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POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP

THE hatreds that multiplied during the colonial period, the wide separation and intense jealousy of the classes,—between the peninsular Spaniards and the creoles, between the latter and the mestizos,—and the contempt of all for the native Indian,—these were an adequate preparation for the convulsion that took place throughout Spanish America between 1810 and 1823. It is not to be supposed, however, that the war for independence was uninspired by the movements that culminated in the American and French revolutions. The new doctrines of human rights based on equality were greedily accepted in these exploited countries. The leadership centering in Bolivar was cradled in the tumultuous changes that had taken place in Europe. It was, in a sense, at once real and theoretical, a struggle for liberty.

In the countries where the new order of things was being established, among the liberals of the United States, England, and France, expectation ran high. It seemed then that nothing was necessary but to throw off the yoke of despotism and release the energies of a people for it to move instantly and continuously toward the realization of a beneficent purpose. The protection of the United States against any move by the monarchies of Europe to interfere with the new order was at once accorded. Liberty seemed a thing of magical potency. The political machinery devised in the United States seemed an adequate vehicle for

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the new national life, and was therefore almost universally adopted.

The world now, a century older, smiles at the uncritical confidence of those days in the effects of liberty. Freedom from previous restraint, we now know, accomplishes nothing by itself. The released energies of man may not be beneficent. In any case, the chances are that movement from the moment when freedom is gained will, for a time, be backward instead of forward. The political organization of European nations was, at bottom, an elaboration of tribal authority into despotic control. The middle term was the necessity for defense and the dissolution of tribal life under military organization. If in any European country, where the kingship was establishing itself, this national authority had been suddenly removed, it is probable that there would have come a reversion to the more ancient arrangements and modes of control by custom. Or we can see the matter in another way. Suppose an individual, subject to restraint for a long period, suddenly endowed with freedom. What does he do? Pretty much what he was doing before if conditions permit the continued exercise of habit. Change will be in the direction of securing satisfactions through the unconscious determination of custom. The story of liberated slaves is familiar. The machinery of law might be suspended in any one of our cities. The majority of citizens would go on doing what they were doing before. All married people might be suddenly divorced. The majority would proceed to marry the same persons again. The acquisition of freedom permits change, but does not insure it, and it is far from being able to make the change one of advancement.

Again, so far as Latin America is concerned, the perspective of a century makes it clear that the expected result

could not possibly have come about. In the United States self-government had been evolved from the beginning of colonial history. In England extensions of a democratic order took place only as different groups evolved in their thinking and administrative training to the point of making them successful. The general rule is that any sweeping political change can be effective only if the people have already served an apprenticeship in preparation for it. Otherwise the new order will be only the old with new labels. The imperial régime in Russia may be stripped away in any moment. But a people accustomed only to that kind of rule will evolve the same thing with different names and persons, and the program of liberty will continue to be carried out in talk and aspiration. We have lately deluded ourselves with a belief in the efficacy of liberty in the small nations of central and eastern Europe. The case is very similar to that of the Spanish American countries of a century ago. So far as immediate results are concerned, all revolution is futile beyond the destruction of despotism. Political growth is subject to the same slow-acting formula as all other growth. This comes from the very nature of government. Democracy is distinctive in that it enables the individuals of a population to discover among themselves plans of action and to modify the machinery of government to carry these plans into effect. There is unity of purpose issuing in policy and a program of action. This unity of the future, which is the basis of democratic life, requires education, freedom of discussion, and a voice in the conduct of affairs. But there is a whole other side to government. It must be adequate to carry out the policy intended to guide its course. In other words, it must be a firmly established, going concern. This requirement can only be met by the possession of numbers of persons trained to the duties of

24 Social Forces in the Growth of Latin America administration. And administration in general must have a consistency and certainty of action which forbid a rapid change. This firmness is usually expressed as principles of government. Every democracy involves a conflict between principles and ideals. Administrators, for the most part, want to remain undisturbed in carrying out routine duties. Anything that upsets their arrangements is considered a violation of some fundamental principle. On the other hand, those who believe themselves able to decide what government ought to do, insist upon the necessity of breaking red tape and even destroying the Supreme Court in order that their wishes may be immediately realized.

Latin America from the beginning and throughout its history has filled half the specifications of democratic government. It has had no lack of idealism, of discussion, of policies, and of plans. It has failed because it had no machinery strong enough to carry out these plans. Constitutional principles were adopted as ideals to be attained rather than settled methods of governmental procedure. It is important to keep this distinction clearly in mind. Democratic self-government cannot be enacted, in Persia, or the Philippines, or anywhere else. Mere idealistic radicalism arrives in a windy chaos. Its necessary vehicle is the conservatism of practised and effective administration.

The expectation that the Spanish American colonies, freed from control by Spain, would speedily evolve democratic nationality was therefore wholly unwarranted. Other nations more advantageously placed had required long periods of preparation for even a limited change in their political institutions. The advance made during the past century is not only creditable, it is astonishing. The fact that constitutions modeled on that of the United States were adopted, and the name of Republic assumed, had

nothing to do with the situation except to polarize aspiration and set a goal for future attainment. What, then, actually happened? Remember that there had been no training of the native population in the functions of government. The different localities possessed deliberative bodies, but skill in administration was non-existent. With the removal of restraint, those elements became dominant which had become fixed in the social order of the preceding period, modified to some extent by existing circumstances. What were these factors?

The tribal organization of the native races has already been noticed. It involved control by chiefs, functioning through customary law aided by religious beliefs. This native chieftainship had never been entirely lost among the Indians. Indeed, it is perpetuated to the present day. Wherever the Indian element is found in strength, one will discover the authority of the cacique. It had proved an instrument of value to the Spaniards. Tribal heads could be made responsible for the conduct and work of their subordinates. All of this means that large sections of the people were habituated to a form of personal control and to the focus of their loyalties into support of personal leadership.

The real contribution of Spain to the life of the New World was the feudal type of social order. It was based here as elsewhere on the ownership of large tracts of land. If a few men are able to secure all the available land and enforce their claim to its possession, they can naturally dictate the conditions of living to all others whose opportunity to exist depends upon the use of land. This dictation usually takes the form of collecting a portion of the proceeds of labor—that portion known as rent. The whole system depends upon the ability of owners to enforce their rights of

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possession. As a general rule, these rights are the fruits of conquest, the vanquished population becoming one of serfs. In course of time, as the distance between conqueror and conquered diminishes, this order of things secures a customary acceptance, and often the strongest supporters of feudalism have been the serfs themselves. A movement for freedom almost never begins with slaves, serfs, or the renters of property. Despite the fact that most revolutions in the past have had the character of agrarian revolts, their initiation has nearly always been from without. An agricultural population may be very violent when once set in action, but its normal tendency is to accept social conditions as it accepts those of climate, and to preserve what it believes to be security. When the Spanish armies were driven out of the New World, they did not take with them their universally established social order—that of widely distinguished classes and the ownership by single persons of extensive lands. As industry has been insignificant, and commerce of late growth in all these countries, their economic basis has been one of agriculture, and the whole period since the war for independence has not been sufficient to uproot the old order. To this day throughout Latin America the land is held and worked under the plantation system. Here and there will survive something of the old Indian communism, but the encroachments made upon this have served, not the development of peasant ownership, but a further assimilation into the large estates. Naturally, in the feudal order, the person of importance is the overlord. He can compel service or give privileges and thus purchase loyalty. Leadership again proves to be of a personal type, based upon purely local and individual sanctions.

It was out of this material that democratic nationality was expected to grow. The reason for disappointment is

sufficiently obvious now. The United States had to face and solve a similar problem. The system of small farms confronted the system of great estates, based on slavery, applied to the mono-culture of cotton or tobacco. That the southern states were democratic in any general sense is more than a pretension. No one can deny that all the standards of democratic equality can be maintained within the limits of a class. The most democratic group in the world is the British peerage. The southern estate owners were democratic in a similar fashion.

The political consequences of feudalism flow from its essential character. If a country is controlled by a few great families, its political arrangements will be matters of family alliance. Domination will be that of persons sustained by family connections. There can be no such thing as free choice of policy, or a division in terms of principle. One will seek in vain to discover what political principle divides blancos from colorados, and encounter astonishment at the suggestion that principle has anything to do with the conduct of government. The other side, one is told, consists merely of rascals and hereditary enemies who are operating the government for their own benefit. They must, therefore, be turned out and one's own friends and relatives placed in office. This view of politics may seem primitive and even childish, but it is the consequence of the universally prevalent feudal conditions.

Imagine, therefore, the state of affairs at the end of Spanish rule. Administration had been of a character to develop no organic unity. The parts out of which nations were to be constructed had been held together mechanically. Such loyalty as existed was local, or at least provincial. Even the unity of military effort necessary to defeat the Spanish armies was hard to secure. Behind the solid front

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created by such disinterested patriots as San Martín, bickerings and jealousies were the order of the day. Only a few men of extraordinary greatness of character were able to rise above dissension. After the war for independence, a struggle that was long, bitter, and cruel, these countries, representing the former administrative divisions, had as their political assets—the raw materials out of which national governments were to be created—a series of little chieftains, each supported by his band of followers, representative only of his own locality, filled with tribal ambitions and hostilities, capable, therefore, of uniting his authority only to an arrangement that would save it from being impaired. The result could only be a tribal confederation, liable to dissolve through jealousy or the promise of greater advantage in another combination. The next stage was the effort by the more prominent chiefs so to manipulate this changing set of alliances as to arrive at supreme power. A leader could only hold the reins of government by force created through rewards to those supporting him, and through corresponding intimidation and persecution of those in opposition.

Naturally the latter conspired and assembled resources to turn the office-holding group out of power. This could only be done through violence. The type of revolution for which Latin American countries are famous is nothing more than a change of parties,—a kind of military election. The attempt to forbid revolution is about as intelligent as an attempt to forbid the rain. It follows upon certain conditions and will disappear when the conditions are altered. The conception of government that obtained until recent years in these countries was based upon personal strength and influence, reward of personal followers through the privilege of enriching themselves in a short period as their Spanish predecessors had done. Not only was corruption tolerated,

it was the normal and expected order of things. The only question was as to who should be privileged to milk the cow.

There is, after all, no essential difference between our professional politician and the soldier politician of Latin America. As soon as our great parties had found their alignment it became worth somebody's while to hold the reins of party organization for the purpose of securing office and the privilege of using that office for selfish purposes. Our bosses are not troubled about principles and are concerned only to win. Once in office or in control of office-holders, it is possible to levy contributions upon all kinds of business. Direct robbery of the treasury would be too crude and is, after all, unnecessary. Our history of bossism illustrates the working of a political force, so far inseparable from popular government. Merely conceive parties organized for a trial by physical force instead of a count of ballots, place generals and their subordinates in the position of professional politicians, and the results are much the same, with perhaps the advantage in dramatic quality lying with the practitioners of violence. The disadvantage lies in the greater ruthlessness, the confiscations, political assassinations, and the inevitable demoralization. But just as the great mass of people in this country have nothing to do with political bosses, except to be drawn through one pretense or another into their machinations, so the Latin American populations have little to do with the conspiracies of their generals. Military service during revolutionary disturbance is usually pressed, and the people have to bear the brunt of this kind of change of government.

With some differences in the case of Chile, where the feudal barons were able to maintain a general agreement, and where the fight for independence was not so bitter, it

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may be said that each Spanish American country passed a generation in warfare among its petty chieftains. Nationhood did not exist; governmental power was merely secured only to be lost immediately. And when stability did arrive, it had the character of the previous conditions. One Caudillo merely succeeded in maintaining his authority against all other contestants. It was of course necessary that he should develop an element of power apart from uncertain alliances with influential leaders. This meant the building up and controlling of a national army with loyalties detached from localities and their feudal chiefs. Here was the basis of the dictatorship. Once secure through military strength, it could count upon the powerful support of the Church. Militarism and ecclesiasticism are the right and left arms of every dictatorship.

The second generation of Spanish American development was characterized by the conditions just described. In Argentina, the tyrant Rosas was the example. In the case of Mexico the story of Santa Anna is familiar. Apparently, those countries in which a single dictatorship maintained itself for a long period were the fortunate ones. There was some training in administration, badly as it was carried out; there was some opportunity to develop commercial organization which prefers the security of the strong hand to the wavering mercies of popular control. Now and then, a Caudillo used his power for the good of his country. But the long continuance of the dictatorship did not alter its character. It was rule through force, always resented as oppressive. Nor was it possible completely to eliminate provincial leaders; these were always prepared to seize any opportunity that would give scope to their personal ambitions. But after a long-continued dictatorship, no minor chieftain could succeed merely on the program of replacing

the tyrant. The only motive that could gather strength among the masses was the desire for freedom. Any new insurrectory movement had, therefore, to promise liberty to the people in terms of the constitution. In this manner the overthrow of Rosas was the beginning of constitutional development in Argentina. Equally, the triumph of Juarez meant a new order in Mexico. In the latter case, the French intervention destroyed the chances of early constitutional development, and threw the country back into another period of dictatorship under Diaz which continued until recent years. The last revolution was successful because it, too, was fought under the banner of constitutionalism.

In the other and smaller nations, the attainment of government was longer deferred. In most of these cases no change has taken place in the general character of their social organization. The expansion of commerce and industry requires and fosters an element in the population different from those found in the owners and serfs of a plantation system. Democracy seemed at first devised to meet the needs of a population of small, working, land-owning farmers. Its ultimate operations seem to depend for effectiveness upon an industrial order. Some of the states of Latin America have, to this day, little commerce and less industry. The old relationships therefore continue, and with them government by persons and families, and, consequently, dictatorships and revolutions.

The stages found in the progress from personal to popular government are so faithfully repeated in the history of each of these countries as almost to follow a formula, at any rate to argue a close similarity of factors and conditions. It might have been expected that Cuba would have proved an exception. With independence attained when it was possible to profit by the mistakes of other countries, with a

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national career auspiciously projected with the help of the United States, there was every reason to hope that an enlightened citizenship after worse than its share of despotism, aided by great economic interests and with the protection of its constitution assured by the Platt Amendment, would escape the quagmires of personal government. But the presidential elections of recent years show the same alignment of groups bound by personal and family affiliations, the same absence of contest of principle, the same use of governmental power to prevent a fair election, the same cynical disregard of the constitution that fill the old sad story of nationhood in its birth throes of all the sister republics. All that can be said is that too many of the same forces and conditions were present to permit escape from the consequences. It is a lesson, too, for those Americans who imagine that the beneficent tutelage of this country can confer immunity to reversionary tendencies, and secure the integrity of democratic institutions. These seem to be matters of growth from within, and no outside artificer, however skilful, can greatly change their form, or inject into them other than their own native spirit.