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SHALL THE GOVERNMENT ENGAGE IN COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES?

Director Emory, of the Bureau of American Republics, in his annual report, shows on December 1, 1898, a balance of \$16,569 out of the annual appropriation of \$36,000. The receipts from advertisements, etc., from July 1 to November 30 were \$17,812, of which \$16,078 was expended. When he took charge of the bulletin, it was published at a cost of \$8,000 per month; the net income from advertisements was \$36,000, and the annual appropriation was \$28,000. By doing away with the advertising system then in force and making other changes Mr. Emory effected a saving of \$5,000 per month."

Anyone casually reading the above in the daily press would naturally suppose that it referred to the business affairs of some private publishing concern. As a matter of fact, astonishing as it may seem, it refers to the annual report of a United States Government Bureau, whose operations constitute one of the most flagrant abuses of the functions of national government on record.

In times like the present, when the elements of political economy are familiar to the average schoolboy before he is far advanced in his teens, it should seem superfluous to discuss in the columns of a journal the question whether it is lawful for a government to engage in business enterprises which bring it into direct competition with the commercial interests of its own citizens. Yet this is exactly the situation in which the United States government stands to-day in respect of the bureau whose report Director Emory has just made public.

Our readers may remember the sitting in Washington in 1890 of an International American Conference designed to promote closer trade relationship between this country and the South American states. The deliberations of that conference resulted ultimately in the founding of an organization known as the "Bureau of American Republics," whose ostensible purpose was the disseminating of special information of the kind likely to increase the trade between those countries and ourselves. Appropriations were granted, and the funds thus available were expended in the printing and dissemination of a varied assortment of literature directed to the attainment of the desired result.

So far, so good. The object was laudable and the methods legitimate and unobjectionable.

In course of time, however, it seems to have occurred to the bureau that the increasing circulation of the monthly bulletin rendered it at once an alluring medium to the advertiser and a possible mine of wealth to the bureau; and forthwith, without one thought of the gross violation of principles involved, an army of government advertising agents was sent out, together with a large volume of franked literature, soliciting paid advertisements from merchants all over the country.

Finding itself fairly launched as a commercial advertiser, and with such gratifying pecuniary results, the bureau cast about for other money-making devices, and hit upon the happy idea of publishing a directory of reliable manufacturers, etc., in the United States. With admirable simplicity and singleness of purpose, it decided that the sole test of a firm's fitness to figure in the directory as "reliable" should be its willingness to enrich the exchequer of the bureau to the extent of five dollars for each insertion. This method of contribution proved to be as remunerative as it was original, for it is certain that if private methods of this character are so frequently successful in wringing the unwilling cash from the victim, few firms would be willing to endanger their commercial reputation by exclusion from a Government Directory, especially when such august endorsement could be obtained by the expenditure of a paltry five dollars!

We will be charitable enough to believe, however, that it is thoughtlessness or simple ignorance that has allowed the bureau to be guilty of such an extraordi-

nary misdirection of its own powers, such a complete misinterpretation of the proper functions of national government. If, by virtue of the advantages of its public appropriations and franked correspondence, the government is entitled to set up successfully in the publishing and advertising business, why should it not also set about making bicycles, hats, baby carriages, or agricultural implements. The government has just as much right to set up a brewery or a sugar refinery, and run it with all the backing that comes from national appropriations and franked correspondence, as it has to insert paid advertisements in its publications, or start commercial directories at the rate of five dollars an insertion.

While the operations of this bureau fully deserve all the odium which they have incurred on the part of the commercial interests which have been so unjustly assailed, this element of the question is less serious than the fact that a door is hereby opened for further and more flagrant abuses. A precedent has been established, which, unless it be stopped and emphatically repudiated, cannot but lead to similar abuses on a more extended scale. It is the duty of the people of the United States to check at the very outset a system which is thoroughly pernicious in itself, and fatally subversive of the interests of sound government.

THE DIAMOND REEF SHOAL IN NEW YORK HARBOR.

There is no question that the battleship "Massachusetts" grounded, not, as was at first suggested, upon a sunken wreck, but upon a dangerous reef of sand off Governor's Island which is a serious menace to the safety of all the deep draught warships that have occasion to go to the Brooklyn navy yard. An examination of the plating of the keel when the ship was first placed in dry dock gave ample proof that it was not the irregular and unyielding form of a wreck or sunken rock that did the mischief. Had it been either of these, the plating would have been torn and the frames cut through; whereas, the frames were in the main not distorted, while the plating between them was bent or dished in just as it would be if some plastic material were forced against it with great pressure; in fact, the ribs and the keel framing stood out in relief through the skin plating just like the ribs of a greyhound. The result is just such as would be caused by the enormous pressure of the sand as the great ship pushed itself bodily through the reef.

The Secretary of the Navy has recommended the immediate deepening of the channel, and we think there can be no question of the great urgency of the situation. As matters now stand any one of our first-class battleships which draw well on toward 27 feet of water is liable to suffer injuries equal to those of the "Massachusetts," which have entailed dry-docking and two months' detention at the yard for repairs. This is a serious state of affairs at any time and might prove positively disastrous in time of war.

A GREATLY NEEDED AMENDMENT TO THE PATENT LAWS.

It is a curious fact that at this late day the Patent Laws of the United States should contain no provision for the event of an inventor or applicant for a patent becoming insane before the patent is granted. As the matter now stands, the inventor who becomes insane is entirely at the mercy of his affliction as far as the interests of his invention are concerned.

We are glad to see that a bill has passed the House of Representatives and has been introduced into the Senate in which it is provided that "when any person having made any new invention or discovery for which a patent might have been granted becomes insane before a patent is granted, the right of applying for and obtaining the patent shall devolve on his legally appointed guardian." The law is to apply to all applications at present on file in the Patent Office.

The obvious necessity and justice of this amendment will commend it, we doubt not, to the unanimous approval of the Senate and the Executive. It is only remarkable that the omission of such a provision from the statutes was not rectified long ago.

THE DISEASES OF NATIONS.

Looked at from more points of view than one, the nation has many of the characteristics of the individual. In periods of international unrest, when rumors of war, or, as in the case of the United States, its stern realities, are upon us, the great aggregation of elements known as a nation takes on an even more distinct individuality than usual, and presents itself to the mind in the form of some representative and clearly defined personality.

While the recognition of the fact that a nation possesses many of the characteristics of an individual organism is most pronounced, perhaps, during the fever and madness of war, we do, at all times, unconsciously but habitually speak of nations as possessing and exercising the functions of the individual. Nations are

"born" amid the throes of a revolution; "nursed" through their childhood and youth; "come of age" and grow to full manhood; have "offspring" in the shape of colonies, which are nourished, neglected, or abused, as the case may be, by a "mother country." Nations, moreover, have their "prime," their "decline," their "diseases," and "death," and it is only a few months since the term "dying nations," spoken by a leading statesman, was accepted by the world as aptly describing the condition of some of the oldest races of the world.

An extremely interesting study of one phase of this subject is afforded by a lecture recently delivered in Philadelphia before the Society of Ethical Research by Dr. Daniel G. Brinton, of the University of Pennsylvania, in which it was shown that one of the most striking evidences of what might be called the organic life of nations was the fact that, like the individual, they are subject to specific diseases, which undermine their strength, sap their vitality, and, in time, if not restrained, bring on senility, decay, and even death itself.

Some fifty years ago a French officer, after careful study of history, determined that the natural term of life of a nation was between eight hundred and one thousand years. Dr. Brinton, however, entertains the belief that a nation, if it is thoroughly conscious of what it is doing, and is not crushed by some of those deadly blows which seem to be of fate, may so guard against national diseases as to insure to itself a life indefinitely prolonged.

A nation is defined as being diseased "when, as a unit, it is chronically incapable of directing its activities toward self-preservation." National diseases are not necessarily of the majority of the nation. In the human system one organ may fail us and precipitate an untimely death; so in nations. A degenerate aristocracy, a dissolute priesthood, or a corrupt government has led to the undoing of a nation, the majority of whom have been free from national disease. The diseases that destroy nations are not so much of the individual, but of the national life.

National diseases may be classified under four heads: 1, imperfect nutrition; 2, poisons; 3, mental shock; and 4, sexual subversion. Some physicians trace all disease in the human body indirectly to insufficient or misdirected nutrition in one of the organs of the body. The historian Buckle said that "the history of every nation could be traced by the food it was accustomed to eat." The expression was too sweeping, yet it was based upon truth. "Every nation must have, throughout all the nation, enough to eat, of good quality, and properly prepared; or that nation will degenerate."

There is a scarcely a nation in Europe which produces enough food for its own consumption. They all know that the foundation of disease—starvation—will be their most terrible enemy in a time of general warfare, and this consideration helps to bind them to an unwilling peace. Starvation or insufficient and improper supply of food brings about degeneration of tissue, inferiority of stature, and a general weakening of the body.

The peasants of Northern Italy present aspects of degeneration, due to their eating the maize (as they frequently do) when it is subject to a local blight. The Jews of Europe are two to three inches underneath the stature of the nations among whom they have lived since the middle ages, the cause being unquestionably the limited and inferior food supply which has been their lot. So with the Lapps of the North and the Bushmen of Australia.

Poisons is the name by which Dr. Brinton specifies the second class of diseases. Among these he includes and gives first mention to alcohol and tobacco. While they may be harmless if used in moderation, the using of them, as it is now customary in most nations—and those nations often among the most civilized—brings with it the elements of national degeneration and decay. The lecturer, in making this statement, admitted that he himself used these commodities in moderation, and therefore was able to designate them as poisons without a suspicion of adverse prejudice on his part. "These are poisons which we deliberately and intentionally take into ourselves," but there are other poisons, such as malaria, distinctly influencing national power, which up to the present time medical science has not been able to meet. There are vast areas of the earth afflicted with malaria, where, as far as we can at present see, it will be impossible for any nation to survive and prosper. There are, moreover, certain infectious diseases, such as leprosy, which, while they are purely physical diseases, are national in their character. They influence the history of the nation, destroy its power, and shorten its life.

The third form of disease is that peculiar physical effect which medical men call "shock." Surgical operations which, under ordinary conditions, should be successful sometimes imperil, if they do not destroy life, because certain mental temperaments receive what is known as "surgical shock." Something answering very closely to this is discernible in the history of nations. Under its influence they appear to lose control of their faculties, yield to despair, and suffer a complete