

The American Personality.

BY GARTH GODFREY.

Francis Bellamy, in a late Saturday Evening Post, says that since our astonishing victories we have seen all Europe salute our powers; and give a tardy recognition to our matchless resources. But the distaste of many thinking Europeans for the American personality is unchanged, in spite of their new respect for the republic as a military power. Mr. Bellamy very seriously adds: "Possibly it might be wise to look patiently at the question of our unpopularity abroad;" and he goes on to say that America came forward as a nation of ideals, which the American people "forsake for the least worthy of the Old World customs and traditions."

However carefully worded may be the condemnation concerning the offensiveness of the American personality few of us will acknowledge having the insensibility of the man who was "kicked down stairs with so much grace that he thought he had been invited up."

Ruskin says that insensibility is the most fatal confession of vulgarity; and what after all is insensibility but an inability to perceive and reverence high ideals?

Has not the material prosperity of America and the respect paid to it by Europeans made the American believe that nothing is better or higher or more to be desired than material prosperity?

The European who has in his veins "the blood of an hundred earls," and realizes that he is adequate to any position requiring high social conditions, may find himself without money enough to support the luxurious habits of his kind.

Straightway money becomes to him what a rope is to a drowning man; yet the unlettered peasant who furnishes the rope is not justified in thinking that ropes outweigh all the advantages of birth and breeding and manhood possessed by the drowning man.

The rope is indeed necessary to

save the man's life that he may use and enjoy his opportunities, but a man of sensibility would prefer death to bartering his fine manhood for mere animal life.

So money is necessary as a setting for a true aristocrat; yet it can never be a substitute for higher qualities and a more finished and perfected character.

The mistake of the American is in overlooking this, and forsaking high ideals of thought, of speech, and of behavior to make money, and exalt money as the real power and glory of the world. When he does this he coarsens himself.

He imagines that an overweening complacency is a mark of real superiority. He fancies that the power to satirise, bully or otherwise discomfort a fellow creature is the only power worth having.

He forsakes the high ideal of service for the low aim of vulgar supremacy. He mistakes flippancy for wit and utter boorishness for what he names "independence" or fancies is dignity.

He characterizes learning, talent, piety, genius or whatever is beyond his experience, as "crankiness."

The average typical American, as he appears to the European, is portrayed in the yankee who visited an Italian monastery and was shown, among other rare treasures, a vestal lamp whose flame had not been allowed to go out in three hundred years.

The reverend father who showed this treasure to the wealthy American doubtless fancied that this at least would excite reverence.

The story runs that the yankee looked at the lamp and remarked: "Ain't been out in three hundred years? Well, its out now," and he straightway blew out the flame and left the monk speechless with the horror of having encountered a "dreadful American."

This is the American personality that is the expression of all vulgarity,

—this utter insensibility of soul that does always the inappropriate thing, extinguished some sacred flame of hope or aspiration and rejoices in an atrocious consciousness of having been "smart."

This is the American personality which the Europeans justly complain; a personality that cannot distinguish between ideals and caricatures;—between calm dignity and and stolid insensibility; between the sparkle of keen wit and the foolish flippancy of mere rudeness; between rising to an emergency to gracefully meet it, and merely crowding in to say what no one cares to hear.

As "the nation of ideals," is it not time for us to understand that we have something to learn besides how to make money and keep it?

Are we not old enough and rich enough to "find time" to study the arts of a higher civilization than eating and dressing and rushing around and getting ourselves disliked by civilized people?

In short is it not high time for us to begin to improve the American personality? It can be done only by beginning each with himself.

PROSPECTIVE IMPROVEMENTS.

The old Anderson house on St. Johns ave., one of the pioneer residences erected by the Highland Park Building company will be moved so as to front on Sheridan Road by the owner, Mr. S. M. Millard. The former site will be utilized for the erection of a fine modern residence.

The property on St. Johns ave., just south of Mr. Millard's holding and owned by Mr. H. C. Basye, will be improved this spring. The owner proposes to erect four comfortable cottages to rent at moderate prices.

Plans are out for a fine residence to be erected by Mr. Messenger upon his desirable Prospect ave. property. The contracts are now being awarded.

The remodeling of the Central Hotel property is being industriously carried on under the direction of the owner, Mayor Evans.

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