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PORTLAND, SUNDAY, NOV. 14, 1909.

THE GREAT SEMI-ARID STRIP.

Nathaniel S. Shaler was a voluminous writer on geological and biological conditions in North America. Many of his books still possess high value—though the information they supply has, in important particulars, been superseded by additional experience and knowledge. The book "The Story of the Interpretation of Nature," and later the work entitled "The United States of America," in two volumes, contain immense masses of useful facts. But the theory therein presented about the availability of the vast semi-arid interior region for the uses of man remains only a reminder of the modern development of the vast interior had fairly begun.

Whether man can inhabit a region or not, is, of course, a matter of obtaining subsistence. If a country is frigid, or arid, it may support a large population, but it is not a desirable one—though these ultimately will be exhausted. The gold that may be easily obtained is exhausted soon; but the larger amounts of gold, that can be obtained only by use of capital in large sums, will last longer. Coal and iron are of greater value, and the deposits are more slowly exhausted.

Agricultural resources are limited by climate and soil and area, yet they may be promoted to an extent that positively is incalculable, by the intelligence and industry of man.

Professor Shaler was one of the most intelligent of those who have written on the natural resources and future industrial possibilities of our continent. His idea was that the whole region of Canada, except the part near the line of the United States, would be a grainless region. North of a line extending from southeastern Labrador to near the head of Lake Superior, thence to the southern end of Lake Athabasca, and thence to the mouth of Fraser River, is a region of delightful summer warmth and not unendurable winter cold; it is covered with primeval forests that are the home of moose, musk-oxen and reindeer, and of many fur-bearing animals, and abounds in rivers that are all stocked with fish—a region in many ways attractive but grainless. Such was the earlier theory. But it is found that there is no grainless region south of the Arctic Circle. Large numbers of people from the United States have gone within recent years into that country to grow wheat, for which there is an increasing market; and the railroads are penetrating it from Hudson's Bay to Prince Rupert, at the southern extremity of our own Alaskan territory.

Yet Professor Shaler wrote of this country: "It will remain a wilderness, unsought as a dwelling place of civilized man, but it is likely that it will become the seat and stronghold of the native Indians, and there may be a refuge from the debasement and final extinction which menaces them in all parts of the continent suited to the uses of our race." Through experience this idea has been completely outgrown. Civilization can exist in numbers where primitive races can not. St. Petersburg has been built in a marsh, on a region of all ice-bound water. Norway and Sweden have no milder or better climate than that of America just below the Arctic Circle. Even from Oregon and Washington people have migrated into the Athabaskan and Saskatchewan regions to grow wheat. They get their grain from railroads, give them the world's markets, and severity of winter climate does not deter them. Coal is found to keep them warm in winter, and they house their animals from the cold, as the people do in the Swiss Alps, in Northern Germany and Russia, and in countries of Scandinavia.

There is a grainless region of the United States, extending from the northern boundary nearly to the Gulf of Mexico. At the Canadian border it is one thousand miles in width, and that width increases southward, till we enter Texas and approach the Gulf. The semi-arid region is four or five hundred miles in width where it enters Mexico. It was the idea, till a few years ago, that this vast region could never be the seat of a considerable population. It embraced the present subdivisions known as the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, much of Nebraska, of Kansas, of Oklahoma and of Texas and the whole of Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington. Only a small population, it was supposed, could ever exist in this vast region, of more than one million square miles. Though it is not possibly now to estimate its future, it would be rash to imagine that this region will not contain twenty-five millions, before the close of the present century. Utilization of natural resources, above all of water, makes a beginning already of rapid transformation. Science, the experience of human enterprise and experience, constantly widens the horizon.

How far the earth, or the conditions existing upon it, may be modified by human agency, it is impossible to conjecture yet. Much is known, but more remains to be known. The countries about the Mediterranean were stripped of most of their natural resources ages ago; yet now, as a whole, they are richer than ever, and sustain larger populations than in the greatest days of the Roman Empire. Yet it is only in recent times that the true philosophy of conservation of natural resources, and of making the most of them, has been applied to the countries that border the Mediterranean. In our own vast semi-arid region,

irrigation, careful use of water, development of electric power, use of coal and of minerals, study of conditions out of which an intelligent industry will obtain means to create subsistence and make wealth, will bring results that no prophet now can foresee. The imagination may suggest the "Alquid vastum infinitum" of Tacitus—of anything beyond it, if that were possible.

Always the distribution of civilized populations is affected by artificial conditions that supplement natural conditions. Natural means of subsistence within a territory may be very limited; but where there are equivalent resources, which may be developed by human industry, and transportation is available, a country poor by nature may become rich by artificial means. Growth or aggregation of population is itself a means to further aggregation, because it affords protection to individuals, and because it is normally followed by social evolution. It is impossible, therefore, to set a limit to the industrial and social growth of any region or country. Modern science will do wonderful, and even unimaginable, things for the vast semi-arid territory of North America.

ELECTORS WILL CHOOSE.

How can the Republican state assembly "control" nominations, unless Republican voters in the primaries accept the nomination of the primary law. The people will choose, just as in Portland's recent city election. The primary law in that election was observed to the letter and voters accepted the Republican assembly nominees and elected them, because they were worthy of election. The convention nominations for the coming state election will be accepted or rejected by voters according to the merit of the candidates. Electors will have the last word in this matter.

It will be necessary for the Republican state assembly to choose good and substantial candidates, otherwise its selections will not be approved at the primaries. This is the best guarantee that the assembly or convention will not permit itself to be boss-ridden nor machine-driven. The Democratic party council that always meets in a closed room to name candidates for primary elections, violate the Chamberlain for Governor and then for United States Senator, that selected candidates for Congress and for every other office in each election since the primary law went into force, and that named a ticket for the City of Portland last Spring, violate the spirit and letter of the primary law, but of course the Democratic politicians and newspapers say not a word about that.

An open convention, however, in contrast with a star-chamber council, accords with the constitution-guaranteed privilege of the people peaceably to assemble and to consider matters for their common welfare and to select candidates for their government. The convention is the most distinctive American of all public functions. When men or women consider together any subject of mutual importance they meet in convention. Matters of progress and commerce, and river and harbor improvement, and religion and fraternal organization, and many others are often considered in convention, and no sophistry can abolish this custom. Nor can sophistry of Democratic politicians, who know that convention affords Republicans their only means of choosing satisfactory candidates for the primaries, deceive Republican voters of Oregon.

Oregon Republicans will hold conventions next Spring and name candidates for state and county offices. If those candidates shall be satisfactory to the electorate in primaries and election, the convention will perform a needed service. If any of them are unworthy the electorate will have full opportunity, in two elections, to reject them. Of course, Democratic politicians and organs will howl. But at the same time they will watch the Republican open convention with secret sessions of their own. The people, however, will choose.

SAVING THE CHILDREN.

The papers read at the first session of the conference at Yale University on the mortality of children, reported to have been fully as significant as the public expected. Perhaps Dr. J. H. Mason Knox and Dr. Woods Hutchinson discussed the subject with the keenest sense of reality. Dr. Alice Tallant, of the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia, made some of the gentlest remarks on the education of mothers as a factor in saving the lives of their children. This remedy, if we can muster up the intelligence to apply it, ought to do some good in the course of fifty years, but it can accomplish very little for the present. When a woman is old enough to be a mother, she is past educating. The ignorance and baneful prejudice which she brings with her into matrimony she will abide by till she dies. The time to educate mothers is when they are young girls, and polite public sentiment in its present mandarin state forbids the slightest mention of the subject at the only period of life when it can produce any effect.

We ought not to wait fifty years before we take efficient measures to check the frightful death rate of young children. We ought not to wait one year, for our diminishing percentage of birth rate unless we can devise some way to save the lives of infants now needlessly lost, we can in no way escape race extinction. To urge people to increase the birth rate by premeditation is useless, even if it is not wicked. The diminishing percentage of children born annually is a worldwide phenomenon dependent upon causes deep-seated in the very nature of civilization. There is no way to reverse it except by reverting to barbarism; but no ill effects need ensue from it if only we cause the death rate to fall at the same time. Philosophical physicians indeed see the diminishing birth rate of civilized people as a divinely ordered refuge from the miseries of over-population.

Dr. Knox threw the emphasis of his discussion upon the destructive power of alcohol. This drug is classed by Dr. Saleeby, the famous eugenicist, as a race poison. It does not act directly upon what men of science call the germ plasma, and consequently its ruinous effects are not truly hereditary; but we must not forget that for a long time the child derives all its sustenance from the mother's blood which circulates through its veins; and if her blood is contaminated with alcohol it poisons the unborn child. His body is therefore genetically blighted. This murdering effect on helpless infants is

the worst charge to be laid to alcoholism. The adult drunkard can be spared to his demon without much sense of loss to the world, but it is a pitiful thing to see children poisoned by the drug before they are born. This plague strikes rich and poor alike. Alcoholism is probably even more prevalent among wealthy mothers than among the indigent.

Dr. Woods Hutchinson spoke principally on the lethal influence of poverty which, he maintained, is the greatest cause of infant mortality since it is the source of ignorance, disease and dirt. He takes literally that uncompromising doctrine of Scripture, "The desire of riches is death to the poor." If Dr. Hutchinson is right, we can hope for no very encouraging decrease in the death rate of young children until we have found some way to relieve the indigence of their parents or, better, have taught them to relieve it themselves. Whether this can be done or not is an open question. There is no man of normal sentiments who would not prefer to see every family in the world comfortably supported, but there are many who yield to counsels of despair and say it can never be done. Perhaps they yield too soon. The falling birth rate is of itself a partial remedy for poverty and, if a corresponding increase of intelligence accompanies it, they may in conjunction solve the problem.

To prevent irremediable misery we must have a population which increases less rapidly than capital accumulates. We may believe then that kindly nature has won for its half the battle against poverty by checking the multiplication of hungry mouths. The other half we must win for ourselves by accelerating the accumulation of capital. Here Fabian methods seem to be the only ones that count for much. Patience and perseverance ought to be the motto of all our philanthropists. It is an error to suppose that any expedient, however inadequate it may appear. Trade schools, better savings banks, freedom of commerce, economy in government, everything is a help which either aids men to produce wealth or encourages them to save it. The fight with poverty will be long and heated, but it is an error to suppose that any expedient, however inadequate it may appear. 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