
When a Hundred Years Are Gone

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When a hundred years from the date of this number of the *Magazine* have joined the innumerable host of centuries gone, and 1985 makes its debut, what will be the condition of affairs in this great American Republic? Such an inquiry may not be usual, and yet, we opine, there are readers of the *Magazine* who do often, in moments of reverie, interrogate themselves upon the subject.

The estimate is that there are now in the United States 55 million souls. When a hundred years are gone an infirm and tottering remnant of the vast multitude, possibly a score, will remain, to recite to reporters their feeble recollections of events; the great majority, the millions, will have moved on and taken their places in the “silent halls,” where death is master of ceremonies.

There may be those, who, in contemplation of this grim phase of the subject, will feel disposed to indulge themselves in the luxury of sentimental reflections, in which the lachrymal machinery will bear tearful testimony to the intensity of feeling aroused by freaks of the imagination.

In fancy they will behold on the streets and highways of the country 55 million funeral processions, the plumed hearse, the casket, the veiled mourners — possibly the brass band — all, even the horses, keeping step to the doleful dirge of death. Manifestly, death, instead of being a curse, is a great blessing. It makes room for the new comers, and sentimentalists can afford to take a thought of the births while deploring the ravages of death. When a hundred years are gone, the Republic will have, in spite of all that death can do, at least 275

million inhabitants.¹ Marriage bells will make merry music while funeral knells are telling what death has done — and as there will be more births than deaths, there will be more rejoicing than mourning in the land, while the next hundred years go marching on.

This reference to population suggests the topic of food. We are now producing, say 500 million bushels of wheat annually, of which we have a surplus, after supplying the home demand, of about 225 million bushels, estimating the consumption for bread and seed at five bushels per capita. If, therefore, in 1985 we maintain the average of five bushels per capita, 1.275 billion bushels of wheat will be required as the annual crop.² Such figures may be startling, but they are not necessarily depressing. When a hundred years are gone it is safe to assume that the arable, the food-producing, land of the world will be occupied, and made to contribute by scientific cultivation, abundant harvests for the sustenance of man; at any rate the present generation can do little for posterity, except to set an example of pluck and industry.

Speaking of population, suggests the area of the field when the multiplied millions are to operate, and the inquiry leads directly to consideration of race peculiarities. With 55 million people it is found difficult to restrain aggressiveness. The Anglo-Saxon element predominating, the acquisition of territory will distinguish the future as it has the past, and when a hundred years are gone, it is prudent to assume that the Republic will embrace the North American continent. The pressure westward being arrested by the Pacific Ocean, it must be northward and southward. Already thousands, citizens of the Dominion of Canada, discuss with steadily increasing favor the annexation of that country to the United States, and those who are capable of understanding the logic of events, of self-interest, of population and wealth, do not hesitate to predict the absorption of Mexico and the Central American States by the United States before a hundred years are gone.

There may be those who will say that such intimations of progress are huge hallucinations, the vaguest of vagaries, the result of mental infirmity. They will be forced to admit, however, that we have out-

¹ According to US Census Bureau statistics, the population of the United States in 1985 was approximately 237.9 million.

² According to the US Agriculture Department, American wheat production was 2.42 billion bushels in 1985, of which 909 million bushels were exported. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991*, pg. 661.

lined possibilities. Probabilities admit of wider discussion. It might be well to state the proposition as follows: If 3 million people, in a hundred years, from 1783 to 1884, gained 52 million, and acquired territory embracing an area of 2,765,640 square miles, what may be expected of 55 million people during the next hundred years in the way of acquiring territory, provided the land is in sight and approachable? We submit that the probabilities are abreast of the possibilities, and that we do not overestimate the greed and aggressiveness of the American people — indeed, we doubt if these characteristics admit of overestimates.

But in the further prognostication of the situation, when a hundred years are gone, the possible acquisition of territory need not be regarded as the most cheering branch of the subject. In the year 1985 we shall be the richest nation on the globe. In this connection it may be said, that the accumulation of wealth in the United States means more, when development and wealth are considered, than in any other country.

When a hundred years are gone, who, of all the seers of the present, can estimate the magnitude of the industrial enterprises which will then command the attention of statisticians?

When a hundred years are gone, it may be profitable to inquire if New England or the South will be the center of the cotton manufacturing industry of the Republic? Indeed, we might extend the inquiry and ask if the probabilities give assurance of England's control of the manufacturing industries of the world, when a hundred years are gone? Manifestly, New England will yield her supremacy to the South, and England, no longer the money center of the world, will be required to succumb to the inevitable. Cheaper food and cheaper materials and greater wealth will rule in the realm of industries, and when a hundred years are gone the United States will control the markets of the world.

Those who take pleasure in contemplating the possibilities of progress would find little difficulty in giving their fancies the coloring of fact were they to read the history of events during the past hundred years. Who, of all sages and sooth-sayers living a hundred years ago, so much as dreamed that a day was coming, near or remote, when steam, on the sea and on the land, would stand crowned by the genius of man, a moving power, compared with which science can find no equal — a power which defies winds and waves, which has revolutionized commerce, peopled waste places and made deserts fruitful as

Edens. Harnessed to the locomotive continents are traversed in a few hours, while millions of men and women, in palace cars, are transported as if the solid earth had been transformed into dreamland.

Who, of all the poets and prophets since the days when Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, intimated that a time would come when man, by the fiat of his inscrutable genius, should command the lightnings to do his bidding, that time and distance should be annihilated, and the remotest places on the face of the earth should be brought into instantaneous communication? In the presence of the telephone and the telegraph who, of all the doubters and croakers, has a right to intimate that still more and far more astounding revelations are not to bless the world, when a hundred years are gone.

Today, those who predict that the time will come when men will fly — cleave the air with artificial wings, are regarded as vagarists, fanciful cranks, whose whims serve only to amuse philosophers, and who play the role of “court fool” to embellish the leisure of thinkers, when relaxation takes the place of work. But it may be said in reply that those who now predict astounding achievements of mind, who map out new highways for thought and invention, who believe, with all the accumulation of knowledge which the past has conferred upon the present, the foremost of discoverers have but entered the vestibule of the unknown, but not the un-knowable, are not treated with greater rudeness than others in the far away days, who, like Galileo, was persecuted for asserting that the earth moves.

It would be interesting, in view of the gigantic strides man has made during the last century, in exploring the mysteries of nature, to outline still further the victories that will challenge the admiration of the world, when a hundred years are gone, but space forbids, and yet our readers have a right to anticipate the inquiry, what of the railroad system when a hundred years are gone? Such an inquiry suggests another, which comes still nearer to the great body of the patrons of the *Magazine*. It is, what of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen of North America, when a hundred years are gone? We confess that the possibilities of the Brotherhood warrant estimates which task the imagination to the utmost limits of rational conjecture. We know that the railroad interests of America are in their infancy, and that our beloved order is still more juvenile. The growth of the former means the expansion of the latter. An increase of the mileage of railroads means an increase in the grand army of locomotive firemen — more lodges and more benevolence. It is a sublime idea. We are building lodges,

not only for the present, but for the future, not only for ourselves, but for posterity. We are laying the foundations deep and strong. Our theory is in consonance with the principles of truth, justice and benevolence, fraternity and the dignity of labor, We are builders, and our work is to go on forever. Our order is to renew its youth as the years speed on. Broad-based as the continent, and as enduring as the everlasting hills, it is designed to resist antagonistic influences from without, and can be overthrown only on the treason of its professed friends. But we indulge no misgivings, preferring to predict for the Brotherhood imperial sway and worldwide renown, when a hundred years are gone.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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