

And the Fair Land

'For all our social discord we yet remain the longest enduring society of free men governing themselves without benefit of kings or dictators.'

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Anyone whose labors take him into the far reaches of the country, as ours lately have done, is bound to mark how the years have made the land grow fruitful.

This is indeed a big country, a rich country, in a way no array of figures can measure and so in a way past belief of those who have not seen it. Even those who journey through its Northeastern complex, into the Southern lands, across the central plains and to its Western slopes can only glimpse a measure of the bounty of America.

And a traveler cannot but be struck on his journey by the thought that this country, one day, can be even greater. America, though many know it not, is one of the great underdeveloped countries of the world; what it reaches for exceeds by far what it has grasped.

So the visitor returns thankful for much of what he has seen, and, in spite of everything, an optimist about what his country might be. Yet the visitor, if he is to make an honest report, must also note the air of unease that hangs everywhere.

For the traveler, as travelers have been always, is as much questioned as questioning. And for all the abundance he sees, he finds the questions put to him ask where men may repair for succor from the troubles that beset them.

His countrymen cannot forget the savage face of war. Too often they have been asked to fight in strange and distant places, for no clear purpose they could see and for no accomplishment they can measure. Their spirits are not quieted by the thought that the good and pleasant bounty that surrounds them can be destroyed in an instant by a single bomb. Yet they find no escape, for their survival and comfort now depend on unpredictable strangers in far-off corners of the globe.

How can they turn from melancholy when at home they see young arrayed against old, black against white, neighbor against neighbor, so that they stand in peril of social discord. Or not despair when they see that the cities and countryside are in need of repair, yet find themselves

threatened by scarcities of the resources that sustain their way of life. Or when, in the face of these challenges, they turn for leadership to men in high places—only to find those men as frail as any others.

So sometimes the traveler is asked whence will come their succor. What is to preserve their abundance, or even their civility? How can they pass on to their children a nation as strong and free as the one they inherited from their forefathers? How is their country to endure these cruel storms that beset it from without and from within?

Of course the stranger cannot quiet their spirits. For it is true that everywhere men turn their eyes today much of the world has a truly wild and savage hue. No man, if he be truthful, can say that the specter of war is banished. Nor can he say that when men or communities are put upon their own resources they are sure of solace; nor be sure that men of diverse kinds and diverse views can live peaceably together in a time of troubles.

But we can all remind ourselves that the richness of this country was not born in the resources of the earth, though they be plentiful, but in the men that took its measure. For that reminder is everywhere—in the cities, towns, farms, roads, factories, homes, hospitals, schools that spread everywhere over that wilderness.

We can remind ourselves that for all our social discord we yet remain the longest enduring society of free men governing themselves without benefit of kings or dictators. Being so, we are the marvel and the mystery of the world, for that enduring liberty is no less a blessing than the abundance of the earth.

And we might remind ourselves also, that if those men setting out from Delftshaven had been daunted by the troubles they saw around them, then we could not this autumn be thankful for a fair land.

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