

Are We True to First Doctrines?

There are today many who sneer at the preamble of the Declaration of Independence. The idea that all men are created equal, which our forefathers asserted to be a self-evident truth, has come to be regarded in some quarters as a self-evident lie. An English writer has given us a brief yet complete explanation of one feature of the preamble.

"Much ridicule, a little of it not undeserved," said this English writer, "has been thrown upon the opening clause of the Declaration of Independence, which asserts the inherent natural right of man to enjoy life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. Yet there is an implied corollary in this, which enjoins the highest morality that in our present state we are able to think of as possible. If happiness is the right of our neighbor, then not to hinder him but to help him in its pursuit must plainly be our duty. If all men have a claim, then each man is under an obligation. The corollary thus involved is the corner-stone of morality. It was an act of good augury thus to inscribe happiness, as entering at once into the right of all and into the duty of all, in the very head and front of the new charter, as the base of a national existence, and the first principle of a national government. The omen has not been falsified. The Americans have been true to their first doctrine. They have never swerved aside to set up caste and privilege, to lay down the doctrine that one man's happiness ought to be an object of greater solicitude to society than any other man's, or that one order should be encouraged to seek its prosperity through the depression of any other order. Their example proved infectious. The assertion in the New World that men have a right to happiness, and an obligation to promote the happiness of one another, struck a spark in the Old World. Political construction in America immediately preceded the last violent state of demolition in Europe."

Can it be said today that "the Americans have been true to their first doctrine?"



A Question of Expediency.

The Boston Transcript says that there can be "neither escape from nor evasion of the conclusion that under authority of the Porto Rican decision congress can maintain a colonial system." Then the Transcript says:

"Today there may be a disposition in some quarters to say that the people will not acquiesce in the supreme court's decision any more than it accepted the Dred Scott judgment as final, but that disposition will pass away. It is but the ebullition of a heated moment. The people will accept, if for no other reason than it will see the vast moral distinction between the case of Dred Scott and that of Porto Rico. The former was in its essence a case of morals; the Porto Rico tariff is in its essence simply a question of expediency."

It is strange that such a statement as this should be made by a newspaper printed in the shadow of Bunker Hill monument, and within the sound of the waves that dash against the harbor made famous by the Boston Tea Party.

There is no "vast moral distinction between the case of Dred Scott and that of Porto Rico."

The Commoner.

At the time of the Dred Scott decision slavery was an institution recognized by our constitution. Dred Scott was a slave who sued in the federal courts for freedom. He was put out of court on the ground that although he had been taken into territory covered by the Missouri compromise, he was yet a slave and therefore not a citizen and having no standing in the federal court.

At the very time that the Supreme Court denied to Dred Scott the right to sue for his freedom there were then in the southern states, at least 3,000,000 human beings in slavery and not one of these would have had the legal right to sue for his freedom. If the Dred Scott matter was purely a moral one then how did it happen that no proceeding was taken in behalf of the 3,000,000 slaves? The reason was that however immoral the institution might have been, slavery in certain states had a recognized legal standing. In the Dred Scott case, then, a purely legal question was presented to the court. In giving its sanction to the slavery of this human being the Supreme Court had at least the excuse that slavery was recognized by our constitution and our laws, however inconsistent it may have been with our declaration of independence.

In the Porto Rican case was involved the right of taxation explicitly forbidden by the constitution. If a case were presented involving the proposition that a tariff duty be levied on goods going to and coming from the state of Massachusetts, the Boston Transcript would very readily recognize that a great moral as well as legal question was involved in the proposition. Such a tariff would be illegal because expressly prohibited by the constitution. Such a tariff would be immoral because every section of our union is entitled to equal opportunities and equal privileges with every other section.

As the Boston Transcript says of the Porto Rican tariff, so the slave owners of the Dred Scott period said of that case—it was "a question of expediency." Every public wrong sought to be perpetrated under conditions where fundamental law must be violated has been excused on the ground that it was simply "a question of expediency."

Both the Dred Scott and the Porto Rican cases were cases of law. The element of immorality enters in both, it is true. But the Porto Rican case has the advantage that the immorality sought to be accomplished under the guise of a statute is forbidden by the letter of the fundamental law and repugnant to the spirit of American institutions. The Dred Scott case involved an institution likewise repugnant and inconsistent with our declaration of independence, but an institution nevertheless formally sanctioned by our constitution and laws of that period.

If there are no morals in the Porto Rican case there were no morals in the Boston Tea Party.

If there is no morality in the contention of the Porto Ricans that they be given equal advantages and opportunities with other sections of the country of which they are a part, then there was no morality in the contention of the men of the revolutionary period.

The Hall of Fame.

The Hall of Fame, established in New York by Miss Helen Gould, was dedicated May 20. Among the great Americans to whom tablets in this Hall of Fame were dedicated are Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Jefferson, Webster, Clay, Channing, John Marshall, John Adams, Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher.

It is interesting to observe that while we dedicate tablets to the memory of these men, the nation they served so well has lost sight of their teachings and repudiated their counsels. In an address delivered on this occasion, Senator Depew, perhaps unwittingly, described the spirit of the times when he said:

"We have now no Tennysons, nor Longfellows, nor Hawthornes, nor Emersons. Perhaps it is because our Michael Angelos are planning tunnels under rivers and through mountains for the connection of vast systems of railways, and our Raphaels are devising some novel method for the utilization of electrical power; our Shakespeares are forming gigantic combinations of corporate bodies; our Tennysons are giving rein to fancy and imagination in wild speculations in stocks, and our Hawthornes and Emersons have abandoned the communings with the revelations of the spirit and soul which lift their readers to a vision of the higher life and the joy of its inspiration, to exploit mines and factories."

Of what value is it that we enshrine the memory of these great men while we are repudiating their teachings? If these men rightfully have a place in the Hall of Fame, it must be because of the service they rendered their country and the lessons they left for their countrymen.

Washington warned us against entangling alliances with foreign nations. He urged us to be true to the principles upon which our government was founded. But to-day we are violating those principles and our foreign alliances are becoming more and more entangling.

Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, in which men who loved liberty enough to fight for it, and if need be to die for it, declared as a self-evident truth that all men are created equal, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. And yet to-day we have repudiated these great principles.

Lincoln told us that liberty was the heritage of all men and of all people everywhere; that no man had the right to govern another man without that other's consent; and that no people were ordained of God to subjugate another people; that no race was empowered to tyrannize over another race. And yet to-day we have boldly assumed the right to give to a people that degree of liberty which we believe them capable of enjoying—a proposition which Lincoln characterized as the argument of kings.

Franklin protested eloquently and logically against taxation without representation and while we are erecting tablets to the memory of Franklin we are assuming to tax the people of Porto Rico and the Philippines denying them that representation which Franklin maintained to be the right of the taxpayer.

It was John Marshall who said that "the United States" means all territory subject to United States jurisdiction and that all sections of the United States were entitled to equal privileges, the one with the other, and that all