

This surely is a work which women are peculiarly adapted to undertake and which offers them a rare opportunity for individual political self-expression in an essentially social medium. The great majority of energetic and successful men either already occupy or are striving to occupy important positions of power which enable them to control the operations of the centralized political and economic machinery. They have neither the time nor the inclination to interest themselves in neighborhood organization and parochial affairs. But the majority of energetic and intelligent women are still independent and will, if they are true to themselves, remain independent. They need opportunity for self-expression in politics which the political machines are not capable of satisfying.

They cannot obtain such opportunities unless they create for themselves new political households in which women voters who know each other and are interested in common neighborhood affairs gather around the same hearthstone for counsel, for mutual help, and if necessary for the discussion and settlement of disagreements. But they cannot provide by these means for their own political expression and education without providing also for a town hall which would shelter, warm up and nourish all the educative and progressive social activities of their neighborhoods. It is in this way only, that women can contribute to American politics something positive and novel, which at the present time men are very much less likely to contribute.

The League of Women Voters should consist essentially of a federation of such neighborhood political groups. Its vitality will depend finally upon the vitality of the educational and social work which its constituent local units are capable of achieving. It does not follow, of course, that these local societies can get along without some machinery of coordination. On the contrary, the activities of the local societies will need encouragement and direction from state and national headquarters; and the state and national headquarters will need at times to agitate on behalf of any program which expresses the consensus of conviction on the part of the neighborhood groups. The spirited and intelligent agitation which the New York State League of Women Voters conducted in the winter of 1920 at Albany on behalf of its welfare bills was the one redeeming feature of a legislative session which in other respects established a new record for political stupidity and obscurantism. But the State Leagues, although they must and should agitate on behalf of their programs as a necessary condition of giving reality to their work, should

none the less use the weapon of agitation with discretion. For the present they are not justified in being too aggressive. They will or should consist of a loose federation of neighborhood societies which are dedicated to the task of educating American women and in the end American men to develop by means of the sincere and candid discussion of their own local problems and differences something of a common national political consciousness.

Whose Flag is it?

WRITING of the open shop, "American Plan," the other day, Mr. Arno Dosch-Fleuret said that in traveling the United States to investigate labor conditions he found that certain manufacturers and employers had, so to speak, hogged the American flag. Mr. Fleuret said that in Butte he was walking to headquarters with some labor leaders and when he came to a big building that flew the Stars and Stripes he started to enter it. The labor leaders stopped him, saying, "Don't you see the flag of the American Plan?"

And now, it appears, there is to be another American Plan, this time in literature. A literary professor draped in the flag is rather a novelty, but the spectacle is to be observed in the January Atlantic Monthly, with Stuart P. Sherman in the star part. Under the benign title, *The National Genius*, Mr. Sherman coils himself and his conception of national culture right into the heart of the Stars and Stripes. It is essentially ludicrous, but it needs some untangling, or the realities that Mr. Sherman is exploiting may themselves become impaired.

The fight between Mr. Sherman and his critics is not a new one. This writer is well-known in his articles and books as an orthodox conservative in literature, leaning to authority and depending on standards, with More and Babbitt and Brownell as the men he follows. Among the persons he has formerly attacked are Dreiser and George Moore, on ethical grounds, and to these names he now adds Joel Spingarn, Ludwig Lewisohn, and for some strange reason W. L. George. But where the previous discussion centred on literary and social values, Mr. Sherman has now carried the fight into that uneasy political region inhabited by Americanism, and he has practically sought to interpose American patriotism between himself and the men who think that he is aesthetically arid, timid and deficient.

These tactics are not perhaps so unusual. Whenever the Old Gang is set upon in American politics

it is extremely likely to reorganize itself on the basis of Americanism, Optimism and Abraham Lincoln. An amusing illustration of this may be found in Chicago by examining the record of William Hale Thompson's forerunner in local politics, Fred M. Busse. When the Old Gang organized the Busy Busse Boosters, everyone who was not a Busy Booster was a highbrow, a goo-goo, a knocker or a pessimist. These tactics of machine politics as against critics and pessimists are now transferred by Mr. Sherman into the discussion of National Genius. It would be harmless if it did not try to enforce that particularist Americanism which in its essence requires exclusion, ill-will, pride and prejudice—Anti-Semitism, Anti-Germanism, Anti-Irishism, Anti-Russianism, anti-everything else.

The fallacy of identifying historic Americanism with the Puritans is itself hardly worth discussing. The Dutch settlers, the Ulstermen, the Swedes, the Quakers had each and all a contribution to make that was not Puritanical. George Washington and Alexander Hamilton were "forefathers" outside that tradition, and half the present population of the United States is admittedly foreign to that particular bourgeois English strain. It is, naturally, a strong strain, and one not always wisely criticized. A good deal has been said about "our forefathers," the Puritans, which must be deeply irritating to men like Mr. Sherman. Certainly Theodore Dreiser, although a writer who has made an immense contribution to American fiction, has said a few definitely silly things on the score of "our forefathers." But when men named Sherman are irritated by men named Dreiser or Spingarn or Lewisohn, are they to be permitted and encouraged to rant about the "Native American"? That is the real point raised by this article, to which the Atlantic Monthly gives leading place.

Mr. Dreiser, we are told with partial inaccuracy and total insolence, "denies a faith which in some fifty millions of native Americans survives the decay of dogma, and somehow, in attenuated form, keeps the country from going wholly to the dogs."

Mr. Spingarn, we are told, declares that beauty is not concerned with truth or morals or democracy. "He says what the American schoolboy knows to be false to the history of beauty in this country . . . Beauty, whether we like it or not, has a heart full of service."

Dreiser and Spingarn, it is plain, are outside "America." Mr. Sherman is inside "America"—Mr. Sherman, and all the other American schoolboys who know that beauty has a heart full of service. But the foreign devil is threatening the schoolboys. "If the young people were not misled by more or less alien-spirited guides, the national

genius itself would lead them into a larger life." And what, Brother Bones, is the national genius? Mr. Sherman goes for it to "our forefathers." It is what he and his friends believe, "we ordinary puritanical Americans." It doesn't mean "banishing or ignoring the austerer ministers, and making poetry, painting, and music perform a Franco-Turkish dance of invitation—it is not thus that the artist should expect to satisfy a heart as religious, as moral, as democratic as the American heart is, by its bitterest critics, declared to be." The national genius (thanks to Billy Sunday and others) manifests itself in religion and politics, "nourished and sustained by ancient traditions and strong racial proclivities." It is animated by a profound moral idealism. To buck it is "secession." These poets and novelists of Bohemia are "anxious to secede from the major efforts of their countrymen." They don't sympathize, these secessionists and rebels, with Americans "who bear the burden of the state, or are widely conversant with its business, or preside over its religious, moral, or educational undertakings. I do not intend in the least to suggest that the artist should become propagandist or reformer. . . . What one feels is rather that intercourse with such men might finally create in our artistic secessionists a consciousness of the ignobility of their aims."

It is not often that we have the nobility of American politicians and educators and business men held up to the ignoble artistic secessionists. But this is a consequence of Mr. Sherman's patriotic fervor and finally, as the acme of patriotism, he exhorts our artists to draw out and express in forms of appealing beauty "the purpose and meaning of this vast half-articulate land, so that our hosts of new and unlearned citizens may come to understand her as they understand divine compassion—by often kneeling before some shrine of the Virgin."

"Americanization" has seldom reached the sentimentality and priggishness of inviting the newcomer to come to this country on his knees. It is patriotism in rather a virulent form. The answer to it is obviously not to flog the dead horse of Puritanism. It is not to recall Mr. Sherman to Main Street which, as the Atlantic Monthly elsewhere says, *is* American—with "its provincial narrowness, its materialism, its malice, its servility, its smug egotism, its childish curiosity, its blind cruelty, and, on the other side of the ledger, its basic goodness of heart, its tenacity of character, its dogged and snail-like progress along the path of self-improvement." The merits or demerits of the American are not in question, but only the right of Sherman and Co. to speak for the native to men not New England in name.

To raise the American flag in front of the open shop or the closed mind is not, as we conceive it, "our forefathers'" plan. The national genius, happily enough, does not depend on lucubrations like Mr. Sherman's. The Sherman of 1880 was undoubtedly abusing the Walt Whitman whom this Sherman praises, and the Sherman of 1960 will in all probability be acclaiming that profoundly moral American Theodore Dreiser. What is obnoxious at present is not Mr. Sherman's actual discriminations against the anti-Puritans but the unhealthy patriotism with which he intertwines it. That sort of Americanism is the last resort of weaklings. We are moulding in this country a national tradition and a national genius, this is indisputable. And it is equally indisputable that certain forms of bad taste and unsocial attitude are repugnant to it, however disguised. But what Mr. Sherman does not understand is that America cannot, in the very nature of its own being, judge of taste and conduct by the alien criterion of "native" and "native-born." This, to use his own terminology, is thoroughly un-American. He must stand up against Spingarn, Lewisohn, Dreiser and the rest on his own merits as a critic. By imputing alien origin and alien ideals to them, he befouls his cause with his own unsocial attitude and bad taste.

Spoils and Principles

GOVERNOR MILLER'S inaugural message to the New York State Legislature rang pleasantly in the ears of the good citizen at large. A regime of economy was promised; and Heaven knows, America is in need of economy, private and public, local, state and national. Deep gloom, it was reported, had suffused the hearts of the jobsters and spoilsmen as the Governor's brave and economical words sank home. A regime of efficiency was also promised, and that, it was reported, caused deeper gloom, for how can jobs and spoils be reconciled to efficiency? What increased the bitterness was that Governor Miller was an exponent of the partisan theory of government in its purest and most extreme form. Government by Republicans, not for the benefit of the people, but for the benefit of Republicans; government by the privileged classes for the benefit of the privileged classes: that was what the politicians supposed had been foisted upon the people of New York under the thick fog of popular disgust with Wilsonism and the Covenant. After the inaugural message the press commentators thought that the politicians had been hideously betrayed. We seemed after all to have a governor

of the people of New York, rather than of the Republican party and the privileged.

But action means more than words, and the evidence of action is now beginning to come in. Let us take for example the amendments proposed by the Knight-Brady Committee to the bill on the recodification and revision of the labor law. There is no need to institute a research into the paternity of these proposed amendments. They have the same grim and lofty mien as Governor Miller's own message.

In the first place they abolish the present industrial commission of five, of whom not more than three may be of one political party, and which naturally contains Democrats, and substitute an industrial commissioner, appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the senate; a deputy commissioner, appointed and removable at will by the commissioner, and an industrial board of three members, appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The change spells economy. The five commissioners have received salaries aggregating \$40,000; this new personnel would receive only \$39,000. It spells efficiency: five Republicans, taken care of, instead of, as now, three Democrats and two Republicans. But we hasten to add, these are only the initial installment of efficiencies and economies.

"The offices of secretary and of counsel to the industrial commissioner are abolished." That must mean economy. The attorney general's office will do the legal business for the reorganized Department of Labor. For nothing? That would indeed be a saving if it were possible, for an administrative body which has so extensive a business as handling the workmen's compensation law, to say nothing of factory inspection, etc., must generate a considerable volume of legal business. We had last year 345,672 industrial accidents, and 52,251 claims for compensation to be handled. The attorney general would have a right to wear a sour face if all the legal points involved were loaded upon him and no new facilities afforded his office.

But the proposed amendments do not content themselves with the negative work of lopping off services. "There shall be in such department (of labor) such heads of divisions or bureaus and such inspectors, investigators, statisticians and other assistants and employees as the commissioners shall deem necessary. The head of a division or bureau and the referees appointed pursuant to this chapter shall be deemed to occupy a confidential position, and may therefore be appointed *without competitive examination*." The corresponding offices at present are subject to competitive examina-