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AN AMERICAN LOOKS AHEAD

HAVE you ever made or helped to make cider—watched a case of apples transformed in the press to dust and a cup or two of juice? Something like that happened when I interviewed Professor Allan Nevins. He is so simple, so friendly, direct, and frank that you think the interview is going famously. Then you say good-bye and realise that he has been interviewing you—that he has squeezed you dry and yet not got enough out of you to leave you compensated even in your vanity. For he is one of those terrifying people who carry facts in their heads. He is not vague when the questions come from you, and he has an uncanny knack of asking you to tell him the things you don't know accurately.

For example: Does land in New Zealand descend from father to son? If it does, what is happening to the farms in area? What happens when a station-owner dies leaving three or four sons?

Or again: Do New Zealand writers go to America for inspiration or to Britain? To Hemingway, Steinbeck and Saroyan, or to Auden, Spender and T. S. Eliot?

You try to recover the initiative by asking about the Middle West or Concord's *Sleepy Hollow*. Is it true, you ask, that the Middle West dominates America culturally?

But there is no dominant culture in America, he tells you at once. If there were, it would not come from the Middle West. The Middle West could, perhaps, be regarded as setting the average standard, if there could be any such thing as an average in culture. But it does not dominate the theatre, or the art world, or music, or literature. Hemingway certainly worked in a newspaper office in Kansas City, but no one would call him Middle Western. Pearl Buck—

You interrupt desperately to ask if it could have been political domination that was meant.

"Well, if it was, it meant nothing. The two outstanding Middle Westerners in the States to-day are Henry Wallace and Wendell Willkie, and they are both hot gospellers against isolation."

"And isolation, you say, is dead?"



PROFESSOR ALLAN NEVINS
"Americans are sensible people"

He pauses, looks at you for perhaps half a second, then replies. "Quite dead. I have no doubt about it. There are still little centres of isolation, die-hard groups here and there, but America as a whole has accepted the international facts. Isolation is lunacy, and the Americans are sensible people."

"You mentioned Willkie. Is he genuine or an opportunist? We have just received *One World* in New Zealand. Has he thought himself into the position he takes there, or is it a pose? Does he mean what he says?"

"Don't make any mistake about Willkie. He is a big fellow—well educated, intelligent, courageous. He means it."

"But he is a Wall Street lawyer?"

"He has been; and a good one. But he is a statesman to-day. *One World* is his own report, not something cooked up for him."

"And Wallace? Has he a following?"

"Henry Wallace is a different man altogether. He is an idealist—very sincere and quite disinterested. His chief interest in a sensible world would be farming. For three generations the Wallaces have conducted an agricultural journal known all over America."

Food And Nationhood

"How successfully is America feeding itself?"

"In general, very successfully, but there are some shortages—eggs, butter, and beef. We don't go without these things, but we get less than we are accustomed to. In short, we suffer about enough to make food a frequent topic of conversation."

"Well, professor, to take a wider sweep still, would you say that the biggest American experiment of all is succeeding? Are the Americans a nation?"

He smiled, but admitted that there were some things Americans themselves were not sure about.

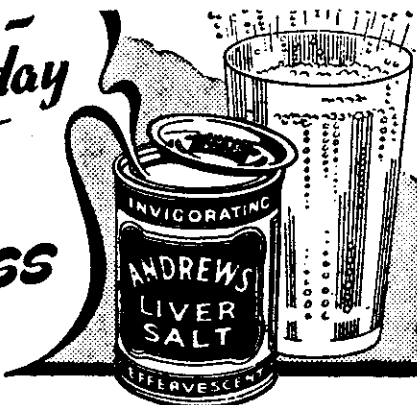
"We would have been in trouble in this war if we had not closed the door in 1920."

"Trouble with fifth columnists?"

"Yes. But we have had a generation in which to make Americans out of the last Germans and Italians admitted, and they are now with us almost to a man. I don't think one in a thousand of the Germans who have taken root in

(continued on next page)

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