EGALITARIANISM

The notion that mankind had once lived in a condition close to ideal and had then fallen from it was common to both classical paganism and Christianity. The myths of the Golden Age as well as of the Age of Kronos or Saturn, though they differed in their various versions, and the story of the Garden of Eden, were kept alive in one form or another throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Whatever the variants, all agreed that man in the beginning of history was happy and that modern man was miserable. This notion, which has been called chronological primitivism, was elaborated in poetry as well as in historiography, ethics, and political philosophy. It was an idea whose ramifications spread throughout European letters. It seemed to some of its proponents to imply that the earliest period or form of anything was the best, whether it was primitive Christianity, primitive art, primitive man as seen in savages, or even the child. Just why the primordial was better than the subsequent was never clearly explained, for there was no evidence in the Bible of just what the life of prelapsarian man was like, and though more details were given of life in the Golden Age and its analogues, they were obviously nothing more than dreams.

There was also no agreement over why man had lost his primeval happiness. To this day no biblical exegete has clarified in an unquestionable manner the meaning of the Tree of Knowledge and its forbidden fruit. The plain unelaborated account is simply that our primordial ancestors disobeyed a divine command. But the significance of their disobedience, the reason for giving the command, the very question of whether there was or needed to be any reason, these problems have filled hundreds of volumes.
Similarly, no one in pagan circles knew why the Golden Age should have disappeared. The temptation of Eve was more easily understood than the degeneration of the Golden Race. Both the pagan and the biblical accounts had to be accepted as descriptions of a historical event, the explanation of which was left to speculation.

Hence when the Dijon Academy in 1754 proposed a prize for the best answer to the question, “What is the origin of inequality among men and is it justified by natural law?” it seemed to be assumed that inequality had arisen in the course of history, that its origin could be discovered rationally, and that presumably it was an evil, not a good. In short, it seemed to be tacitly assumed that men had not always been unequal, though if a contestant had wished to argue that inequality was an inherent trait in human beings and part of God’s scheme, he could have done so. What is of special interest is that the definition of inequality was left to the contestants to frame.

One of the most famous of medieval Latin phrases is attributed to Gregory the Great: Omnes namque homines natura aequales sumus (“All of us human beings are equal by nature”), a phrase in which the word “natura” is the locus of the argument. Just what it meant to be equal by nature was never very clear; the closest one can come to an interpretation is to substitute another phrase, “in the eyes of God.” The idea, however vague, has its literary origin in Cicero’s De legibus (I, x, 28–30), in a passage expounding the natural homogeneity of mankind. For Cicero, man “in a state of nature” was of one kind, rational animality being the genus and differentia. The differences among men were either trivial or unnatural. In Christian writers these differences were differences of condition, economic status, bodily strength, and the like. They might be important in temporal affairs, but to God, who is not an acceptor personarum, they are

worthless. Just as the Roman Stoic could disregard his condition as slave or emperor, so the Christian could be urged to disregard all social and economic, as well as political, differences as irrelevant to religious felicity.

Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality, which was submitted in the competition, distinguished between obvious inequalities which are "established by nature," such as differences in age, health, bodily strength, and mental quality, and those which are established by convention, the political, the privileges of the rich, the prestigious, the powerful, the commanding (p. 140). And though it might seem as though the latter depended to some extent upon the former, Rousseau denies this. His denial entails the belief, to cite but one possibility, that the man endowed by birth with great intelligence or aggressiveness or bodily vigor is no more likely to rise to a position of political power than one who is congenitally stupid, submissive, or weak. Rousseau is convinced that the law of the state takes precedence over the law of nature and that this was not always so but came about at a specifiable moment of history. At the same time he repudiated all earlier descriptions of the state of nature as historically worthless and insisted that what was wanted was an account of primeval man based upon a hypothesis of human nature as such, of human nature as it must have been before societies and their laws had been framed.

He therefore rejected the Aristotelian principle that man was inherently a social animal. On the contrary, there is no more reason to believe that sociality is inherent in human nature than in animal nature. Man in the beginning just wandered about the forests like a beast, eating whatever he could find, naked, weaponless, inured to extremes of heat and cold, robust, and giving birth to robust children. Should any infant be too weak to survive, it was allowed to perish. In modern societies, on the contrary, "the State making children a burden to their fathers, kills them without

distinction before birth” (p. 143). Primitive strength, seen in modern savages, is hence lost. 3 Modern society preserves the unfit and propagates disease. Nature would have us live a simple life, in an unvarying regime, in solitude (p. 146). The one difference between natural man and the beasts is that man is a free agent, whereas the beasts are controlled by instinct alone. “Nature gives her orders to every animal and the beast obeys. Man experiences the same impulsion but recognizes his freedom to acquiesce or resist” (p. 149).

The detail of solitude was important to Rousseau. Like Lucretius he pictured man in a state of nature as “having neither house nor hut, nor property of any kind, each taking what shelter chance provided and remaining in it for one night only, males and females uniting fortuitously as the occasion and desire provided, without the need of words to express what they might have to say. And they left each other with equal ease” (p. 154). Why then should they have formed societies? They had no more need of their fellows than wolves or monkeys have—an unfortunate example. They were not and could not be unhappy, for they lacked nothing that they needed and they were free, with hearts at peace and bodies in good health (p. 158). Instinct was all man needed to live a natural life; educated rationality (raison cultivée) is required only for living in society. These men were neither virtuous nor vicious; such adjectives are inapplicable to solitary beings.

Like Vergil (Georgics, I, 125 ff.) and Tibullus (Elegies, I, iii, 13), Rousseau believed that in a state of nature there was no private property. “The first man who enclosed a bit of land and took it upon himself to say, ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple minded enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society” (p. 169). 4 Private ownership of land is the cause of

3. Oddly enough, American Indians, the first real savages to be known by Europeans at firsthand, were thought by some writers to be weaker than Europeans. See A. Gerbi, La Disputa del Nuovo Mondo, passim.
inequality. And from this inequality, economic in nature, pride, superiority, power, all evolved. “From the moment,” says Rousseau, “that a man needed the help of another man, as soon as he saw that it was useful to one man to have provisions for two, equality vanished, property entered the scene, and work became a necessity” (pp. 175–76). The woods were cleared and fields took their place. Crops were planted, “watered by the sweat of men, and soon slavery and poverty were born and grew with the harvests” (p. 176).

Returning once again to classical primitivism, Rousseau laments the invention of metallurgy and the use of iron, for with them man profited from those inequalities that had their roots in his natural endowments. “The stronger did more work; the shrewder profited more; the ingenious found means of diminishing their toil; the farmer needed more iron, the smith more wheat; and though one man worked as much as another, the one earned much, the other could hardly make a living” (p. 178).

Rousseau finds it a simple matter to deduce all the ills of society from this point on, while insisting at the same time that society itself is an evil. The Solitary Walker could hardly have been expected to praise social life, but he might have perceived its necessity. Yet to his way of thinking laws were intrinsically bad. They put shackles on the weak and fortified the strong, destroyed forever natural freedom, and perpetuated property rights and inequality, and “to the profit of a few men of ambition, subjected the whole human race forever to labor, servitude, and poverty” (p. 181). Life and liberty might well be natural rights, but not property. History, he believed, illustrates an evolution from the establishment of law and property rights through that of the courts to the final stage where legitimate power becomes arbitrary power (p. 190). The first period authorizes the distinction between rich and poor, the second that between powerful and weak, the third that between master and slave, the highest degree of inequality. It is not to be wondered that men like Robespierre
looked back to Rousseau as their master, for there was at the heart of his speculation an anticipation of that form of neo-Darwinism which deprecated the building of hospitals, the protection of the weak, and even schooling. In a state of nature the unfit went to the wall. Only those individuals survived who were capable of meeting the challenge of primitive life. The Terror, after all, was a duplication of nature’s technique. The guillotine simply removed from society those individuals who perpetrated its unnatural injustices.

The inequalities of nature then would have been smoothed out by nature, according to Rousseau, if private property had never been instituted. But there were other inequalities common to most societies which became more and more noticeable as the nineteenth century developed and the twentieth dawned. Each period and social group was characterized by injustice, if injustice is the unequal distribution of the good things in life, among which must be included esteem. It will not be irrelevant to list some of them, confining ourselves to American history.

Omitting inequalities in wealth, it became clear very early in American history that the owners of land were to be given privileges that other property owners could not enjoy. In Rhode Island, for example, the charter of 1663 and the franchise law of 1724 restricted suffrage to freeholders owning property of the minimum value of $134. It was not until 1842, after Dorris’s Rebellion, that the suffrage was extended to non-freeholders. In New York the Senate was elected, in the words of Chancellor Kent, “by the free and independent lords of the soil, worth at least $250 in freehold estate, over and above all debts charged thereon.” So was the Governor. In 1821 when it was proposed in the Constitutional Convention that the suffrage be extended, the Chancellor delivered himself of the following comments:
The Senate has hitherto been elected by the farmers of the state. . . . [It is now proposed] to annihilate, at one stroke, all those property distinctions and to bow before the idol of universal suffrage. That extreme democratic principle, when applied to the legislative and executive departments of government, has been regarded with terror, by the wise men of every age, because in every European republic, ancient and modern, in which it has been tried, it has terminated disastrously, and been productive of corruption, injustice, violence, tyranny. . . .

I wish to preserve our senate as the representative of the landed interest. I wish those who have an interest in the soil, to retain the exclusive possession of a branch of the legislature, as a strong hold in which they may find safety through all the vicissitudes which the state may be destined, in the course of Providence, to experience. . . .

The men of no property, together with the crowds of dependents connected with the great manufacturing and commercial establishments, may, perhaps, at some future day, under skilful management, predominate in the assembly, and yet we should be perfectly safe if no laws could pass without the free consent of the owners of the soil. That security we at present enjoy; and it is that security which I wish to retain.

The tendency of universal suffrage, is to jeopardize the rights of property, and the principles of liberty. There is a constant tendency in human society, and the history of every age proves it; there is a tendency in the poor to covet and to share the plunder of the rich; in the debtor to relax or avoid the obligation of contracts; in the majority to tyrannize over the minority and trample down their rights; in the indolent and the profligate, to cast the whole burthens of society upon the industrious and the virtuous; and there is a tendency in ambitious and wicked men, to inflame these combustible materials.  

Kent, it will be observed, seemed to be making the following assumption: the property owners were an industrious and virtuous minority group of creditors; the nonproperty owners were an indolent and profligate majority group of debtors. He was probably speaking in the heat of passion, but his feeling that freeholders

were more important to society than other men was not uncommon. After all, that great democrat, Jefferson, held an agrarian society in higher esteem than one in which trade, finance, and industry predominated. But dispraise of trade was nothing new. Kent was illustrating a prejudice that had been expressed and condemned in the United States as early as 1798 by William Manning.

The reason why a free government has always failed is from the unreasonable demands and desires of the few. They can’t bear to be on a level with their fellow creatures, or submit to the determinations of a legislature where (as they call it) the swinish multitude are fairly represented, but sicken at the idea, and are ever hankering and striving after monarchy or aristocracy where the people have nothing to do in matters of government but to support the few in luxury and idleness.6

In the United States the prejudice in favor of the propertied class has often been accompanied by the prestige given to old families as contrasted with new ones and, until recent times, to North European ancestry as contrasted with Mediterranean or Central European. Such social inequality was most clearly seen in our immigration quotas. Along with it, as far as prestige is involved, one’s professional status determined social privileges—lawyers, physicians, and scholars ranking businessmen and laborers, the white-collar worker ranking the blue-collar worker, and in each group a pecking order well recognized by its members.

There has also been a definite social and at times political inequality determined by one’s religious affiliation. Roger Williams was the first to attempt to eliminate this, but the disfranchisement of Jews and Roman Catholics was common in most of the colonies. Maryland at its foundation enfranchised Catholics, but the other colonies followed the example of England. And anti-Catholic prejudice did not die out when Catholics were permitted to vote. The war cry of “Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion”

was heard as late as 1884, and it was feared in 1960 that John F. Kennedy’s election “would put the Pope in the White House.” In fact, the realization that a Catholic could be elected president seemed to be startling news at the time. As for the Jews, their inequality to Christians used to appear in appointments to university chairs, and still appears in some cities when a Jew is looking for a house to live in. But even within Christianity there is an order of rank among the Protestant sects, though it varies from locality to locality. “All one body we” seems to do well enough in a hymn, but it is seldom carried out as a program.

The intellectual and racial inequalities have been too well publicized to be more than mentioned. But some states have disfranchised the illiterate and made it almost impossible for Negroes to vote. It is absurd to speak about equality when one penalty is meted out to a white man and another to a Negro, though both may be convicted of the same crime. Similarly, there is no equality when ingenuity is expended on ways of humiliating a man because of his color and regardless of his personal character or professional attainments. Inequalities in knowledge might be thought of as justifying inequalities in suffrage, but racial differences have been known to throw intellectual equality out of balance. In fact, when Andrew Johnson was faced with the problem of extending the franchise to the liberated slaves, he suggested that test of fitness be the ability to read the Constitution of the United States in English, to write one’s name, to own real estate valued at more than $250 and pay taxes thereon. This, he said, would “completely disarm the adversary,” meaning the northern members of Congress, “and set an example the other states would follow.”

Other states did follow and with lamentable results.

Literacy tests did not suffice to exclude the would-be Negro voter. The members of the Virginia Convention of 1901–2 were frankly told that it “would not be a sufficient safeguard, because

illiteracy is fast disappearing among the negroes."  

Hence recourse was had to "the understanding clause." The chairman of the committee is quoted as saying, "I expect the examination with which the black man will be confronted to be inspired by the same spirit that inspires every man upon this floor and in this convention. I do not expect an impartial administration of this clause." 

The judges who administered the test of whether a man understood the Constitution were free to be as severe as they pleased, or as lenient. Their aim was to disfranchise the Negro by whatever means were available.

But Negroes were not alone in being disfranchised. To begin with, only twelve states allowed women to vote in 1918, and the Nineteenth Amendment was not adopted until 1920. Catholics could not vote in Rhode Island, in spite of Williams' liberalism, as late as 1767; in New York both Catholics and Jews were disfranchised, though it appears that the letter of the law was not always observed; and even in Maryland, founded though it was by Catholics, a Catholic was not allowed to vote in the 1770's. The Know-Nothing Party did its best to exclude the foreign-born from the polls, but its best was ineffectual, for a precedent had been set by Wisconsin as early as 1848 in permitting even aliens to vote after they had declared their intention of being naturalized. There aliens could vote before they became citizens. Some states, fifteen in number, excluded paupers, usually meaning inmates of almshouses, poor farms, and publicly supported institutions. Various types of criminals were disfranchised. But it is interesting that as of 1860 criminals could vote in Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Vermont, though Negroes were disfranchised in many of the same states.

8. Ibid., p. 217.
10. See Table III in Porter, History of Suffrage, p. 148. Cf. Chilton Wil-
The main political inequality that stimulated movements for reform was economic. That voters must own a certain amount of real estate was fairly generally the case, and as states became industrialized and cities grew in population, the test eliminated a large proportion of the adult white males from the polls. But it was also believed, as John Jay is reported to have said, that those who owned the country ought to govern it. In the state of Rhode Island the dispute came to a head in 1842 when Thomas W. Dorr, relying on the principle of popular sovereignty, decided that too small a fraction of the people was running the state. He and his followers organized, wrote a new constitution, set themselves up as a new government with Dorr as governor, and even attempted armed rebellion. But it came to nothing.

Rhode Island at that time was governed under the old colonial charter with only slight modifications. Dorr's constitution was called "The People's Constitution." It is interesting to observe that "the acquisition of property" was added to the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Art. I, 2). The suffrage was granted to every white male citizen of the United States who satisfied certain residence requirements, but excluded members of the armed forces, paupers, the insane, and criminals. Moreover, only electors owning $150 worth of property who had paid their taxes could vote on any question of taxation or of the expenditure of public moneys. This no longer seems very revolutionary, but to its opponents it meant that it "would admit to the vote naturalized citizens who were often Irish Catholics," whereas the tradition at that time "upheld the standards of

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11. See Williamson, American Suffrage, p. 244.
12. The story is told in detail by Jacob Frieze, a one-time follower of Dorr, in a pamphlet called A Concise History of the Efforts to obtain an Extension of Suffrage in Rhode Island from the Year 1811 to 1842. This work went into at least three editions, the last I have seen being 1912.
middle-class agrarian, Protestant, native-born Rhode Islanders.”  

There was probably (I do not say certainly) a vestige of the old feeling that those who do not own property are shiftless and lazy and, what is more serious, uninterested in the welfare of the commonwealth, coupled obviously with anti-Catholic and anti-Negro bias. It was a long way from Roger Williams, who said that no uniformity of religion had been required by God and who declared that the government of his colony was to be a democracy.  

The equality that was sought by most egalitarians was to be actualized in universal suffrage. Innate inequalities, those which Rousseau attributed to nature, had to be accepted with resignation. Economic inequalities could be alleviated by self-help, industry, and, later, organization. Religious and racial prejudice might perhaps be diminished, if not eliminated, by education. But the triumph of egalitarianism is still in the future, and our inalienable rights are still to be universally recognized. The question is bound to arise of why anyone should have wanted all men to be equal in view of the obvious inequalities to be seen everywhere and in all ranks of society. No very satisfactory answer can be given to this question but one can suggest certain motivations of a literary sort.

To begin with there was the biblical text that proclaimed mankind to have been created in the image and likeness of God. This seemed to hold good of all men, regardless of race or social mark. If one actually believed this text, surely one’s attitude toward one’s fellowmen would have to be one of respect. Then there was the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, accompanied by the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself. The early

13. See Williamson, American Suffrage, p. 255.
Christian communities seem to have made an effort to practice charity, and charity as brotherly love made no distinction of persons. During the Middle Ages, even when slavery was accepted, the clergy tried to emphasize this. Furthermore, there was that strange tradition of the natural light, the *lumen naturale*, which even Descartes did not doubt, and which granted to all men equal intelligence in rational matters. One of the most compendious statements of this position, as far as America goes, is that of John Wise in his *Vindication of the Government of the New England Churches* (1717). He says,

> [A democracy] is a form of government which the light of nature does highly value and often directs as most agreeable to the just and natural prerogatives of human beings. This was of great account in the early times of the world. And not only so, but upon the experience of several thousand years, after the world had been tumbled and tossed from one species of government to another, at a great expense of blood and treasure, many of the wise nations of the world have sheltered themselves under it again; or at least have blendished and balanced their governments with it. . . . The natural equality of men amongst men must be duly favored; in that government was never established by God or nature to give one man a prerogative to insult over another. . . . Honor all men.16

Here one finds a recognition of the natural light, of democracy in church government as a consequence, of social equality, and of general respect for humankind.

Over a hundred years later Channing was to say very much the same thing.

It is because I have learned the essential equality of men before the common Father, that I cannot endure to see one man establishing his arbitrary will over another by fraud, or force, or wealth, or rank, or superstitious claims. . . . It is because I see in him a great nature, the divine image, and vast capacities, that I demand for him means of self-development, spheres for free action—that I call society not to fetter, but to aid his growth.17

But here the plea for equality is based on man’s common likeness to God. Since God is self-rulled, so must His image be. This should have led Channing into the perfectionism of John Humphrey Noyes, but he stopped short of that. It was apparently enough for him that we all accept our common brotherhood. Channing forgot that the first pair of brothers known to history was broken by murder.

Nevertheless, the religious motivation persisted in the United States. One has but to remember the various communities that were founded—Brook Farm, Oneida, the Shaker villages, and for that matter, Deseret—to see how prevalent the religious stimulus was. And what other motive can one attribute to people like Jane Addams, to the preaching of a man like Jacob Riis, or to the sympathy of Dreiser, Sandburg, and Masters, “with their lost and buffeted characters”? 18 Social service could be explained, I imagine, on economic grounds, just as it was criticized as paternalism. But though boys’ clubs, settlement houses, public libraries, free schools, and playgrounds are not a solution of economic inequalities, the question might be asked whether that is their purpose. There was of course a good bit of sentimental talk about social service, as when George D. Herron announced that “the Sermon on the Mount is the science of society.” 19 But in spite of that, the supporters of the various humanitarian movements were engaged in a religious enterprise. One could hardly be criticized for satisfying one’s sense of charity. 20

Along with this there was a regard for the individual as such, as having a right—and perhaps a duty—to be himself. Emerson, who was the most influential spokesman for this point of view, in

20. The influence of the pulpit on the growth of “republican” sentiment as early as the seventeenth century has been beautifully shown in Alan Heimert’s Religion and the American Mind, esp. chapter 10.
his speech on “The Young American,” given on February 7, 1844, recognized and insisted upon differences in ability. “In every society,” he said, “some men are born to rule and some to advise.” Each shade of character has its place in the whole and presumably each man can discover for himself what that place is and proceed to fill it. He says nothing here about the pressures of school, custom, the family, the neighbors, but perhaps he thinks that will power can resist them. Emerson had so high a regard for particularity that he said in “Self-Reliance,” “I would write on the lintels of my door-post, Whim.” In short, like Walt Whitman, he felt that no man was obliged to be even consistent. One had a right to change from moment to moment in spite of hitching one’s wagon to a star. “Nothing,” he said, again in “Self-Reliance,” “is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. . . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. . . . The only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it.” This is atomizing society into its individual members and, consistent with this extremism, Emerson recognized no obligation to the poor.

There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison if need be; but your miscellaneous popular charities; the education at college of fools; the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which many now stand; alms to sots; the thousand-fold Relief Societies;—though I confess with shame I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked dollar, by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold.

It may well have been Emerson’s affection for the particular that led him in “The American Scholar” to emphasize cultural nationalism. The emphasis goes back to Herder who, for analogous reasons, tried to liberate Germany from Mediterranean civilization. The People now, as among the lovers of ballads, folk songs, folklore, were not the totality of human beings, but were fragmented

into nations. Each nation, like each type of individual, had a right to be itself, regardless of its previous condition or general history. And just as every character was to all intents and purposes as worthy of respect as every other, so there was no esteeming one national culture above any other. European culture as a whole, it was usually agreed, derived from Judea and Greece. But during the nineteenth century local differences were becoming respectable and there was apparently no longer a single Occident. More and more Americans were to accentuate their differences from Europeans. Such phrases as “the American dream,” “the American way of life,” “Americanism,” plus “Americanization” and “manifest destiny,” all indicated that somehow or other a new kind of civilization, not just another example of the old kind, would evolve. The supposed crudities, the materialism, the comic accents, were to be embraced and not repudiated. Europeans might not like it all, and few of them did, but that was of no importance. Proponents of this point of view asserted the equality of kinds and transcended individuals. It was the sort of formula that justified, when necessary, regionalism, states’ rights, religious sectarianism, in fact all forms of collective particularism. But, ironically enough, as the twentieth century developed, conscription in two wars, a national press stifling all local papers, syndicated editorial opinion, communication networks, and national advertising, helped to unify mores and tastes, to say nothing of ideas, and the struggle for individual self-assertion had to be begun all over again.

With the election of Jefferson egalitarianism as a slogan, if not as a program, was reinforced. From 1801 to 1841 all presidents with the exception of John Quincy Adams were Democrats, and of them Andrew Jackson became a symbol of the rough, honest, intuitively wise son of the soil, presumably superior to the sons of landed proprietors. Even Emerson, that fastidious scholar, was able to “embrace the common,” “explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low.” In this he joined ranks with Walt Whitman, with the crackerbox philosophers, and furthered the tradition
which had gained popular support through Tom Paine's *Common Sense* and the *Rights of Man*. These men wanted full political equality, at least for whites, if not for Negroes and Indians, but they also wanted social equality. It was all very well for John Adams to speak of the "rude man" as "shiftless, ignorant, spendthrift," the swinish multitude was asserting itself and losing all sense of inferiority, if indeed it ever had had any. It was this self-assertion that shocked visitors like Mrs. Trollope and gave an air of crudity to American manners. The lampoons even of Jefferson show that the feeling was not confined to Europeans.

The myth of Andrew Jackson as a farmer working his own land was a concentrated emblem of this spirit. Here the distinction between the educated and the uneducated man was done away with. The old cultural primitivism that made innate wisdom superior to acquired, implied that lack of schooling was not identical with lack of brains. The Germans had made a distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, a distinction that in America was sometimes labeled the head and the heart, and the wisdom of the heart, or *Vernunft*, was the better. The philosophers who played upon this were far from being of the crackerbox genus and would have been astonished to see what use had been made of their doctrines. But they would have had no right to be astonished. One of the strongest threads of the Protestant tradition was the irrelevance of schooling to religious understanding, and even popes, for that matter, had been known to depreciate scholarship. Alan Heimert has shown how the anti-intellectualistic strain had appeared in the colonies as early as the middle eighteenth century. And though the more refined members of the clergy objected to

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25. How this was utilized in argument is clearly expounded in Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Reason, the Understanding, and Time*.
the hysteria stirred up by evangelists like Whitefield, they had to admit that the Spirit of the Lord was in such preachers. A moment's reflection will show that this type of anti-intellectualism has never died out in the United States. The professor is still an object of ridicule, and it is still customary to prefer practice to theory, as if the two could actually be separated.

In describing Jackson as the type of self-made man, Professor Ward has said, "For the early nineteenth century Jackson objectified the belief that a man could overcome all obstacles and rise from obscurity to greatness." 28 The greatness of Jackson was proved not only by the Battle of New Orleans but also by his having been elected to the presidency. All this was political, not moral or intellectual, greatness. The slogan "From Log Cabin to White House" became in time a program for every American boy. To be president was an ideal. But it was not the only ideal. There was also the ideal of commercial and industrial eminence. There was the ideal preached by R. H. Conwell in his sermon "Acres of Diamonds": "I say you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich. . . . There is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings, or by the shortcomings of someone else. It is all wrong to be poor, anyhow." 29 This was not very different from the moral of the Horatio Alger stories. Alger's poor boys, often the sons of widows, make good by their own efforts. Character, persistence, industriousness, these were the qualities by means of which a man might make himself. But while one group was putting the onus of success on the

29. "Acres of Diamonds," pp. 18, 21. This point of view was anticipated by the Rev. Thomas P. Hunt in The Book of Wealth; in which it is Proved from the Bible that it is the Duty of Every Man to become Rich. Later, in 1910, Lyman Abbott in an article called "Righteousness" (Outlook, March 12, p. 576) wrote that the Parable of the Talents proved that "Jesus Christ was one of the men who think that it is right to be rich." See Irvin Gordon Wyllie, The Cult of the Self-Made Man, 1830–1910, unpublished doctoral dissertation for the University of Wisconsin.
individual alone, another was organizing to give the individual the means essential to making the effort. I am not speaking here of settlement houses and social service, but of the very large program of free education running from the first grade in primary school through the university, supplemented by generous scholarships, fellowships, and grants in aid of research. It has been this movement, along with the labor movement, that has put most members of American society on the same level. There is still plenty of inequality to be eliminated if one wishes to do so. But at least one can say that the Welfare State has made it an avowed purpose to eliminate inequality, whether political, economic, social, or intellectual. How far it will succeed is another question, for those natural inequalities of which Rousseau was aware will probably always exist, and it need not be forgotten that among such is the desire to obey rather than to command. The submissive individual, humble, self-effacing, shunning responsibility, has something of the quality of the saint. He finds his place in the Church, for there he is honored. But in the world he is doomed to be the burden bearer, and he wears no halo. He may not starve, for someone or some institution will feed him; he will vote but vote a straight ticket; he will read but will guide his choice of books by the book reviews. A new myth will be developed to justify his existence and give him a feeling of security. We see it emerging in the pride we take in being “common men.”

To be a common man, to be a 100 per cent American, or to be a perfect example of any other category, is an ideal. But ideals of that sort have a power that is as strong as that of anything concrete. And during the last three quarters of the nineteenth century it became an important political as well as social slogan. So far as its embodiment in action is concerned, however, the seeds of its
decay were planted while it was at its point of greatest influence.

After the Industrial Revolution got under way, class warfare and, naturally, class consciousness arose and there was an uneasy balance in the minds of the working class between devotion to the nation and devotion to one's fellow workers. It was part of the propaganda of the popular leaders to play down nationalism and to accentuate the common interests of the "workers of the world." It was even hoped before the opening of World War I that the representatives of the working class would refuse to vote credits for armaments and thus would prevent the outbreak of that catastrophe. But that hope came to nothing. German workers shot at French and English workers just as the sons of the nobility did. And though there were plenty of writers to declare that World War II was a civil war, that declaration was as futile as earlier slogans had been. The outstanding exceptions—there were conscientious objectors in both wars—were members of the various communist parties who until the Soviet Union was attacked by Hitler were vociferous in their objections to what they termed an imperialists' war. But once the situation changed they became as nationalistic as their bourgeois brethren. The war was then a People's War against Fascist tyrants.

We have seen in these essays how the term, "The People," has fluctuated in its denotation, being at times the Plebs, the mob, male citizens of voting age and with the proper amount of real estate, and at one time even the princes of the empire.\(^30\) During all these changes few writers had anything good to say of the

\(^{30}\) Cf. Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages*: "When the fourteenth century writer [Marsilius of Padua] spoke of the *populus* he was thinking only of its *senior pars*, the princes and magnates who were held to represent the whole community" (p. 196). And again: "The people can act only with and through the magnates, not against them. The *communitas imperii* therefore comes to mean nothing but the princes, forming an autonomous body" (p. 198). And finally: "Princely liberty meant what it said: complete freedom of action for the princes and for nobody else, whilst popular movements came automatically under the heading of sedition and subversion" (p. 199).
People, and popular taste, like popular opinion, was identified with bad taste and thoughtless opinion. One might grant political power to an individual or social class without on that account endowing it with intellectual, moral, or aesthetic insight. But it is clear, I hope, that this is precisely what was granted to the People when the People became the Masses or the Working Class, and esteem for their wisdom increased as their political power increased.

When one begins to speculate on how this came about, one first thinks of the relatively novel notion of the dignity of labor. In the book of Genesis, 3:19, labor is a punishment for Adam's sin, though in chapter 2 he had been put in the Garden to tend it. On the whole men thought of work as unpleasant, if not downright painful. Aristotle had already laid it down as a principle that manual labor was degrading, and in Latin literature manual arts were inherently lower than liberal arts. In fact, in ancient times most manual labor was performed by slaves. Men have generally sought a life of leisure as their goal, and the only hard work which was considered worthy of a gentleman was warfare. Warfare was of course extolled and, though the actual fighting involved as much sweat and muscle as farming or carpentry, the sanction of its being self-protection seems to have given it a place in a class by itself.

In the monasteries a certain amount of labor was prescribed, field work for the most part. But the idea that the monks spent their time at hard labor is erroneous; they spent their time at various things, and the orders themselves varied in what they demanded of their members. When a monastery owned slaves, the monks did little work, and some monks, the mendicants, did none at all. Nevertheless, the tradition developed that the monastic life was one of penance, and that part of the penance consisted in labor. After the Gothic Revival of the early nineteenth century, monastic life was glamorized and one had a picture of the monks engaged in painting pictures, making stained glass, putting frescoes
on the walls of churches, and doing it *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Coulton has shown how exaggerated this picture is. But the fact remains that it led directly to a cult of handicraft and, in men like William Morris and later Eric Gill, to work with one’s hands became almost a religious duty. Thus a sentimental regard for the manual laborer appeared along with depreciation of the machine. That it was the machine which gave men time for manual labor was usually forgotten.\textsuperscript{31} Work now took on a new aspect, and it was logical enough for Morris to preach a brand of socialism, for he made no distinction between the labor of the artisan and the labor of the mill hand. And since the lot of the laboring man was incontestably bad and humanitarianism was on the increase, since political economists began to see that individual charity would never succeed in giving the laborer the decency his human nature deserved, to invest labor itself with dignity was a natural enough outcome. There was nothing dignified in the life of the English mill hand, man, woman, or child, and one suspects that the attribution was a sort of sop to the working man to give him the impression that he too had a place in the social hierarchy, and a necessary place. But when a man feels that he is necessary, he will demand recognition of his contribution to the body politic. It was to be expected that political democracy would spread, and before many years were past social democracy was to be added to political.

This evolution was not inevitable. It was made possible by the organization of labor into unions which demanded and got compensation in the form of higher wages, shorter hours, and finally various fringe benefits. There was a recognition on the part of those immediately concerned of the interdependence of capital and labor. This was so obvious that it might have been recognized somewhat earlier, but since labor had no means of making its demands felt, the obvious interdependence had no effect on changing

\textsuperscript{31} Morris, of course, did not invent the Gospel of Work. That originated as far as literature goes in Carlyle’s *Past and Present*.
the social order. It was the idea of the class war that turned the trick. And whatever one may think of the desirability and justice of strikes, one had to admit that as the years advanced strikes produced the results that labor wanted. The laboring class found that its standard of living was steadily rising and, as of today and in the United States, it has become absurd to speak of the working man in terms that were current in the eighteenth century. Such terms are obsolete. One might object to the word “dignity” as applied to the conduct of some labor leaders, but dignity is obsolescent also and it is rather social rank that is in question.

In the United States, except in the South, everyone is supposed to “do” something. The leisure class as a class is so tiny that it has no effect on the general level of taste and morals. It is taken for granted that everyone, even men of wealth, has some sort of job, and, since the enfranchisement of women, almost the entire adult population has been at work. The demand for manual labor has decreased noticeably as work is being done more and more by machines. It has become almost impossible to find individuals willing to undertake jobs that were formerly common, such as domestic service, gardening, driving cars, and the like. Work is not only easier than it used to be, but pleasanter, and the average American takes it for granted that when he reaches a certain age he will go to work. As a working man he is no longer isolated from his fellow citizens. He has all the advantages of everyone else and there seems to be little effort made to deprive him of them. What effort is made in that direction is exerted to prevent the Negro from living the life of other citizens. But even in that area history is moving fast.

Industrialization has fused large numbers of individuals into groups conscious that they have a common interest. As soon as industry left the cottage for the factory, this change began. But cottage industry was gone for good since it could not possibly turn out enough products for the demands of the consumers. This might not have been true if England, for example, had remained
without colonies, but the colonies were a market for English goods and a market that was to be respected. The entrepreneur found himself caught in his own devices. On the one hand he had to produce large quantities of goods, and on the other he could do so only by recognizing his dependence on labor. As soon as labor, for its part, recognized this simple truth, it used its power; and now in every industrialized society it wields a power which a hundred years ago was only a dream.

As industry has evolved it has utilized technological innovations which have moved the laborer towards the so-called white-collar status. To symbolize modern labor by a hammer and sickle is anachronistic. Push buttons and switches would be more to the point. There is nothing grimy about the modern factory. It is clean and orderly and the machines work under the supervision of only a few men and women. The main annoyance is the noise, but since the noise is no worse in the factory than in the home, where nine times out of ten a radio or television set is turned on, no one is in a state of acute suffering when at work. It is of course true that not all workingmen are in so delightful a situation. There are still women on their feet for eight hours a day in the large retail stores, builders high on their scaffolds in cold or heat, road builders operating heavy machinery. None of this is idyllic. But on the whole the working class, as a class, is in a position of control. The strike is no longer merely a threat to management; it is a weapon used more against the consumer, who is powerless to grant the demands of the worker. It is thus anachronistic too, for since industry is now country-wide, and labor is industry-wide, the consumer cannot refuse to buy from producers who are being closed down by strikers and buy elsewhere. There is no elsewhere. If there is a strike in the steel industry, building halts. If there is a strike in the telephone network, communication halts. In such cases it is not management that suffers, but the public. And since the public includes both members of the managing and of the working class, everyone suffers at the same time. Hence the next
step—and I am not alone in prophesying this—will be the participation of labor in management, the frank admission that both parties are in partnership.

It is clear that we are seeing the People transformed into Labor. In some countries there are Labor parties, but in the United States there is no need for one. Both parties recognize the power of organized labor and unorganized labor hardly exists. Moreover, in the United States one is used to invisible parties, or power groups, lobbies of all sorts which constitute a fourth power in the government. This is deplored by some, but their criticisms have had no effect. Churches, military organizations, patriotic societies, veterans associations, industrial groups, almost any interest that can be organized is organized and acts as a lobby to bring pressure on Congress to pass the kind of legislation that will satisfy it. The only thing that is new about this is our frank admission that it exists. In the Old Regime the Court, the Clergy, and probably the Bank, always had power and used it. But their power was exercised in the dark. Moreover, lobbies were not so numerous, since the number of interests that were recognized as worthy of satisfaction was smaller. It is the United States which has brought the lobby to fulfillment. Whereas on the continent of Europe (though not in Great Britain) there are political parties by the dozen to take care of special interests, in the United States it is preferred to keep the two-party system on the surface and allow the other parties to operate as lobbies.

When the People are identified with Labor, as when they might be with management or the clergy or the armed services, the individuals who are not of the laboring class, for there is always some degree of heterogeneity in every society, are almost without political power. They can, of course, vote, but they have to vote for those candidates who are agreeable to the dominant social class. It is unlikely, as a factual matter, that any candidate proposed by a minority group, if elected to a major office, would
be able to carry out legislation that ran counter to the interests of the dominant group. One observes this when an intellectual, a university professor, is elected to Congress. He gets elected by obeisance to the machine or never gets re-elected. There are occasionally individuals, like Woodrow Wilson, who become a sort of Third Force. He was elected because the Republican Party was split. His opponents, Roosevelt and Taft, polled almost a million and a half votes more than he did. He was the choice of a minority, though the candidate of a major party. But once in office, he was shrewd enough to speak for a group whose power was growing. And in his second campaign his slogan was, "He kept us out of war," a slogan which was rejected a month after his inauguration.

The notion of a two-party system includes the objection to a third party. No one objects to the idea of a loyal opposition, except those to whom it is opposed, but there is no reason why a third party, if it actually represents interests that can be satisfied by legislation, should be silenced. Yet no third party has ever succeeded in becoming an important force in American national elections. I assume, but can hardly prove, that this is because there are no deeply felt political sentiments among Americans. It has often been remarked that there are no differences between the platforms of the major parties. This may be because Americans satisfy their needs nonpolitically; the tradition of individualism is too strong for there to be any deeply rooted class-consciousness. There is group-consciousness aplenty. Social bonds are firmest in churches, then in the various societies, clubs, associations, fraternities, to which individuals belong. But there is little evidence that such membership is admitted to be a social tag. And since everyone works, and the combined AFL-CIO has more political power

32. The irony of the situation is brought out by G. William Domhoff in Who Rules America?, which shows how national, but not local, problems are settled by a minority.
than any other organization, and since its members traverse parties, its pressure on Congress is strong enough to make the possibility of a Labor Party nil.

There is another feature of American culture which is relevant—that is, urbanization. The urban population of the United States, according to the 1960 census, was 69.9 per cent, and varied from 80.2 per cent in the northeast to 58.5 per cent in the South. The tradition of the village lingered on in the northeast and was carried into the Middle West and the Northwest by the settlers who came, on the whole, from upper New York State and New England. There was and is plenty of snobbery in urban areas, but there are no landed proprietors, owners or descendants of former owners of plantations. Hence distinctions of social class, as distinguished from economic class, are vague, and the dream of rising from rags to riches is realized frequently enough to become folklore. It is hard to keep a person in his place in a city; he has any place he can afford to occupy. And though the corner grocer, where he still exists, or the barber, may not be thought of as the cream of the cream, he is not educated to think of himself as lower in any sense of the word than anyone else. I doubt that any American would be capable of thinking of himself as "not quite top drawer," as so many characters in English novels do.

The point is that the city is taking the place of both the village and the plantation but the transition is not yet completed. The individualism of the town meeting has become as obsolete as cottage industry, but the feeling of being any man's equal is far from obsolescent. Urbanization forces the individual into the mass, compresses him into social solidarity. The very fact that everything he does is now done by large numbers of his associates might be thought to overcome every shred of personal difference. The congregations of churches are no longer two or three gathered together in His name; they are hordes. The media of entertainment cater to millions, not to scores. Two or three newspapers at a maximum, and in some cities only one, peddle the same news
and the same editorial opinions to all readers alike. The shops
all sell the same goods and the goods themselves are manufactured
for all parts of the country. Even the gladiatorial combats on the
baseball diamond or the football gridiron belong, so to speak, to
the City. They belong in the sense that they symbolize the ath¬
letic interests of the community as a whole. When the Orioles
win the pennant, it is the city of Baltimore that wins, and every­
one, except a handful of “loners,” is excited and proud. The in­
habitants of the city are supposed to support their team as if some
deeply seated interest of each man were bound up in the team’s
success. So important is this that the President of the United
States has to throw the first ball of the season in the capital. If
we Americans had a Pindar, he would write odes to celebrate the
Giants, the Dodgers, the Orioles, and so on. But our Pindars write
for TV and radio.

This ought to lead to the utter suppression of the individual.
But it has not done so. For there are so many subsocial groups
with which a man can be identified that he may be at one with
his neighbor as far as the city’s baseball team is concerned but at
odds with him as far as his lodge, his church, his service club are
concerned. Christian sects, which might seem to be the easiest to
amalgamate, proliferate in the United States. There are two hun­
dred and forty-six religious sects exclusive of Roman Catholics and
Jews. If we derive all these from the Reformation, we may surmise
that religious individualism has survived in America because of the
ingrained notion of freedom of conscience. Actually there is very
little religious prejudice, and there seems to be a tacit understand­
ing that any kind of theist is to be tolerated. The only restriction
is that he share his religious beliefs with others; he must not be
so free in his thinking that he is a solitary worshiper. That is, he
must belong to some church; any church will do. One thus has
individualism within corporate solidarity. And it is this that prob­
ably lies at the root of our striving for leadership. One can be an
individualist in the sense that one searches for autarky in its ancient
sense of complete independence of all externals, people as well as things. But one can also be an individualist in the sense of being the head man, the leader, the man with initiative, the captain, the inventor. It is this latter type who would seem to be more typical of the American urban man, for the former scarcely exists. Sometimes this passion for outstanding importance takes on a ludicrous aspect, when the mere mention of one's name in the local newspaper suffices to confer distinction. If the name is accompanied by a photograph, so much the better. But I have probably said enough to make my point, and should I go further it would land me in a bog of coarse satire.

The Voice of the People, then, in a typically urban culture is no more strictly described than in any other. But there are two more comments that may be useful in discussing it. First, the Voice of God has tended to be de-emphasized. The Voice of the People is not so much justified by its relation to a divine source as by its inherent rightness. Whether this is because one hesitates to identify certain popular decisions with divine decrees in view of their weakness, or because God has lost the prestige He used to have, I do not know. In any event majority rule is seldom if ever disputed. It is held to be self-justified. Second, the technique of inducing the People to say what you want them to say has been developed to a point beyond which it would seem impossible to advance. Advertising or psychological warfare or brain-washing, whichever name is the most pleasing, has caused large numbers of individuals to accept as their own opinions ideas that originate in small offices or committees. The technique is sometimes that of mob rule, based on turning every issue into a crusade against a hidden enemy. The hidden enemy is usually some subsocial group easily identified by color or race, accused of all the crimes in the calendar. Hatred is the most cohesive social cement, and apparently it can be whipped up without too much effort into something approaching frenzy. When one has heard people who are apparently sane accusing the Chief Justice of the Supreme
Court of treason because of his respect for the Bill of Rights, one realizes how irresponsible such accusations can become. And when one overlooks the definition of treason as clearly stated in the Constitution and finds that the accusation is based on the Justice’s strict interpretation of the Fifth Amendment, one wonders what influence American education has had upon its pupils. But this is only one example among many. Works of art and styles of art, educational fads, medical nostrums, philosophic fashions, no matter what, can be popularized by the well-known tricks of advertising. The American love of belonging to societies is of course a great help. One’s mail is heavy with appeals to join groups—upon payment of dues—whose purposes turn out to be support of the group regardless of its efficacy. The average American seems to enjoy merging his psyche into a collective psyche. This seems to be enough. There is no need to argue that one must fight for popular opinion because it emanates from God. The fact that it is popular suffices. But the added fact that it is made popular by individuals whose business is precisely to make it popular, that is never emphasized.

It is possible that the acclamations of the crowd that aided in the election of bishops, or the suffragia of the Comitia, were spontaneous and unsolicited, though I doubt it. But in our own times that which takes the place of such outbursts of enthusiasm is surely not the spontaneous expression of any sentiment or idea, but simply results from the manipulation of a mass of human beings made to believe that they are acting freely. It is known that the very phrasing of a question will determine the kind of answer that will be given to it. A small committee which is expert in posing the right questions can determine the People’s Voice without any help from God. One turns back to the first Book of Samuel and one realizes that collective opinion will always overcome reason and common sense, in the future as it has now for some 2500 years. Vox populi vox signiferi.