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DOLLAR-WORSHIP



"Money-making in America was never regarded as disgraceful; a scene at a Mid-West stock sale.

Are Americans Guilty ?

THIS is the second in the series of W.E.A. lectures by SYDNEY GREENBIE, Special Assistant to the American Minister, and head of the United States Office of War Information in New Zealand. Mr. Greenbie's first talk, it will be remembered, was an answer to the question, "Are Americans Vulgar?" In this talk he asks and answers another question: "Do Americans worship the dollar?" Our report is a condensation.

the dollar. But are we different from any other people in the world in that regard? Is there a nation where wealth, property or money is not revered? Whether it is acquired by honest means or not, wealth stands for social distinction, for class, for power. About the only thing that makes America different in its attitude to wealth is that we do not camouflage it. Wealth with us is not confused with culture, with manners, with aristocracy. It is just plain money—something we need to live by.

"Money - making in America was never regarded as disgraceful. People came from all over the world with one object in view — to get money. They were not Americans. From all over the world people rushed to America expecting to find the streets paved with gold. If there was any true worship of the dollar it was by those who came to America greedily seeking it. Some, like the gentlemen of Virginia in 1607, refused to soil their hands with labour. Their colony did not prosper. Those regions like New England, where honest toil and puritanical thrift obtained, where the rigours of an austere, religious sobriety prevailed, not only prospered, but along with that prosperity came a sharp, clear beauty, a taste for living which has made its mark on the culture of our entire country.

Not Ashamed of Trade

"Wherever else in the world there grew a civilisation based not on the frank acceptance of the value of money, there arose an aristocracy of power. This power was based on the fighting abilities of the soldier class. That class went out into the world seeking wealth other men created; they regarded that wealth as just apoils. Much of that spirit remains in the countries we are to-day fighting. Germany and Japan are examples of the contempt of the soldier

class for money. The Japanese samurai had a code based on contempt of business and trade. This soldier never carried money. He just took what he needed. The German Junker class, though it did not hesitate to sell its fighting services for money (I refer to the Hessians in the American Revolution), nevertheless always regarded itself as above the money-maker. Some of the English, too, believed that being in trade was socially not quite right. To this day there is a slight sense of demeaning in the acts of buying and selling. Lord Byron refused to accept any of the royalties for his poetry. Three or four of the repertory plays I have seen here in New Zealand deal with the struggle of lords and ladies to sustain themselves in their comforts without visible means of support. The characters strive by devious ways to trade off their social position for clothes, food, and so on. Honest dressmakers and working people were more than willing to exchange dresses and food with the Lady Fredericks just for the sheer joy of being invited to the homes of the titled upper class. Now, distasteful as our Hollywood pictures are to New Zealanders and to many Americans because of the social striving in them, to us Americans this type of striving is even more distasteful.

Escape from Servility

"America was settled by humble people trying to escape that very thing. Feudal society gave Europeans no prospect of rising above the status of serf and labourer. But with a little money in America one soon found release from servile clinging. Hence two things run through American life like corpuscles in the veins—respect for trade and respect for labour. Through trade and labour, man found his freedom. Americans early learned that the only way they could conquer the continent and put it in order was by making money with their own hands. In that