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Our national character:- how it was formed

If you were to ask the average man how it came about that England, or rather the English speaking races, were the leading people of to-day, he would probably answer, "because the English have always been successful in war, but if you pursued the subject and asked him why we had been successful, both in gaining territories and holding them, he would probably be at a loss for an answer.

Now it is indeed a fact that it is chiefly by war that we have gained most of the Empire of which we are so proud to-day, and however much we strive for peace in these enlightened days we should never forget that many of the benefits we enjoy

to-day were paid for by our fore-fathers, by immense sacrifices in order to benefit generations yet unborn. It is this spirit of sacrifice and true patriotism which has made our nation what it is to-day and it is only by maintaining this spirit and striving to emulate the noble lives that have gone before us that we can maintain our leadership. The real strength of a nation does not consist so much in the number of Dreadnoughts it can build or the amount of money it may have invested as in the spirit of its people and the food-producing power of their labour. All the great Empires of the past have crumbled to dust not because their armies were beaten in the field but because their social order had become

corrupt and selfish, caring more about their own individual pleasures than the welfare of the community. Now as far back as we can trace the history of our own nation we find that there has always been present in the large mass of the people a war-like spirit, quick to resent injustice and oppression, and an indomitable persistence to hold out to the bitter end which has many a time gained a victory when the odds were all against it.

Now then is it that this spirit became such a strong feature in our national character that it has lasted down to our own times? Chiefly because of these habits of our forefathers. It was for long thought that the supremacy of the English was due to their being such large consumers of meat, more

especially beef. This fact however would not account for much in itself if we did not consider the exertion required in order to obtain it. Many nations are still in a state of savagery because their food supply is so abundant and easy of possession that they are never required to exert themselves either mentally or physically and so live on from one generation to another in a state of primitive savagery. It was not so however with our ancestors. The first we know of them is that

they they lived in the forests of Central and Northern Europe which were at that time inhabited by large drives of wild cattle which moved about from place to place according to the seasons and state of the pasture. These cattle were the staple food of the forest tribes who consequently had to

accompany them in their migrations, killing such of them as they could with their primitive weapons, and then feasting themselves on the flesh of the carcase, and using the skins for clothing. When we consider that their chief weapons were flint-headed arrows and stone axes we cannot fail to recognise that their lives must often have been in danger from such contests. Such conditions as these would tend to develop a race both strong and courageous.

The necessity also of having to follow the trail of a wild animal, often for miles through the forest would involve a process of mental calculation and develop the reasoning powers to a great extent. We can see therefore how these qualities have been gradually developed in the race from the earliest times

As they gradually became more enlightened they would find means of taming the young cattle they caught and become possessors of flocks and herds which could furnish them at all times with an abundant food supply. They would still however be under the necessity of moving about in order to find fresh pastures. They probably at this time first made use of horses which would enable them to get about with greater ease and facility. During their wanderings they often came into collision with other tribes and would probably have to fight in order to retain their possessions. It was therefore highly necessary that they should be alert and watchful and able to guard themselves at any time. Thus we see how those habits were gradually formed which have helped to make us the nation

we are to-day. As the tribes became more num. with their numbers of their cattle which form-
erous they spread farther west and north-west ed the original stock from which the Short-horn
until stopped by the North Sea. Having by cattle have descended. They speedily subdued
this time acquired a certain degree of civili- the southern part of the country to which they
zation and discovered the use of various gave the name of England and of which they
metals they soon acquired the art of boat. have retained possession ever since. From this
building and became a terror to the sea-coast country they have pursued their adventurous
countries. They did not ply their trade as home-quests into all parts of the earth's surface.
not fishermen but were more expert in making
raids on those tribes of a less warlike nature
who lived chiefly by the peaceful pursuits
of agriculture. It was during one of these
expeditions that they first discovered these
islands at that time a Roman colony
and finding it a fruitful country and
well adapted to their requirements they
crossed the North Sea in large numbers
about the end of the fifth century bringing

What it means to have a mind of your own.

Mind. The power in man which thinks; the whole inner nature or spirit of man, as the reason, judgment, ^{etc} affections.

The above is the definition of mind as the dictionary gives it. It does not follow however that because a man possesses a mind that he is going to use it. Most people are either too lazy or else too stupid to think for themselves.

Those who in their youthful days might have shown some tendency to develop their minds have generally been severely discouraged by those set in authority over them. They come into a world which has already made up its mind that it does not want anything altered.

Take for instance the boy who has his own ideas about things. He gets spanked and sent to bed. In later life he finds himself up against the schoolmaster, the parson, the policeman, and in fact the whole force of law and order (so called). These things have a tendency to elimination. It is as though the people with minds have to run a gauntlet in which many of the weaker ones fall to the ground. The few survivors are always quite sure of themselves, and their active minds act as a lever on the inert mass of the non-thinking multitude. It takes time however for ideas to penetrate.

History is a record of such people being imprisoned, tortured, burnt at the stake, and generally suppressed as much as possible. Why? Well, simply because they are in advance of their generation. Each age regards itself as the last word in knowledge, as well as most of the other virtues. Consequently, the few people who are so audacious as to think of anything which might conceivably be better, are regarded by the majority of their fellows as ^{*}infidels, heretics, cranks, etc., and treated accordingly. About five centuries later, more or less, the ideas they promulgated, come to be recognized ~~and~~ by the people who have benefited by them. The usual procedure then is to hold a memorial service in memory of the dead, and then return with added zest to the good work of suppressing the living.

You may be right in thinking that most people are either too lazy or too stupid etc., but may it not be that many are simply afraid & many others unaccustomed to do so from youth up.

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I like your spirited style of writing & love of independence, but you are apt to exaggerate a little as here*. What you say seems true, on the whole, of past times when persecutions & suppression was more rife. Nowadays we don't always spurn the new - esp. if it is reasonably presented in the many unknown ways of thought are, of course, cherished unduly.

29th Jan. 1926

Richard Baater 1615 - 1691

Richard Baater was born Nov. 12th 1615 at Rowton, in Shropshire. His maternal grandfather Richard Adeney was a resident of this village and Baater spent the first ten years of his life there. This was owing to the dissolute character of his father, who however reformed after the birth of his son, who was also the only child.

At the age of ten, young Richard went to reside permanently with his father, whose early excesses were now almost forgotten and from him received instruction in the Book which had played such an important part in the re-building of his character. This teaching at the most impressionable period of life, coupled with Baater's sensitive nature made a lasting impression. As a boy he was rather prone to boyish faults, but had a real love for his books. At the age of fifteen the whole current of his life was affected through reading a book on Revolution by a Jesuit named Parsons. It was through reading this book that he was first inspired with the desire to justify his existence.

For the next few years of his life he obtained the greater part of his knowledge from books, and although introduced to court circles in his eighteenth year, he speedily withdrew to his country home again.

When he came of age his health was in such a condition that he scarcely expected to live another year, and it was this belief that fired him with the desire to witness to his belief in the Gospel, while life was yet spared him. Owing to this desire he became ordained in 1638 and was appointed master of the grammar school at Dudley with licence to preach, his first sermon being preached in the upper parish church of Dudley.

He afterwards extended his ministry to the surrounding villages, and for the first time came into contact with men who did not conform to the State Church.

J. B. Titterton
24.11.12

This it was which first caused Baxter to consider his own position with regard to Church doctrine, and from now onwards we see the gradual development of that spirit of Nonconformity which culminated in the great refusal of 1662. In less than a year he was called to Bridgnorth, where his preaching greatly influenced the people, and from thence passed on to Kidderminster in 1641 until compelled to leave, through the condition of the town at the outbreak of the civil war. For the next few years he was in touch with the Parliamentary forces during which time he strove most earnestly for reconciliation of religious opinions. He was however so imprudent as to sign the Solemn Covenant without rightly understanding its clauses, but this is only typical of the man's trusting nature. He was yet to mature his judgment through bitter experience. He returned to his ministry at Kidderminster in 1647 and there continued for the next fourteen years, exerting such an influence by his preaching and character as has survived through succeeding generations. He also laboured for religious unity among the various sects of that time and in 1652 drew up the Worcester Agreement. He continued in his labours until the Restoration when he was offered the bishopric of Hereford which however he refused. At the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662 Baxter was faced with the alternative of "rendering unto Caesar the things which were not Caesar's" or resigning his pastorate. He chose the latter course. Shortly afterwards he married a young lady of Kidderminster, with whom he lived happily, as regards his married life, until her death nineteen years later.

During this time however he suffered much persecution on account of his preaching, was twice imprisoned for nonconformity, but he survived to see the dawn of a new era in the revolution of 1688. He passed away very peacefully, December 8th 1691 and was buried at Christ Church, London, beside his loved wife.

This life was given to the service of his faith, both in regard to preaching and writing. He has been credited with as many as 168 books and treatises. It is indeed questionable whether any other life has had a greater influence on Nonconformity. J. B. Titterton
27.11.12