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**Title:** "Colonial Prosperity," by William L. Whitney

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The history of the world is the history of changes. Nations rise, flourish & decline; and on their ruins are founded others, which live their day & die. Such is the story told us by the chronicle of ages; and such seems to be the order established by the Governor of the universe. Cities & nations once <sup>glorious and</sup> powerful have passed away, and had long since been forgotten, had not their ruins remained to tell an occasional traveller where they stood or faithful history preserved their memory. But most nations do not die without leaving a remnant to perpetuate their name & manners. A state, after it has been firmly established & thickly populated, sends forth its colonies, which, to a certain extent adopt the language & institutions of their parent. It is like a tree which has grown old & strong. Its roots send forth the tender twig, which, protected from the storm becomes a rival in size & strength, & when the parent tree is riven by the blast, or falls through age when no breeze rustles among its branches, it takes its place & flourishes above its decaying trunk. Or like the father who watches his growing son. At first he is the helpless child, dependent upon him for every thing; But with time he gains strength and knowledge, soon equals him in vigor & activity; & when the grave receives the father, the son is prepared to take his place. This regular order of succession is noticed, not in man & vegetation only, but in nations & cities. The most interesting feature in these changes, & that which merits attention, is that colonies generally excel their parent states.

The glory of Sidon, in the most ancient times a great & magnificent city, was far eclipsed by her daughter Tyre. [Across the sea arose another city, itself at one time but a small military colony; with its rise fell Tyre and as the sun of prosperity rose upon the city of Alexander, a dark cloud hung over the "Empire of the waters."] But she <sup>too</sup> had her colony

and Carthage survived, to rise in a very short period, to the most exalted eminence, as a naval & commercial state. She, in turn, obscured the glory of her mother city, and her sons carried the blessings of civilization to countries which not till long after were made to quail before the destroying legions of Rome.

The early settlement of Greece, though veiled in deep obscurity, is usually ascribed to colonies emigrating from ~~the~~ Greece & Phoenicia. From this small beginning she became a mighty empire, the admiration & terror of the world. But her day of glory <sup>has</sup> passed; her temples have been violated; her gods have been hurled from their shrines; her banners are in the dust; and the pall of darkness covers her. Her colonies were numerous, "owing to the freedom of their institutions, and their superiority in the arts of civilized life to the native inhabitants of the countries among whom they were generally placed, they rose in a comparatively short period, to a high pitch of opulence and refinement, & many of them, as *Miletus & Ephesus in Asia-Minor, Syracuse & Agrigentu in Sicily, & Aruntum & Locri in Italy,* not only equalled but greatly surpassed their mother cities in wealth & power."\* Literature & philosophy, too, here found a home. Of the cities claiming to be the birthplace of Homer, the colonial are considered to have the better title; the father of history was a native of a colony; and the Ionic & Italic schools of philosophy, springing up in the colonies of Asia-Minor & Magna Graecia, gave birth to the numerous sects which existed in the mother country.

Nor does modern colonization disprove the proposition. Indeed the history of the world affords no brighter example of colonial prosperity than <sup>the</sup> British Colonies in America. We have not yet surpassed our mother country but are her respected rival. England is still advancing, and our watchword still is "onward". But widely dif-

\* McCulloch's Com. Dic. Art. "Colonies!"

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ferent is the conduct of the two nations. The one is extending her conquests with the sword, & emboldning, with her might; the other moves gradually but surely forward, appealing, not to arms but to right, and conquering by the force of truth & virtue. It would be unkind & ungenerous in us to predict the downfall of Old England, but it may not be so for us to anticipate that our youthful nation, will one day equal if not surpass her.

It is not difficult to account for a fact so universal. Too dense a population at home, of the mother country, oppression at home, or allurements abroad lead men to leave their native land. They usually are firm & intelligent, they leave behind them the vices & corruptions of the old country, and enter upon a new sphere, to establish themselves in a new country, to make for themselves a new government. They have before them the example of their parents & all other nations; they may shun their vices & imitate their virtues; they have the experience of ages wherewith to build a new national fabric. If oppression has driven them to leave their home, they will be careful to guard their rights & liberties; if revolution has distracted their ~~state~~ <sup>mother country</sup>, they will strive to banish the spirit of discord; or if want has made them emigrate, they will learn a lesson of frugality. There is every motive to toil & activity, to care & watchfulness. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that a colony should flourish more than an old country, where vice is prevalent and luxury abounding; where blind custom impedes improvement and age has weakened energy.

The very fact, too, of a change in climate & country has its salutary effects. The world is a garden & the nations are its plants. For a time they grow together rich & luxuriant. Each returning season brings its foliage & flowers; and each year adds new shoots & branches. Time gathers round each stalk a group

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of younger plants. But unless some branches are lopped off and  
some roots divided, neither the parent nor the offspring can  
flourish. If suffered to remain they choke the mother plant,  
and themselves become <sup>dwarfish & insignificant</sup> inelegant. But they are removed &  
grow up vigorous & beautiful; soon eclipsing the parent stalks;  
and when age has robbed it of its charms, or the worm is at  
its roots, they still live to bloom in beauty.

W.S. Whitney,

Commencement Oration by William L. Whitney, class of 1843  
Transcribed by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, May 2008  
Edited by Chris Altieri, June 2008

### Colonial Prosperity

The history of the world is the history of changes. Nations rise, flourish, & decline: and on their ruins are founded others which live their day & die. Such is the story told us by the chronicler of ages; and such seems to be the order established by the Governor of the universe. Cities & nations once glorious and powerful have passed away, and had long since been forgotten, had not their ruins remained to tell an occasional traveller where they stood or faithful history preserved their memory. But most nations do not die without leaving a remnant to perpetuate their name & manners. A state, after it has been firmly established & thickly populated, sends forth to colonies, which, to a certain extent adopt the language & institutions of their parent. It is like a tree which has grown old & strong. Its roots sends forth the tender twig which, protected from the storm becomes a rival in size and & strength & when the parent tree is riven by the blast, or falls through age when no breeze rustles among its braches, it takes its place & flourishes above its decaying trunk. Or like the father who watches his growing son. At first he is the helpless child, dependent upon him for everything, But with time he gains strength and knowledge, soon equals him in vigor & activity; when the grave receives the father, the son is prepared to take his place. This regular order of succession is noticed, not in man & vegetation only, but in nations & cities. The most interesting feature in these changes, & that which merits attention, is that colonies generally excel their parent states.

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