation of nationalities by the force of one of them instead of by the democratic coöperation of all. In Austria-Hungary, nationality, having been exploited and suppressed, has been the enemy and destroyer of nationhood.

America A Commonwealth of Nationalities

IN this country the whole spirit of those institutions which constitute American nationhood makes for the liberation and harmonious coöperation of nationalities. This spirit is also a part of the Hebraic spirit, a part of the explicit program of our prophets, those champions and vindicators of social justice and international righteousness and peace; and this, significantly, is the spirit that literally inspired the democracy of our America.

For the democracy of America had its first articulate voicing in the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans of New England. These men and women, devoted to the literature of the Old Testament, and upheld by the ancestral memories of the Jews, were moved to undertake their great American adventure by the ideal of nationality. It was not because of an overwhelming oppression of body and soul that the Pilgrims adventured to America. It was not "freedom to worship God" that they sought. They had that in Holland. They sought freedom to be themselves, to realize their national genius in their own individual way. Their English manners, English speech, English history, and English loyalty were, in fact, more important to them than their Hebrew Bible. They used that as the spiritual pabulum which nourished their English corporate life. Their Calvinism was a reinterpretation of its prophetic nationalism expressed in the doctrine of the "chosen people"; their political institutions were a modification of the ideal political order it was supposed to reveal. As Cotton Mather narrates,[82] his grandfather, John Cotton, found, on his arrival in New England, that the population was much exercised over the framing of a "civil constitution." They turned to him for help, begging "that he would, from the laws wherewith God governed his ancient people, form an abstract of such as were of a moral and lasting equity." So "he propounded unto them an endeavor after a theocracy, as near as might be to that which was the glory of Israel." Out of this beginning the democratic mood of America surges; in such conceptions the ideals which express the mood have their origins. These ideals are the conservation of nationality, and the equality of men before the inconceivable supremacy of their God. Hebraism and English nationality—these are the spiritual background of the American commonwealth.

Political freedom in America has tended to generate self-expression of each national group, and our country is to-day, broadly speaking, a great coöperative commonwealth of nationalities, British, French, German, Slavic, Jewish, each freely developing, in so far as it is self-conscious, its national genius, its language, literature and art in its own characteristic way as its best contribution to the civilization of America as a whole,^[9] realizing in this way the ideal of the democracy of nationalities, of international comity and coöperation which our prophets were the first to formulate.

American nationhood, thus, is in the way of becoming what Swiss nationhood fully is, the liberator and protector of nationality; its democracy is its strength, and its democracy is "hyphenation." "Hyphenation" may, it is true, become perverse. As an expression of the coöperation of nationality with nationality in the life of the State, it is inevitable and good; as an attempt to subordinate all nationalities to one, to use all for the advantage of one, it is partial, undemocratic, disloyal. Our nation is a democracy of nationalities having for its aim the equal growth and free development of all. It can take no sides. To require it to take sides, German or Anglo-Saxon, Slavic or Jewish, is to be untrue to its spirit and to pervert its ideal.

The Renaissance of Nationality in the Past Century

IT is the attempt of one nationality to dominate and to impose its character, culture and ideals upon others that has been the basis of all the great wars in Europe, of all international injustice from the beginning of history.

The movement in modern history which we call progressive has been a movement toward democracy in both the internal affairs and external relationships of nations. Men did not realize its entire significance until the nineteenth[83] century; only then did it come to full consciousness in fact and idea, urged equally in Greece, in Germany, in Ireland, in Italy. Its great voice is the Italian thinker and patriot, Mazzini. In a marvelous essay entitled "Europe, Its Condition and Its Prospects," he wrote, at a time when the hope of social and international democracy seemed extinguished: "They struggled, they still struggle, for country and liberty; for a word inscribed upon a banner, proclaiming to the world that they also live, think, love and labor for the benefit of all. They speak the same language, they bear about them the impress of consanguinity, they kneel beside the same tombs, they glory in the same tradition; and they demand to associate freely, without obstacles, without foreign domination, in order to elaborate and express their idea, to contribute their stone also to the great pyramid of history. It is something moral which they are seeking; and this moral something is in fact, politically speaking, the most important question in the present state of things. It is the organization of the European task. In principle, nationality ought to be to humanity that which division of labor is in a workshop—the recognized symbol of association; the assertion of the individuality of a human group called by its geographical position, its traditions and its language, to fulfill a special function in the European work of civilization."

Modern Europe saw the overthrow of the Holy Roman Empire, of the imperial aspirations of Louis XIV, and of Napoleon before it realized the natural fact and moral principle which underlay these overthrows, and which finally so successfully asserted themselves as to unify Italy and cast off the Austrian dominion, to liberate Greece, Bulgaria, Roumania and the other Balkan States from the Turk, to unify and create contemporary Germany. The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the renaissance, often in the face of overwhelming suppression, of the language and cultures of Czechs, Bohemians, Poles, Irish and Jews. It saw the rise of nationalism in the Oriental dependencies of Great Britain. It saw the beginning of an acknowledgment of the full rights of nationalities by both Austria and Great Britain, the grant of local autonomy to the various nationalities in the Austrian Empire, of progressive home rule to India and South Africa and Ireland. The twentieth century seemed to be moving peacefully toward the fulness of democracy—when came the war.

The Present War: Nationality vs. Imperialism

LET no one be deceived into believing that this war is a struggle for the economic domination of the world, springing from commercial rivalry and industrial intrigue. No. Nothing is so international as economic life—we in America know that now to our own cost also—and if commercial interests and capitalistic counsels had had their say, there would have been no war. England was Germany's best customer, France her[84] great creditor, Russia supplied her with unskilled labor. The socialist international was against war, the peace party was against it, the intelligence of the world was against it. When it came, it shattered all these international organizations into national units, it smashed the solidarity of even science and art, which are the most international enterprises in the world. And why? Because its cause was something deeper than economic interest or the other secondary interests. Here is the question that the war is to

decide: Is the whole of mankind to be dominated in body and in spirit, without its consent, by a portion of it, and to be compelled "to elaborate and express the idea" of the portion? or is the whole of mankind to be self-governed, in a coöperative commonwealth, each part of which, by elaborating and expressing its own idea, contributes its best to the whole?

This is the issue between the warring powers and each claims that it is defending itself against the aggression of its opponents. Each claims to be fighting for democracy. In the face of these claims, history has the deciding voice. Now, historically, England, more than any other power, has stood for the democratic and coöperative idea. Her colonies have autonomy, her more backward dependencies are encouraged toward autonomy. Since the Boer war, when imperialism passed away, she has moved toward the position of Switzerland. Even Ireland has obtained home rule. "We are a great world-wide, peace-loving partnership," said Mr. Asquith,^[E] has reiterated again and again the principle for which all the Allies are fighting: believing that "the preservation of local and national ties, of the genius of a people which has a history of its own, is not only not hostile to or inconsistent with, but on the contrary, fosters and strengthens and stimulates the spirit of a common purpose, of a corporate brotherhood," the Allies seek to defend public right, to find and to keep "room for the independent existence and free development of the smaller nationalities, each with a corporate consciousness of its own . . . and, perhaps, by a slow and gradual process, the substitution for force, for the clash of competing ambitions, for groupings and alliances and a precarious equipoise, of a real European partnership, based on equal right and enforced by a common will."^[E]

It is hard to believe that Russia can be fighting for such an end. Fear of Russian barbarism is what brought Germany into the lists, the Germans declare, to defend western ideals and western democracy. Yet Russian government is Prussian in its organization, and it is on the side of the ideal of western democracy that she is explicitly aligned. The contradiction is striking, and it is still more striking when we recall that in her armies are over a quarter of a million of Jews, and that in the other armies there are half as many more. For the Jews the war is more than civil; it is^[85] fratricide. On the face of it they have no inevitable personal or political stake in the war's fortune. England has acknowledged their "corporate consciousness" and given them maximal opportunity for "free self-development"; so has France. Russia has oppressed and horribly exploited them; Germany, though infinitely better than Russia, has set them conditions in which "free development" is synonymous with complete Germanization. Austria and Turkey have dealt with them somewhat after the manner of England and France. The contradiction of the Jewish position outdistances that of the Russian. But both contradictions are resolved in the fact that the ideal in question concerns not Russia alone, nor England alone, nor the Jews alone, but the whole of Europe, the whole world. What is at stake is not something local, personal, political, but a universal principle, the goal toward which mankind has been so slowly and deviously crawling from the beginnings of modern history—the principle of democracy in nationality and nationality in democracy.

It is for this that our brethren in the armies are fighting; it is for this that they are undergoing crucifixion in the Pale, for this that our people have suffered and died from the beginnings of our history. Our whole recorded biography is the narrative of a struggle for social justice against the exploitation of class by class within our polity, for nationality against imperialism without. Our statesmen and leaders were the first to formulate the ideal of the coöperative harmony of nationality, and the ideal of international peace.^[E] Mr. Asquith is echoing our prophets, and our embattled brethren are engaged in the defence of a principle which is the constituent of the genius of their own nationality.

The Service of Jewish Nationality to Civilization

THE genius of their own nationality! That with all its implications is an issue in the war not only as a principle but as a fact. The Jewish people are the great historic incarnation of the *casus belli*. In fortune and in disaster, through difficult and terrible centuries, they have cherished their language, their history, their culture, have sustained their "corporate consciousness" and in terms of it have served civilization in all the institutions of civilization. Not freely, not by free development; not because of conditions, but in spite of them. The Bible, whose moral vision inspires the world, we gave the world only as we had or yearned for "independent existence" and "free development." Our best, like the best of every people, has been a function of this "independent existence and free development." We also, scattered among the nations, tortured and oppressed by the mighty and the weak among them, are among "the smaller nationalities" for whose sake the war is being fought. With Serbia, with Belgium, with Poland, we[86] claim our public right and our national security, and we claim it not merely for ourselves, but for the service of all mankind. For as we have had a rôle "in the organization of the European task," so we still have a rôle, and in that division of the labor of civilization in terms of nationality we have our task to accomplish, our service to render. This task, this service, is the expression of the Jewish idea, the flowering and fruitage of the Hebraic spirit, which, rooted in our historic past, planted on our national soil, shall realize in modern terms, in social organization, in religion, in the arts and the sciences, a national future that by its inward excellence will truly make Israel "a light unto the nations."

The indispensable condition for such a realization is autonomous nationality; not nationhood, necessarily, but autonomy. This, more than civil rights among other nationalities, is our stake in this great war. In the last analysis, the Hebraic culture and ideals which our Menorah Societies study, can be *advanced*, can be a *living* force in civilization, only as a national force. Our duty to America, inspired by the Hebraic tradition,—our service to the world, in whatever occupation,—both these are conditioned, in so far as we are Jews, upon the conservation of Jewish nationality. That is the potent reality in each of us, our selfhood, and service is the giving of the living self. Let us so serve mankind; as Jews, aware of our great heritage, through it and in it strong to live and labor for mankind's good.

H. M. Kallen

I THINK I see in your Society a recognition of the real spirit of our country's motto, e pluribus unum. That does not mean a sinking of the differences between us all into absolute uniformity, but rather the harmony that can result from the recognition of these differences and developing our own individualities so that we shall have variety in unity.—From an Address before the Yale Menorah Society by Professor Benjamin W. Bacon of Yale University.

FOOTNOTES:

[C] For a fuller treatment of this point compare in the *New York Nation* for February 18 and 25, 1915, the author's articles on "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot."

[D] Cardiff Speech, 2d October, 1914.

[E] Dublin Speech, 25th September, 1914.

[F] Cf. Isaiah, II, 2-4; XIX, 23-25; XI, 6-9; LXV, 17-25, etc.