

PATHS TO THE PRESENT

by Arthur M. Schlesinger

源遠流長

思 果 譯



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中英對照

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本 書 用 法

閱讀中英對照的書籍，有好些方法。這裏是其中一種。

先將中文譯文從頭至尾讀一遍，由於我們所選的每一本書，不但故事有趣，而且可以幫助你立身處世，獲得許多別處得不到的益處，所以這種閱讀本身便可以對你產生很實際的幫助。

讀過中文後，對故事已經有了概念，再回過來讀英文。我們在每頁下邊都留有足夠的空白。除了若干必要的註釋外，是用來給你記下英文生字與詞語以及它們的中文意義的。如果地位不夠。本書後面還有好些空白頁。可供你使用。

你一頁一頁對照地讀下去。因為有中文的幫助。你不難把攏住英文。每一句話和每一個字的意思與用法。你可以一天背幾行唸幾頁，慢慢地但須有恆地修習。自生而熟，由緩而速。在不知不覺間，你的閱讀與寫作的力量會有很大的進步。把這套「金瓶文聲名著譯萃叢書」一本本閱讀下去，你的語言將跟着豐富起來。看書寫文將一天容易過一天。

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One National Traits

“What Then Is the American, This New Man?”

The question which forms this title has never stopped being interesting since Crèvecoeur asked it in the last years of the Revolution. If we can learn why the American has come to be what he is, how he is unlike other peoples, we shall have gained a deep understanding of the causes for national behavior. Crèvecoeur’s own answer, the considered opinion of a Frenchman who lived long in the New World, may still be read with profit. The American, he said, “is either an European, or the descendant of an European, so there is a mixed blood you will find in no other country.”

I.

Crevecoeur, of course, was one of a long line of Europeans who has tried to describe the American. Their writings, though of varying merit, have the common advantage of presenting an outsider's point of view. Viewing the scene from a different background, they see national differences of which the native-born may be unaware. What they have noted most frequently is: a belief in the universal obligation to work; the urge to move from place to place; a high standard of average comfort; faith in progress; the eternal pursuing of material gain; an absence of permanent class lines; a neglect of philosophy and art; a deep respect for womanhood; the great number of spoiled children; the general restlessness and hurry of life always illustrated by the practice of fast eating; and other things such as overheated houses.

But this list is incomplete and includes matters that have little importance. The judgment of outsiders leaves much room for the student of United States history to venture his own answer to Crevecoeur's question.

II.

What then is the American from a historian's point of view? The answer is simple. This "new man" is the product of Old World influences and New World conditions. It has been observed that plants and animals change when removed from Europe

to America. These changes arise from differences in climate and the nature of the country. But other things as well influence transported people. The act of leaving a familiar existence for a strange and dangerous new one demands strength, courage and imagination. Once the ocean is crossed, the distance from the old country and the challenge of new experiences weakens the bonds of custom and awakens new capacities.

The new continent was undeveloped. Farming was the principal occupation, but agriculture in the New World differed from agriculture in the Old. Thickly forested land had to be cleared, the wildness cleared from the soil; knowledge of native plants and the best way to grow them had to be learned.

Accustomed in the old country to simple comforts and useful devices in the home and about the farm, the settler copied these in the new land. The farmer became a Jack-of-all-trades—he made almost everything for himself.

III.

What elements of the national character come from this long-time farming background? First is the habit of work. For the colonial farmer, ceaseless labor was the price of staying alive; every member of the community had to be up and working. They were the hardest working people on earth, their only rest being the observance of the Sabbath, as demanded by church and state.

Probably nothing handed down by these early settlers has entered more deeply into the national way of life. If an American has no purposeful work on hand, the fever in his blood drives him nevertheless to some visible form of activity. Indeed the worship of work has made it difficult for Americans to learn how to play: they play games not for fun, but to win. The importance attached to useful labor had the further effect of helping to make "this new man" indifferent to beauty and art. Travellers used to the loveliness and charm of Old World cities have long noted the sameness and ugliness of American cities.

IV.

On the other hand, the complicated nature of the farmer's job gave him unrivaled training in invention and practical skill with tools and machines. As population increased and manufacturing developed on a commercial scale, men merely turned to new purposes the abilities that, by then, had become second nature to them.

Meanwhile, the tradition of wasteful farming, of taking up new land instead of making the most of the old, was accustoming Americans to wasteful ways in public as well as private life.

Toward women, the American male early acquired an attitude which also sharply distinguished him from his brother in the Old World. As in every new country, women had the value of being scarce. They were in demand as sweethearts

and as wives, and they performed endless work about the house and helped with the heavy farm labor. "The cry is everywhere for girls; girls, and more girls!" wrote a traveller in 1866. In these circumstances men placed women on a higher level than in European societies.

V.

Since the agriculturalist thought of his farm only as a place to live for a limited time, he soon learned to be always on the move. As the nation grew older, the habit continued. With the coming of the low-priced automobile, the number of cars by 1925 became so great that everyone in the country could, if he wished, spend his entire time in motion.

But this movement from place to place was a less important aspect of American life than constant upward movement in society. There was belief in equality of opportunity, the right of all men to a free and fair start, a view which led to the establishment of free tax-supported schools. To benefit from equality of opportunity, a man had to be equal to his opportunities under a government which did not have too many rules. The result was an idea of democracy strongly qualified by individualism.

This individualism sometimes assumed forms that ignored government. The colonists often took the law into their own hands. This tendency led to a violence which has continued

in present time to condition the national way of life. That attitude, though it sometimes has been directed to wrong purposes, also has been a check on the wrong use of governmental powers and has protected the rights of smaller groups.

In still another way, the individualism of the pioneer farmer does much to explain the desire to pile up wealth. "The poor struggle to be rich, the rich to be richer," remarked an observer in the mid-nineteenth century. In absence of a titled nobility, financial success was accepted as the highest success.

VI.

For a people who recalled how hungry and miserable their families had been through long centuries in the Old World, the chance to make money was the means of living a life of human dignity. Even people with a moderate amount of money freely shared it with the less fortunate and helped by giving to charities, schools, hospitals and other good causes.

The energy that the people gave to many of these causes was heightened by another national attitude: optimism. To doubt the future was to confess oneself unsuccessful. This quality sometimes led to much overstatement and boastfulness, a sign of youth which the passage of years, however, has helped to temper.

VII.

In 1860 only a sixth of the people lived in towns of eight

thousand or more; but by 1900 a third were in such places and today well over half are. This change in living conditions brought some changes in the older national traits.

The best schools and colleges, newspapers and magazines, and practically all the bookstores, libraries, concert halls, art museums, and theaters were found in the cities. There, too, America was in closest contact with Europe. As a result Americans began to contribute to the world of learning: to science, literature and the fine arts, in a way that challenged the best Europe could offer.

Quite as remarkable has been another effect of city growth: the average man gradually came to believe that under the new conditions it was the duty of the government to protect the opportunities of all.

Though the belief in work continued to be as unquestioned as ever, willing workers could no longer be certain of regular employment, particularly in the cities and the towns. As early as 1893 the American Federation of Labor resolved that "the right to work is the right to life," and declared that "when the private employer cannot or will not give work the state or nation must." But it was not until the Great Depression destroyed the living of people in all walks of life that this view became a part of American faith. What originally had started because of a community's need that all should work, transformed under the *New Deal* first into a doctrine of the right to work and then into the duty of society to provide the means of work.

VIII.

The national character is, then, a mixture of old and new traits. The long lesson of the soil acted as the chief influence, and the rise of the city confirmed or strengthened many of the earlier characteristics while reshaping others. The result is a way of life unlike that in any other nation.

Just as the American character has experienced changes in the past, so it will doubtless experience changes in the future. The American character, whatever its faults, is full of courage, creative energy, and "know-how," based upon the deep belief that nothing in the world is beyond its power to accomplish.

Two Biography of a Nation of Joiners

At first thought it seems a puzzle that a people noted for individualism should also be the world's greatest example of joiners. The point is that the Americans, enjoying unusual economic opportunities, have not generally felt the need for the government to do things for them when they could do them for themselves.

I.

During the first century or more in the colonies, the people showed little skill for large collective undertakings. They had had small experience in doing things in this way in Europe, and, moreover, the population was so small and scattered that it made cooperation extremely difficult. But in one important part of life, religion, the principle of voluntary association struck quick and effective root. Even in the colonies that had official churches, the field was open to all beliefs.

It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century, when towns had grown larger and more numerous, that the principle of voluntary action extended to other interests. Benjamin Franklin, who was in many ways the forerunner of the modern American, among his other activities took part in founding a hospital, a fire-insurance company, the American Philosophical Society, America's oldest learned body, and helped to start a Western land company.

Considerably more effective were the attempts at united political action as the Revolution approached; and the adoption of the Constitution provided a still firmer basis for political parties. The requirement of electing the President, Senate and House in different manners created the danger that these organs of government would each go its separate way unless some voluntary agency unknown to the Constitution held them together. To supply this need the Federalist and Republican parties quickly took shape, the one looking to Hamilton and the other to Jefferson for inspiration.

II.

The associative current gathered strength during the first half-century of national independence. The rising importance of the plain people, summed up in politics by Jackson's election as President in 1828, made ancient injustices no longer easy to put aside. In the field of humanitarian reform the earlier concern for wounded souls now widened to take in wounded and neglected minds and bodies.

The reformers had support from church, school, and stage. Ministers preached peace, school books included arguments for peace, and books and plays such as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "Ten Nights in a Barroom" converted countless thousands to the antislavery and temperance movements.

The rapid growth of industry fathered a new type of voluntary organization, the trade-union. Wage earners, under conditions

that denied good standards of living, took to united action in self-defense. They soon established nation-wide unions in some trades.

The desire to join also affected professional and intellectual workers, largely to improve standards of performance and research, and to send out the findings through meetings and publications. The twentieth century as yet has added little to the picture of the organizations of the nineteenth century.

III.

William Ellery Channing wrote, "Men, it is justly said, can do jointly what they cannot do singly." Day in and day out, these little unofficial governments—the chamber of commerce, the trade-union, the business corporation, the lodge, the church and other voluntary associations—command the active support of their members, often influencing them more than the regular government.

A Senate committee in 1944 pointed out that only six states have a greater value of property in private hands than the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and only ten more than the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, the Chase National Bank or the Prudential Life Insurance Company. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in 1947 had general funds of over \$20,000,000.00 with a total amount of \$47,000,000.00 and as far back as 1919 the mutual-benefit lodges had an annual income of \$165,000,000.00.

Considering the importance of voluntary organizations in American history, one cannot doubt that they have afforded the people their best schooling in self-government. Through their membership, men learned from youth to reason together, choose leaders, smooth out differences and obey the majority will. The habits so formed have armed the people to take swift and effective steps in moments of great emergency.