

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL WAR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MINNESOTA¹

No people can pass through a period of abnormal existence without some modification of its fundamental institutions, more or less profound. Even though the period of abnormality be short and the ruffling of the surface of things apparently insignificant, the path of the destiny of that people takes a new turn and never can affairs be put back upon the old footing. Wars rank among the most potent of modifying influences. Nevertheless all wars do not equally produce immediate and perceptible changes in the life of a nation. While more spectacular and politically significant, the American Revolution did not remold the lives of the people of the United States as did the titanic European struggle to eject Napoleon, wherein the War of 1812 was one of the closing chapters.

The Civil War in the United States has been, down to the present conflict in which we are engaged, the most momentous and the most highly significant armed struggle which has wrenched our people out of the beaten track. Leaving out of consideration the political effects of this strife as well as the legal and social results of putting an end to domestic slavery, the student of the period of the war and the years immediately following perceives the rise of new forces in the social order and the submergence of older factors. All portions of the Union, however, were not equally affected. The South, obviously, was most radically modified, both during the war and in the following reconstruction period. Yet the North by no means emerged from the contest unchanged, although it was

¹ An address read at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, January 14, 1918.

but little affected by the ravages of contending armies and subject to nothing of the blighting economic depression which spread its pall over all the seceding states.

In April, 1861, the industrial organization of the North was attuned to peace. For four years preceding the fall of Sumter the country had been slowly emerging from the hard times following the panic of 1857, and, but for the political cloud on the horizon, everything appeared propitious for a new era of prosperity. Factories turned the product of the southern cotton fields into cloth, while mines were sending to the smelters the ore which would yield the metal for all the varied industrial demands of an age of steam. Better prices and ample labor stimulated the farmer to produce the food stuffs and raw products which a reviving industry demanded, while good wages made the laborer's position better than anywhere else in the world. To be sure, there were flies in the economic ointment; mutterings about the railroads were later to become articulate; the germ of the subsequent disputes between labor and capital could be discerned by a keen observer; and there were some who questioned whether there might not come a time of reckoning with the problems growing out of the concentration of population which accompanied the factory system. Nevertheless, if the troublesome issues arising from slavery could be compromised away, as had been the case so many times before, it was possible to face the economic future with confidence.

When it was realized, however, that the war was to be something more than a holiday excursion to Richmond, the future began to appear less rosy. The stopping of the cotton supply caused the mills of the North to slacken their activities. Soon, when the accumulated stock of fibre was exhausted, the hum of the spindles nearly ceased, and, while some operators attempted to keep their employees busy with repairs, improvements, and extensions for a time when normal conditions should be restored, many of them were obliged to shut their doors and see their help drift off into other work. Frantic

efforts were made to substitute other fibres, but little success attended these endeavors. Hopes were raised high when portions of the southern coast fell before the exploits of the Union armies and navy, only to be dashed by the meagreness of the bales obtained. Even when New Orleans was captured, only a small amount of cotton was secured. To be sure a little trickled through the lines in exchange for articles needed in the South, even for war munitions in some cases, and this was sold to manufacturers, or more often to speculators, at rapidly mounting prices. Cotton fabrics became so scarce that silks from the Orient could be obtained more easily and more cheaply.

If cotton manufacturing had been dealt a staggering blow, many other industries were inordinately stimulated. All sorts of supplies for the armed forces were in great demand; the metal industries were rushed to capacity; cloth for uniforms was desired in such quantities that the mill-owner stilled for a time his incessant plea for protection and yet more protection. The cry for wool made sheep raising upon the barren hills of northern New England profitable once more, and hundreds of hitherto almost worthless farms were turned into paying sheepwalks. Shoddy came into its own, even though soldiers in the field complained that their uniforms dropped to pieces in a few weeks. Shoes and boots for the army gave an impetus to factory production of these articles which was now possible because of an adaptation of Howe's sewing machine. Leather soared and cattle raising thrived.

Whatever surplus of labor was loosed upon the community by the stopping of a few industries was rapidly absorbed by the extraordinary demands in other branches, and soon the cry of shortage in the labor market was heard. This appeal became more insistent as the armies grew and absorbed thousands of young men. Yet, when it is considered that the Union forces were made up principally of boys in their teens and young men in their early twenties, it can be perceived that the greatest part of the labor power of the country was

not turned from productive to destructive activity. Two factors, moreover, served to relieve the labor situation: the substitution of women for men workers, and the use of labor-saving machinery. It was at this time that women began in large numbers to take positions hitherto almost exclusively filled by men; the schoolma'am ruled in the place of the school master, and the female clerk, it was discovered, was as efficient as her brother. Whatever was gained in the economic struggle by women during the war was not relinquished at its close, and furthermore a great impetus was given to the demand for women's equal rights, economic, social, and political.

But if the transition advanced materially the cause of women in certain aspects, it brought other and sadder changes. The need for ready-made clothing stimulated sweatshop methods. Hundreds of women, old and young, pushed to the wall by mounting prices and by the removal of male wage-earners, eked out a bare living sewing for army contractors and sub-contractors at the scantiest of wages. Again Howe's invention, made practicable just before the outbreak of the war, contributed both to rapidity of supply and to heart-breaking toil.

It was in the agricultural field, however, that machinery as a substitute for man power made itself most evident. The armies had to be fed as well as clothed; not only that, but ample allowance had to be made for the inevitable waste which attends military operations. Without the mowing machine, the horse rake, and the reaper it is impossible to conceive how the armies or the civilian population could have been fed, or surplus of wheat raised and sent abroad to help maintain the credit of the United States in the mart of the world. To labor-saving devices, more than to any other one cause, was due the tremendous increase in the production of food stuffs in the fields of western New York and Pennsylvania, and of the Northwest. Still, machines could not take the place of human labor entirely, and while the agricultural West raised no such complaint of shortage of labor as did the manufacturing East,

women had to work in the fields to sow and harvest the crops, particularly in the last two years of the war when the draft was garnering in a constantly increasing number of youths.²

It was not enough to produce the food and the other raw products. They had to be transported to the front, to the manufacturing centers, and to the seaboard for export. One of the decisive adverse factors with which the Confederacy had to contend was a most inadequate railroad system, constructed wholly from Northern and European materials, while one of the elements contributing to Union success was a network of lines which not only connected the interior with the seaboard but linked remote communities with the business centers of the North.³ In the later period of the war some portions of the South were on the verge of starvation while others had an unusuable surplus of food; Lee's army, for instance, was destitute in Virginia when Alabama had all the necessities in abundance. On the other hand, after it had been gathered at the primary distributing centers by rail or by river boat, the wheat of Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin poured into New York from Milwaukee and Chicago either by rail or by the Great Lakes and the Erie Canal.

The railroads were not slow to realize that they held the whip hand. Prior to the war Atlantic ports competed with New Orleans as outlets for the products of the upper Mississippi and the Ohio; long usage gave the southern port advantages not easily overcome. When, however, the Confederate government realized that the Northwest was going to throw its lot with the Union the Mississippi was closed, and traffic had to be diverted to the welcoming but not necessarily benevolent competitors. They were not averse to making all possible use of their commanding position, to the end that the farmer could complain that an unduly large portion of the fruits of

² Frederick Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade*, ch. 1 (Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1916).

³ Carl R. Fish, "The Northern Railroads, April, 1861," in the *American Historical Review*, 22:778-793 (July, 1917).

his labor was absorbed in transportation charges. In no small degree did this extortion add to the already existing dissatisfaction with railroad treatment and precipitate the "anti-monopoly" revolt which came at the close of the war as a precursor to the Granger agitation and legislation of the early seventies.⁴

Not content with the added tonnage and consequent receipts which the closing of the river gave them, the railroads took steps to throttle local river transportation. Wherever the rails tapped a territory which was also served by river boats, cut rates forced the cheaper carrier to lay up, except where a persevering independent continued to carry on a precarious business. Moreover, all possible steps were taken to divert to rail points traffic which logically should have sought non-competitive river facilities. At a time, then, when one would expect that traffic on the upper river and its affluents should have shared in the benefits of war commerce, there came a falling off. For instance, in 1862 St. Paul had the largest number of boat arrivals during the war (1015) exceeded only by those in 1857 and 1858 (1026 and 1068). Thereafter the decline which ensued was continued with occasional spurts of renewed life. What was true of St. Paul obtained at the ports on the smaller streams.⁵

Minnesota necessarily shared in the economic transition which affected the whole Northwest. Yet, inasmuch as Minnesota was still in the midst of her pioneer endeavors, it is difficult to determine with any precision just what should be charged to war conditions and what to a continuing primitive stage of development. When territorial status was proclaimed in 1849 fewer than 5,000 souls lived in Minnesota, but such was the rush to virgin lands that the census of 1860 disclosed a population of 172,022. The next five years saw this number nearly doubled, but in the five years following the war a

⁴ Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin*, ch. 12.

⁵ Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin*, ch. 14; Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1869, p. 107.

smaller proportionate gain in population was made than in the war era. There were 250,099 persons in the state in 1865, in 1870 there were 440,076. Nevertheless this was an average annual increase of 15.19 per cent, and in the decade from 1860 to 1870 only Nebraska and Kansas had higher rates of increase.⁶

The war did affect the relative proportions of males and females. Whereas in a normal community which has passed through the earlier formative stages the number of females is slightly in excess of the males, in 1860 Minnesota's male population exceeded the female by 8.22 per cent; in 1870 this disproportion had somewhat disappeared for the males were only 6.84 per cent more numerous, yet the state census of 1865 showed that the females were outnumbered by but 5 per cent. In the census returns after 1870 the approach to a normal relation of the sexes demonstrated that pioneer days were rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

As a result of the inpouring of people, despite the ample response of Minnesota to Lincoln's calls for soldiers, there was no such dearth of labor as was experienced, for instance, by her neighbor, Wisconsin. Late in 1863 and during 1864, when more plentiful money accompanied renewed activity, especially in railroad construction and in lumbering, there is some evidence that there was a heavier demand for labor, yet nowhere does there seem to have been such a shortage as was experienced in the agricultural and lumbering states across the Mississippi. Again, while wages increased somewhat between 1861 and 1864, the average for common laborers in the latter year was not as high as in Wisconsin.⁷

In common with all the rest of the United States the increase in wages was not at all proportionate to the rise in prices of all sorts of commodities. There was nothing unusual in the way that prices of necessities soared during the war; similar

⁶ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1870, p. 116.

⁷ Governor's message, January, 1865, in Minnesota, *Executive Documents*, 1864, p. 19; Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin*, ch. 6.

phenomena have been observed among every people engaged in a great armed struggle. Nevertheless, large amounts of fiat currency issued by the United States served to aggravate the prevailing tendencies. In the West, however, the greenback was not looked upon with the disfavor it encountered in the older portions of the Union. Contrasted with the depreciated notes of state banks, the United States note was indeed the "best money" the West had ever known, and to the local economist there was in it no evil except its limited amount.

State banking, which was usually accompanied by secured and superabundant note issues, forms one of the least pleasing features of the early history of most of our frontier states from the beginning of the century down to the time the national banking act began to operate in full force. Minnesota had not escaped the prevailing passion and had sought to eke out the scanty supply of specie trickling into her commercial channels by authorizing banks to issue upon securities regarded by outsiders with suspicion and not sound enough to prevent great depreciation. The war, however, did not produce so much added disturbance in the exchange value of notes secured by railroad bonds as it did in Wisconsin and Illinois where bonds of southern states had been largely used as a guaranty. In fact, after a time, the war proved a blessing so far as Minnesota's currency situation was concerned. Not only did the greenback afford relief, but the state banks chartered during the war based their issues upon state and national bonds of one sort or another and so inspired a confidence which had been almost lacking previously. But no greater alacrity to take advantage of the national banking act of 1863 was shown by banking interests in Minnesota than was the case in other states. Many new state banks were incorporated but only two national banks had received charters before Congress, in March, 1865, forced all banks of issue to enter the new fold or go out of existence.⁸

⁸ Sydney A. Patchin, "The Development of Banking in Minnesota," in the *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 2: 159-168 (August, 1917).

While relief had come by 1863, the previous two years had been a period of great money stringency in the state. Specie disappeared from circulation as it did all over the United States; money was almost impossible to obtain and exorbitant rates of interest were charged.⁹

Investigation of the agricultural phase of war economics in Minnesota is complicated by the difficulty of determining whether the truly remarkable progress exhibited by the state was a result of the war or came in spite of the war. Undoubtedly there would have been a great development under normal conditions, for, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the earlier steps had been taken and the temporary setback produced by the panic and hard times had been overcome. Untouched lands have ever tempted man to exploitation, and Minnesota's millions of fertile acres have proved no exception to the rule. On the other hand the high prices of wheat and other grains unquestionably stimulated production. Despite the Indian outbreaks and a devastating drouth in 1862 and 1863 the wheat harvest advanced from 5,101,432 bushels in 1860 to 9,475,000 bushels in 1865. As the assistant secretary of state remarked in his annual report, "the development of agriculture kept even pace with the population." Moreover, a high yield per acre encouraged more men to sow wheat.¹⁰

The new homestead policy of the federal government added to the total available public lands open to settlement. These were already extensive for, in addition to the school and university lands and swamp lands which had been donated to the

⁹ One of Ignatius Donnelly's correspondents asks his aid in obtaining the payment of a loan of fifty dollars, the interest on which was three per cent a month. Schriver to Donnelly, November 12, 1862, in the Donnelly Papers. The papers of Ignatius Donnelly comprise one of the larger and more important collections of manuscript material in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. They consist mainly of the letters received by Donnelly, supplemented by his own letter-press books. See *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 1:133 (August, 1915).

¹⁰ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1869, p. 9; Commissioner of statistics, *Minnesota: Its Resources and Progress*, 1872, p. 27.

state and territory, enormous grants for railroad purposes, amounting eventually to nearly twelve million acres, were open to purchase or to preëmption. In 1863 a total of 463,296 acres was taken up; this amount increased in 1864 to 665,750, and in 1865 to 804,982 acres. After the close of the war this rate of increase was not maintained; in 1866 a smaller acreage passed into private hands than in the previous year, and in 1869 there was only a slight increase over 1865. *Post bellum* depression and poor harvests in these two years in part explain the falling off.¹¹

Minnesota was not unaffected by the prevalent stimulus which was given to certain activities. Naturally those related to some branch of husbandry received the greater attention. Attempts were made to find substitutes for the cane sugar and molasses which could no longer be obtained from Louisiana. Sorghum was the most promising of these substitutes, and it was tried out on a considerable scale. While this plant yielded a syrup of good quality, all efforts to cause it to crystallize into sugar proved fruitless. It was thought that tobacco might be raised and so free the North from dependence on the South for this article, but no very serious attention was given the crop during the war. It was not until the period of high prices in 1868 and the years immediately following that farmers of the Northwest believed there were sufficient prospects of a paying crop to invest much time or money in its growth.¹²

Wool, however, was in a different category. The high price of this commodity early stimulated the Minnesota husbandman to try his luck at supplying a portion of the demand in the hope of securing a share of the enormous profits of the successful sheep raiser. The number of sheep in the state in 1864 was slightly over 97,000. Importations and natural

¹¹ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1869, p. 127.

¹² Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin*, 35-37; Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1870, p. 35. John Wass wrote to his congressman, Donnelly, December 13, 1863, asking for tobacco seed for himself and for the benefit of Minnesota. Donnelly Papers.

increase sent this number to 193,045 in 1866. The high expectations were not realized, however, for in 1869 the number of sheep in the state had fallen to 135,450, while the next year saw another decrease. A report of the state department said, "It will hardly be claimed that even the more moderate expectations respecting the growth of wool have been justified by the results yet obtained; and it is undeniable that this important interest has experienced a serious decline, and labors today under great depression."¹³ Experience proved that the lateness of the spring in this northern climate caused the lambing season to come too late for the best development of flocks, and men soon drew out of this branch of husbandry as rapidly as they could.

Next to agriculture, lumbering received the strongest impetus from the war. In common with Wisconsin and Michigan, Minnesota possessed vast resources in standing timber, of which the white pine covering much of the northern portions of this section was considered most valuable. In 1863, after a depression in the first years of the war which was more seriously felt in Wisconsin where greater development had already taken place, the prices of lumber began to jump and continued to rule high. In 1864 the pineries of Minnesota, like those of western Wisconsin, were precluded from taking advantage of the price of twenty-three dollars a thousand in Chicago, by the unusually low water in the branches of the upper Mississippi; but the next year saw a different situation and millions of feet were floated down to market. Peace brought a great slump in the lumber market, and it was not until 1867 that reviving conditions pushed the price even higher than it had been during the war.¹⁴

The Fifties had, down to the panic, been a boom period for lumbermen, signalized by the concentration of thousands of acres of valuable timber land in the hands of a few operators. The fraudulent use of half-breed scrip, among other means,

¹³ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1869, p. 43; 1870, p. 36.

¹⁴ Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin*, 61-63.

had contributed to the alienation of much public wealth.¹⁵ During the war a stop was put to this easy method of appropriating the public's wealth, but in 1868 a more complaisant secretary of the interior opened the door again and the merry scramble was resumed. Railroad lands, too, offered an opportunity to the energetic and not too scrupulous lumberman, which, coupled with an easy attitude on the part of state officials, further served to build up enormous holdings. A single illustration, by no means extreme, serves to indicate what opportunities lay open to the astute. The firm of Hersey, Staples, and Dean (Hersey, Staples, and Hall after 1866) was organized in April of 1861. When the partnership was dissolved in 1875 each of the three associates was able to take as his third of the accumulated holdings a hundred thousand acres of timber land. Coöperation of state officials, as well as local agents of the federal government, with favored lumbermen also aided the latter, not only to secure the land itself, but, in some cases, to allow cutting of timber at a more than reasonable valuation without the necessity of buying the soil which grew the trees. This was a variant of the scrip frauds.¹⁶

The war both retarded and promoted the construction of railroads in Minnesota. When the vast land grant to the prospective state was made by Congress in 1857 for the purpose of forwarding the building of lines which should connect distant points with the more settled portions and also link Minnesota up with her neighbors, everybody looked to a period of prosperity even more intense than that which had existed in the preceding few years. But the panic in the same year spelled doom to such anticipations. Although the land was

¹⁵ William W. Folwell, *Minnesota, the North Star State*, 112-120 (Boston, 1908).

¹⁶ George W. Hotchkiss, *History of the Lumber and Forest Industry of the Northwest*, 531 (Chicago, 1898); "Report of the Pine Land Committee" (Senate), March 3, 1874, in *Minnesota, Senate and House Journal*, 1874, pp. 541-552; *Testimony Taken by the Committee on Invalid Pensions*, 59 (44 Congress, 1 session, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, no. 193—serial 1707).

granted to companies, it was impossible to secure sufficient money for construction either in the East or in Europe. Land was a drug on the market. State bonds were issued to the chartered companies as the grading of successive strips of roadbed was completed. These were formally like other bonds, but in the minds of the people who had amended the state constitution so that the "credit" of the state might be loaned they were merely a form, for it was intended that the railroads themselves should pay the obligation. New York capitalists, moreover, looked askance at any kind of new securities, especially those which had to do with new enterprises whose returns were problematical. The net result was the defaulting of the railroad companies, while Minnesota had a few score miles of poorly graded roadbed to show for an obligation of nearly two millions known as the "Five Million Loan." The retraction of the amendment of 1858 and a regrant of the lands to newly organized companies in 1861 and 1862, brought the completion of only ten miles of track, and this was the situation when the war had gone on for a year.¹⁷

The regrant of lands and privileges which the old companies had forfeited, together with easier money, injected some show of life into railroad enterprises, and when 1863 closed there were fifty-six and a half miles ready for operation. The following year saw over thirty miles added and at the end of 1865 over two hundred miles of railroad existed in the state.¹⁸ But to counterbalance this was the alienation of thousands of acres from the public domain, as well as the spectre of that "Five Million Loan," which was to come up year after year until the ghost was finally laid in 1910.¹⁹

¹⁷ William W. Folwell, "The Five Million Loan," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15: 189-214.

¹⁸ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1869, p. 105.

¹⁹ In the spring of 1858 the voters of Minnesota adopted an amendment to the constitution providing that the "credit" of the state, to the amount of five million dollars, might be loaned for the purpose of facilitating the construction of railroads. In the following two years \$2,275,000 worth of bonds were issued to four companies which had complied with

Except in flour milling and in the manufactures of lumber, Minnesota did not share in the industrial burst of the northern states during the war. Even in these lines, while the proportional increase was impressive, the absolute results were not correspondingly great. The total number of manufacturing establishments rose from 562 in 1860 to 2057 in 1870, yet the capitalization of all these concerns was only \$11,806,738.²⁰ Nevertheless, this showing was not bad for a pioneer state so young as Minnesota, even though the major portion of the increase came in the last half of the decade. Milling of flour and the primary processes of lumber manufacture accounted for more than half the total capital invested and nearly half the number of establishments, while these two lines gave employment to approximately one-third of the persons engaged in industrial pursuits. Some beginnings are seen in the fabrication of sashes, doors, and blinds, furniture, machinery, agricultural implements, carriages and wagons, harness, and a few other articles.

After Lee surrendered in 1865, it took a little time for a society grown accustomed to war conditions to adjust itself again to peace. A temporary economic stagnation accompanied the return of the armies to everyday existence. This slackening was, however, of short duration. The world marvelled at the ease with which a million men who had just laid aside their arms could be absorbed into the economic life of the com-

the requirements by grading nearly two hundred and fifty miles of road-bed. The companies, however, failed to fulfill other obligations and the governor was forced to start foreclosure proceedings which resulted in the transfer of all their privileges and property to the state. The bonds, which had greatly depreciated in value, were in form an obligation of the state, but all attempts to secure payment were of no avail until 1881 when provision was made for the issue of Minnesota state railroad adjustment bonds in exchange for the old ones. The liquidation of these refunding bonds was completed in 1910. Folwell, "The Five Million Loan," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15: 189-214; Rasmus S. Saby, "Railroad Legislation in Minnesota, 1849 to 1875," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15: 30-49.

²⁰ Minnesota, *Statistics*, 1870, p. 63.

munity, causing scarcely a ripple upon the surface of the social fabric. Minnesota, in common with the rest of the states of the West, was an important factor in the process. Her vacant and inviting lands, which could be obtained for a trifling cash investment plus a large amount of energy, fortitude, and patience, stood ready to receive all those who were unwilling to return to their old homes to try to fit themselves into a situation which had grown strange in their absence. The population of the state increased between 1865 and 1870, by nearly two hundred thousand, while the taking up of railroad, state, and federal lands kept even step with the march of the inpouring flood.²¹

It was not, however, returning soldiers alone who swarmed to Minnesota. Up to 1865 the population elements of the state were not much dissimilar from those of her neighbors of the Northwest, or for that matter, of the whole North. In 1860 something over two-thirds of the inhabitants were of native birth. Those of foreign birth, who totalled 58,728, were mostly Irish, Germans, English, and British Americans, just about the same racial elements to be found anywhere from New York to the Mississippi. In 1864 the legislature enacted a law to "organize a system for the promotion of immigration to the State of Minnesota" in order to offset the further drain which might be anticipated on account of the war, as well as to secure settlers for waiting prairies. Pamphlets in the English, German, and Scandinavian tongues were printed and spread broadcast to picture the possibilities of the region as well as to remove many misapprehensions as to the soil and especially the climate. Beginnings of Scandinavian immigration had been made as early as the late Fifties, but in 1860 this element comprised less than 12,000 of the 172,000 people in the state. These, like the Germans, had for the most part moved on from Wisconsin. But the seed had been planted. The watering came when a board of immigration was created

²¹ Commissioner of statistics, *Minnesota: Its Resources and Progress*, 1870, p. 31.

in 1867, with Hans Mattson its secretary. Mattson held the position of land agent for one of the railroads which traversed some of the most desirable portions of the state, hence he was able to give definite directions as to favorable points for settlement.²² Perhaps to this man, more than to any other one factor is due the great Scandinavian migration to Minnesota. In 1870 Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes comprised thirteen and one-half per cent of the population, and had already begun to impress upon the state an indelible mark. In 1860 there had been only half as many Scandinavians as there were in Wisconsin; by 1870 Minnesota had over fifty-nine thousand as against Wisconsin's forty-eight thousand. The Swedes alone were pressing close to the lead of the Irish, and in a year or so overtook and passed this element. Only the Germans could rival the Scandinavians and even they comprised but 48,457 souls as against 59,390.

When men return to the primitive passions brought by war there is necessarily a loss of much of the hardly won refinement which can be a product of peace alone. How long after the struggle there will be seen the results of this relapse is a matter difficult of determination. All students of the Civil War, however, have noted that the years immediately following 1865 presented an unusual number of examples of low public morality. This was the period when the Whisky Ring was profiting at the expense of the federal government, and when federal officers connived at gross irregularities as well as shared in the profits. The *Crédit Mobilier* not only was an example of "high finance" in railroading, but it served to blast several public careers as well as to sully the reputations of prominent men who were not completely overwhelmed by the public wrath which followed exposure. The manipulations of the Tweed Ring in New York, aided by its intimate relation with certain Wall Street interests, exemplify in an exaggerated degree, perhaps, the degradation into which most of the larger

²² Secretary of state, *Annual Report*, 1866, p. 113; Hans Mattson, *Reminiscences, the Story of an Immigrant*, 97-100 (St. Paul, 1891).

municipalities had fallen.²³ The whole civil service of the United States had become so honeycombed with corruption and inefficiency that the reform element of the Republican party could, in its campaign from 1870 to 1872, urge with great force the need of a complete housecleaning. The old guard itself could not present any defense and was forced to adopt at least in form the principles of the reformers.

It would be easy to say, of course, that all this array of horrible examples, which was exposed to view in investigation after investigation from about 1870 on, could be paralleled at many other times in the history of this country or of other nations. It might be said that every now and then a people has a spasm of reforming zeal and while in this mood can find evidences of corruption and laxity if it looks with sufficient care; that the period, say from 1872 to 1875, was just one of these periods. Furthermore it might be added that a panic followed by hard times is likely to produce soul searching on the part of a stricken population; religious revivals vie with judicial and legislative investigations.

Still this does not wholly dispose of the case. Not alone in the United States after the Civil War, but in Germany after the Franco-Prussian War, for instance, keen observers noted a recklessness, an abandon, which characterized the economic and social life of the people. Everybody was enjoying good times, nobody was interested in counting pennies or in inquiring too carefully into the doings of his neighbor so long as his own particular activities were not interfered with. In such times the public official who inclined to make the most of his position could pursue his course without much fear interruption, while the man who desired to remain honest was sorely tempted when he perceived the ease with which he, too, might

²³ Charles F. Adams, "A Chapter of Erie," in Charles F. Adams Jr. and Henry Adams, *Chapters of Erie, and Other Essays*, 4-99 (Boston, 1871); Charles F. Wingate, "An Episode in Municipal Government," in the *North American Review*, 119: 359-408; 120: 119-174; 121: 113-155; 123: 362-425 (1874-76).

profit in the way others were doing. There is no doubt that the later years of the war and those immediately following were permeated with this spirit, and that public opinion was generally inclined to laugh at the "smart" man more than to be indignant at pilferings or gigantic steals. Our civilization is too thin and too recent a veneer to stand much hard rubbing, and war rubs hard. Moreover, the veneer cannot be renewed immediately after the struggle ends.

Did Minnesota experience any of this general laxity which followed the war? If evidences are found shall they be attributed to a continuation of pioneer times, when there is a certain lack of regard for the finer products of civilization, such as the perception of more delicate degrees of public morality; or shall they be accounted for by the fact that Minnesota shared with the rest of the conquering North in a debauch of moral let-down? It would be hard to give a categorical answer to such a question. It may be said, however, that the late Sixties and the early Seventies saw a sufficient development of Minnesota to warrant confident belief that the worst aspects of the pioneer stage ought to have been things of the past. Nevertheless there are many indications that a deplorable laxity, if nothing worse, permeated the community and manifested itself in various irregular transactions.

One of the most spectacular of the revelations enjoyed by the newspaper reading public was that attending the Seeger Investigation and impeachment. It must be said at the outset that the legislature of Minnesota, by paying the state treasurer a salary of only one thousand dollars a year, actually, if not deliberately, encouraged all sorts of irregularity. It appeared that for years before this investigation, which came in 1873, the state treasurer was accustomed to "loan to and let bankers and business firms have the use of large sums of the State fund" as well as to draw upon the county treasurers for moneys not yet due and have personal use of such funds, sometimes for many months. Furthermore the books of the treasurer's office were in such a condition that it was impos-

sible to obtain an adequate idea of the financial status of the commonwealth. When there came a change in the treasurer's office the new incumbent, who happened to be the father-in-law of the outgoing treasurer, concealed the fact that large sums belonging to the state were not actually turned over, although subsequently the deficit was made up.²⁴

Such an opportunity as this to attack the party in power was not to be overlooked by the Democratic "outs," and this attack in turn provoked other revelations. It was discovered that county treasurers were also in the habit of failing to regard the distinction between the public funds and their own money.²⁵ They loaned the county's money to banks and other business firms, and in some instances, at least, received the interest themselves. It was further charged that sometimes bank officials had exerted themselves to secure the election of a particular man as county treasurer, and if the campaign proved successful the bank was not the loser. And then, when a leading Republican paper could seriously argue that nobody of men would convict a man for shielding his son-in-law, there is evidence that the standard of public morals was not overly high, to say the least.²⁶

The disclosures made in 1873 were followed by equally sensational ones the next year. Just before the Seeger Investigation had lifted the lid, the *St. Paul Daily Press* had reviewed the various departmental reports submitted to the

²⁴ *Report of the Special Senate Investigating Committee, Appointed to inquire into the Condition of the State Treasury*, 5-7 (St. Paul 1873); *Proceedings of the Senate of Minnesota, sitting as a High Court of Impeachment for the Trial of William Seeger, Treasurer of State* (Minneapolis, 1873).

²⁵ The *St. Paul Daily Press*, in its issue of February 27, 1873, affirmed that this was happening in all the Democratic counties, and admitted that the same thing might have occurred in Republican counties as well.

²⁶ *St. Paul Press*, March 6, 8, 1873; *Report of the Special Senate Committee, Appointed to Investigate the Management of the Office of State Auditor, prior to January, 1873*, 55 (1875). In February, 1874, William Murphy wrote that "there is something rotten in the management of county affairs." Murphy to Donnelly, February 4, 1874, in the Donnelly Papers.

legislature, and, among other comments, took particular pains to felicitate the state upon the efficient service rendered by the state auditor. He "closes an administration," the *Press* remarked, "which has been substantially coextensive with the ascendancy of the Republican party in his State, embracing in its four official terms a period of twelve years, with a terse statistical record of the varied questions during that time of the more important departments of the State Government under his control, which will form an enduring memorial of the general economy, prudence and beneficence which have, on the whole, characterized the management of State affairs by the Republican Party, and of Mr. McIlrath's own conspicuous and honorable share in its marked successes."²⁷

The McIlrath Investigation of 1874 demonstrated the truth of the statement made by the *Press* about the "conspicuous" share of the late state auditor. It was found that the auditor, in performing his functions as land commissioner, had been in the habit of accepting notes secured by a lien upon logs cut instead of cash payments for timber sold to lumbermen. In many instances before any payment was made the logs would have been disposed of. He sold timber at far below the market price; he connived at agreements among prospective purchasers of standing timber whereby there was no competition in bidding; he had kept in his own name and had received the interest on bonds purchased with money from the school fund, although eventually the bonds were credited to the fund. All the accounts of these, as well as other transactions were kept in such an ill-ordered manner that McIlrath himself testified before the investigating committee that he could not explain them. In all a sum of not less than one hundred thousand dollars was unaccounted for, as a result of "irregularities" beginning at least as early as 1866. In addition to the above, McIlrath had acquired, in 1868, an interest in a firm which entered into a contract with the state for the purchase of the

²⁷ *St. Paul Press*, February 1, 1873.

right to cut timber on some thousands of acres of university lands. It is no wonder certain lumbermen were anxious for the reelection of McIlrath at a time when some opposition seemed to be developing, especially when it is considered that, in addition to reasons which may be suspected from the foregoing statements, there had never been a prosecution of trespassers upon the state timber lands during his incumbency. As a matter of fact, the committee found that "extraordinary inducements were held out to parties to cut timber as trespassers."²⁸

Give all allowance possible to frontier conditions, grant every excuse to the men engaged in the task of opening a new land, and still there remains evidence of a sadly deficient sense of public morality. When we find all over the North similar conditions which cannot be explained by primitive necessities, the conviction grows that there was something abnormal in the atmosphere. Add to this the testimony of men high in the public estimation of the time, as well as the word of those who have sought an explanation of the social phenomena of that day, and even the naive confessions of that sanctimonious old railroad pirate, Daniel Drew, and it is impossible to conclude that some portion of the explanation is not to be found in the war and its aftermath.²⁹

If the Civil War teaches that such a social cataclysm stirs the mud in the depths of the pool, it also reveals the fact that men are stimulated by it to reestimate all social values. Along side the loosing of the baser propensities of mankind there comes

²⁸ In the *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Management of the Office of State Auditor* the above facts are brought out in the formal report of the committee as well as in the testimony accompanying the report.

²⁹ Bouck White, *Book of Daniel Drew, A Glimpse of the Fisk-Gould-Tweed Régime from the Inside*, 161 (New York, 1910); George W. Curtis' speech to the New York State Republican Convention, March 22, 1876, in the *New York Tribune*, March 23, 1876; speech of George F. Hoar in the *Congressional Record*, 44 Congress, 1 session, vol. 4, part 7, p. 63; James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*, vol. 7, ch. 1.

a renewed interest in many of those problems whose roots have been slowly entwining themselves about the inmost parts of our social structure. From 1865 down to the panic of 1873 the labor world was shaken by notable convulsions. Unionism, which had had a precarious existence up to the time of the war, advanced with remarkable strides. Educational questions, including the problem of the education of women, were receiving new attention. The temperance movement gained a wider following. The same stimuli that induced reflection along these lines served in time to turn thought to the corrupting sores which had developed in the social body. Those who would renovate an educational system or seek to find the true relations between capital and labor were not long content to tolerate in silence those blots upon our political organization which anyone could perceive if he stopped to observe.

In times like these one naturally desires to learn whether it is possible to draw upon the experiences of the Sixties for guidance in our present crisis and in the years which are to follow the War of 1917. Unfortunately, perhaps, it appears that general conditions are so dissimilar that little of a positive nature can be found. Among the more striking differences may be noted the fact that the Civil War in no way depleted the world's accumulated store of products as the present war is doing. The South was impoverished by the conflict and even yet has not recovered all the ground lost, but the resources of the North were not drained to an appreciable extent. This was due in part to the fact that so great a portion of the country was as yet untouched. Natural resources undreamed of in 1865 were to be discovered as the years passed, as, for example, the iron mines of Minnesota. Even more it was due to a failure to destroy on such a colossal scale as that on which the world now destroys.

America, after the close of the Civil War, offered to the people of the world an opportunity unequalled elsewhere. Migration on an unprecedented scale, arrested temporarily by economic depression in the Seventies and again in the Nineties,

sent workers to develop untouched possibilities. When the present war closes America will no longer be the outlet for the land-hungry people of Europe. Some less desirable remnants of land will be found here and there, but, except in parts of Canada, the land will not be given away to the asker. Furthermore, it is even a question whether there will not be a reverse process. There are indications that there may be a movement back to Europe which will most decidedly affect our future social and economic life.

The Civil War does not help us to see our path in matters of collective control of transportation, food, fuel, manufactures, or in any of the vital problems with which we are now grappling under abnormal conditions but which we shall find ourselves unable to drop the moment peace is declared. We shall find that we have clasped the handles of an electric machine the current of which will paralyze our efforts to relax our muscles. The world has gone far since 1865 in its ideas of the relation of the individual to the community.

There is, however, one ray of light which the earlier war and its effects throw upon existing and future problems. The partial economic emancipation and consequent general advance in status gained by women during the Rebellion was not lost when peace came. It can confidently be stated that what is being gained now will be retained; not only that, but it will serve as another stepping stone toward political, social, and economic equality with men. We shall not go back.

Could we predict with equal confidence along other lines it would be possible to guide our activities today in such a manner that the grosser blunders might be avoided. But, after all is said and done, about the extent of safe prophecy is this: war, under modern conditions, unsettles many if not most of our institutions; it is as futile to dream of getting back to the world in which we lived before 1914 as it is to believe we are in the last month by failing to tear a leaf from the calendar. Nevertheless, it will be the aim of many people to execute just this reverse. If the Civil War brings home the lesson

that it caused men to modify their course and that when it was ended society was marching in a somewhat different direction than it had been before, then it is possible to keep in mind that the same thing will be true when this war ends, with this sole qualification: there can be no comparison in the magnitude of the change.

LESTER BURRELL SHIPPEE

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
MINNEAPOLIS

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