

Comment

Conflict of Races

The law of the jungle is to hunt and be hunted. To the swift and the strong is the victory. In the savage strife for life or the means of living there is no place for the weak, no quarter for the vanquished. The rule of tooth and claw is cruel, relentless, final. Only the fittest survive. That is the way of nature.

In human relations the grim law of the jungle is modified somewhat. Reason has shown the advantage of mutual concession, and the consequences of defeat are not often fatal. But complete abrogation of the primitive code has never been possible. Whenever two races of different culture representing separate stages of civilization come into conflict, the stronger is certain to triumph. The sharper the conflict, the more decisive will be the result. For the defeated peoples there is only sorrow, resentment, rebellion — and the end is always surrender. Either they must acquire the culture of the dominant race or decline to the status of vassalage. It was ever thus: when the Children of Israel went into bondage; when Rome ruled the world; when the Goths swept over Europe. The conquest of the American Indian was inevitable from the beginning.

Between the white race and the red the differences were irreconcilable. To the Indian the white man appeared in the rôle of despoiler; while the white man regarded the Indian as an irksome impediment to progress. Neither comprehended the ways of the other. There was little in common between them. The Indian cared nothing for commerce or empire, for schools or churches, for cultivating the soil or clearing the forests. And the white man was no less blind to the deep spiritual nature of the Indian, his healthful habits, sense of justice, and carefree existence.

Perhaps the lack of understanding was partly because each saw the worst of the other on the frontier. The white men whom the Indian met either robbed him or tried to convert him to their way of living — and those who robbed him first gave him whisky. Travellers and settlers, being indifferent or hostile, noticed only the sullen, barbarous, and dirty savage, debased by the vices and diseases of the white men. In their natural environment the Indians were happy, generous, and moral people. Some of their customs were repulsive, their tools were crude, and their religion was immature, but they possessed virtues that the white men lacked. In racial development they were children; their ideas and conduct were childish.

Now the period of conflict is over. The desperate struggle for three centuries to stem the tide of a dominating civilization, to withstand the ravages

of alien diseases, and to repel the attacks of resourceful grafters has ended. "In the great drama enacted in the American wilderness these bronze stoics have played every rôle — hero and villain, hunter and hunted, victor and vanquished; yesterday defiant, imperious, battling victoriously with naked hands against storm and wind and snow and cyclone, against man and beast and hunger and pestilence;" today servile and broken-spirited, feebly endeavoring to make the best of their fate, a beaten remnant passing into the twilight of their race.

J. E. B.