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Effect of
Climate on Character

Delivered at the
Commencement Exercises

of
Dickinson College

by
David D. Heman

June 29 1865

Thought is the great motive power which
impels man to actions. From differences of
condition, situation & intellectual culture
opinions are formed upon the same subject
essentially different in themselves which
when formulated clash together and mutually
oppose each other.

When questions
of paramount importance arise and
opponents parties deem their mutual
satisfaction impossible by force of reason, then
war ensues. War is the stern arbiter of nations.
Although the agent of much destruction
and misery, its results are generally good.

It is a hard and untractable
mode of enforcing order in the affairs of
the world. New theories, improvements
and innovations always meet with
more or less opposition. And it may
be well arranged so by an all wise Providence
that out of the confused and discordant
elements of war should come forth truth
with its imposing pomp, well sifted
from error and superstition.

Warlike nations effect change and revolution
in the world. Peaceful nations cultivate
and refine society by encouraging the liter-
ary professions, the arts and sciences and

industrial and commercial pursuits,

As in the individual so in the nation we find certain distinct parts of character.

National character depends upon that of the individual, which is influenced by various circumstances but especially by situation with respect to climate.

Climate acts upon the physical constitution of man and through that indirectly upon the mind. Cold climates inure the body to privations and hardships, while more temperate climates, requiring less care for the regulation of self, are apt to bring on habits of luxury, sloth which vitiate the minds and swarms of the inhabitants. They becomepliant tools in the hands of a few despots who usurp that authority which God has given to each one over his own conscience and individual actions.

Success in war depends upon the relative amount of physical injury inflicted. It often gives direction to the minds thoughts and on disputed and unsettled points of belief produces a preponderance for one side or the other. This is especially true of the masses and unthinking portion of the population who enroll themselves on the side of the strong. Hence it is that in the history of nations and indeed of the whole world

that in all questions the decisions of which is referable to an appeal to arms. "Right makes right" however (such) repugnant such a doctrine may be to our sense of justice. Warlike powers have in this account always acted an important part in the progress of the world and may be relatively considered Northern or Southern.

As we proceed North, we observe in the character of the inhabitants a disposition to rudeness and an evident neglect of those arts which tend to cultivate manners of refinement and affability, but which they regard as having a tendency to render the mind effeminate.

On account of the rigor of the climate their physical powers are well developed, requiring both strength and powers of endurance from constant and necessary exertion. In no case is the old adage true. "Practice makes perfect." What most forcibly strikes us in Northern character is independence of feeling, manly energy or a certain raised determination in action.

Impatient under restraint, antagonistic to whatever authority presumes to transgress the dictates of conscience the North has given birth to freedom. It has demonstrated the fact and is a proof of it this day that the rulers

are the servants of the people and not the people
of the rulers. In earlier times the Southern
nations were devoted to literature and gave
knowledge its most powerful impulse.
Knowledge in their hands was however of
little practical utility, but rather an object
for speculative wonder and admiration.
Avoiding its more important applications
they "Mixed reason with pleasure and wisdom
with mirth."

Surrounded by all that can render life
charming the inhabitants have little care
in spending the allotted period of their
existence. Prompt to resent an injury
their passions are yet easily allayed.

They lack that firmness and perseverance
which is so conspicuous in the North.

We see then that Northern & Southern
nations possess in different degrees those
elements which constitute the efficiency
of a warlike power. As the former possesses
greater strength, tenacity of purpose and
zeal for the public good it is natural
to suppose that they would be successful
in war. History proves it to be so.
They tide of success has flowed from North
to South and although temporary advantages
may have been gained by Southern nations
they have been followed by no permanent result.

The Persians were conquered by the Assyrians
coming upon them from the North. Egypt
fell by Persians. Sparta and Athens who for
a long time struggled for supremacy were at
length overcome by the Macedonians who
valiant and strong in their native audacity
extended their sway over Persia, India and
Egypt. Carthage, the seat of unbounded
wealth with her numerous armies and her
fleets penetrating to every part of the known
world was utterly destroyed by Rome.

Rome was twice sacked by Western
invaders. All her pomp and magnificence
was made the spoil of the barbarian hordes.
The Moors in Spain were vanquished by the
Christian tribes pushing down from the
mountain fastnesses of the North.

Gonzagante was finally and completely overthrown
by Russia, England and Germany.
Napier was unable to withstand the intrepidity
of the United States Soldier and last and
greatest is the complete overthrow of the
great Rebellion by the states of this Union
who stood true to their allegiance.

The result of Northern conquest has not
been as might be supposed the degradation
of society, but as it were a newly infused
energy in every department of life.

Northern conquests have always been

followed by immigration. Hence we have
the grand migration of Scandinavian races
after the fall of Rome to Central Europe.
The literature and philosophical development
of Southern nations have never been lost but
have been reproduced by Northern nations with
an energy all their own. The Anglo Saxon race
formerly the most warlike and barbarous of
the North is now the Pioneer of civilization
the nurse of freedom and the defender of
justice. We claim allegiance to that
honored race, and as we direct our course through
the tempest of revolution, ever preserving inviolate
its glory and independence and cast additional
lustre upon its name. With the principles which
inspired the fathers of that illustrious race
we must still succeed. Independent
and untrammelled action earnestness and
perseverance, with a due sense of the high trust imposed
upon man by the Creator will secure to Northern
powers what they now enjoy the undisputed government of
the world.

"As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Springs from the gale and midway bears the storm
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread
Eternal Sunshine settles on its head"

Commencement Oration of David B. Herman, Class of 1865
Transcribed by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, June 2008
Edited by Chris Altieri, June 2008

Effect of Climate on Character

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Where questions of paramount importance arise and repugnant parties deem their mutual satisfaction impossible by force of reason, then war ensues. War is the stern arbiter of nations. Although the agent of much destruction and misery, its results are generally good.

It is a hard and intractable mode of enforcing order in the affairs of the world. New theories, improvements and innovations always meet with more or less opposition. And it may be well arranged so by an all wise Providence that out of the confused and discordant elements of war should come forth truth with its imposing panoply well sifted from error and superstition.

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industrial and commercial pursuits. As in the individual so in the nation we find certain distinct traits of character. National character depends upon that of the individual which is influenced by various circumstances but especially by situation with respect to climate.

Climate acts upon the physical constitution of man and through that indirectly upon the mind. Cold climates inure the body to privations and hardships, while more temperate climes, requiring less care for the regulation of self, are apt to bring on habits of luxury & sloth which [illegible word] the minds and manners of the inhabitants. They become pliant tools in the hands of a few despots who usurp that authority which God has given to each one over his own conscience and individual actions.

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Surrounded by all that can render life charming the inhabitants have little care in spending the allotted period of their existence. Prompt to resent an injury their passions are yet easily allayed. They lack that firmness and perseverance which is so conspicuous in the North.

We see then that Northern & Southern nations possess in different degree those elements which constitute the efficiency of a warlike power. As the former possesses greater strength, tenacity of purpose and zeal for the public good it is natural to suppose that they would be successful in war. History proves it to be so The/y tide of success has flowed from North to South and although temporary advantages may have been gained by Southern nations they have been followed by no permanent results

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country through the tempest of revolution ever preserving inviolate its glory and independence we cast additional lustre upon its name. With the principles which imbued the fathers of that illustrious race we must still succeed. Independent and untrammelled action earnestness and perseverance, with a due sense of the high trust imposed upon man by the Creator will secure to Northern powers what they now enjoy the undisputed government of the world.

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