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Faith in Australia

Solving the National Problem

By E. J. BRADY

NATIONS, like individuals, never progress without faith in themselves. Lunatics of the Hitler type display this quality to an amazing degree; but it is sometimes found in normal citizens, and occasionally in communities.

If Australians spared time to cultivate faith in Australia, and made the picking of doubles a secondary consideration, the country's future would be less in doubt than it is now. The

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present generation might even look forward to a pleasant old age.

My own faith—born of knowledge—carries me to the borders of fanaticism, and I have even dared to suggest that this Commonwealth could have a hundred million inhabitants! That belief is based on two main factors—soil and water. To which, it is necessary to add, statesmen and engineers. Engineers are in good supply. In regard to statesmen, of courage

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and imagination, the supply has not always equalled the demand.

It has been remarked by visitors from overseas that we have thirteen legislative chambers and about seven millions population! The explanation may be that thirteen is an unlucky number; or it could be found, as some people say, in our political system, in the fact that the party in office is invariably considered by the party not in office as Public Enemy No. 1.

Both parties are so concerned with electoral numerals that the statistics of population and production do not receive the attention their national importance calls for. The electorate could compromise with the party system by calling a pan-Australian Convention of experts, and authorising it to devise a fixed plan of development for the whole Commonwealth, a plan which Parliament would be constitutionally compelled to go on implementing, no matter what party occupied the Ministerial benches. In this way—and it is the only way one has ever been able to think up—present obstructions on the path of progress could be overcome. Popular initiative is needed—an element hitherto lacking in our democratic set-up, and not in harmony with holiday temperament.

The alternative is for honorary performers to harp on the same old strings until they awaken a response in the public mind, or wear out the instrument. Taking up the plectrum again to strike the chord of soil and water, I assert that we have a sufficient abundance of these essentials to ensure an increased population and a corresponding increase in national wealth.

Such predictions seem to excite the dervishes of the Desert Theory, and set them dancing on their sandhills. I have followed the gyrations of this alien cult for a lifetime. The pursuit has helped to keep me poor, but there

have been consolations. Mildura is one; Renmark and Leeton others. Nothing is more pleasing to those who have faith in Australia, than to squirt the juice of a Renmark orange in a pessimist's eye.

Nothing is more soothing than to walk, arm in arm with the Angel of Abundance into a knocker's hideout with a packet of Mildura raisins, and throw it down like a glove of challenge. Before he has time to enter a demurrer you go at him with the statistics of Leeton—

"Here," you shout, "is the area, the population, and the annual production. Multiply that by the number of irrigable acres in the Murray and Darling system—with all the water of the Riverina catchment conserved, and you can establish, at least, another seven millions of people in comfort and security."

You leave your knocker to think up a counter to that, and retire to work out your major calculations. One of these will be the total area of irrigable lands in Australia, in conjunction with an estimate of possible storages, rainfall and river flow.

If the pessimist infers at the next encounter that you have water on the brain, tell him that Australians could suffer from several worse diseases.

I centre here on arid regions—mis-called deserts in many cases—because, since we first became interested in irrigation at Mildura, the optimistic Americans have repeated in U.S.A. what engineers and statesmen demonstrated in Egypt and Mesopotamia thousands of years ago.

Further to that, it is necessary to emphasise this aspect of Australian conditions, because the great Desert Idea has influenced minds as far apart in time as the pirate Dampier and playwright G. B. Shaw.

Round forty years ago I said publicly that Australia's desert soils are

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among her most valuable assets. My city friends hinted that I would do well to consult a medical specialist. One went so far as to suggest that the correct diagnosis of my case would be found in Dr. Winslow's *Obscure Diseases of the Brain and Mind*.

That critic had gone to his eternal reward before Ellsworth Huntington—research geographer of Yale University, and an accredited authority on the soils, climates, and habitable regions of the earth—published *The Human Habitat*. He lists the arid soils of Australia among the best in the world, and backs his opinion with scientific proof. Huntington points out, moreover, that irrigated lands in U.S.A. produce crops 25 to 65 per cent. more than crops from the other soils, and believes that if water can be led to the untouched, dry, red sands—such as those which prevail in our inland—the world's food supply might easily be doubted or trebled.

America has discovered that "the last lands are the best lands," and

hence the great storages and leagues of channels which have been installed, to transform what was once classed as hopeless desert into farms.

In far-off Uzbekistan a similar miracle has been brought about by Soviet enterprise. What has been done elsewhere can be done here. After or before we have found a way towards utilising our dry areas to the limit, we should evolve a plan for effective occupation of that valuable half of our continent which spreads across the Tropic Zone. A majority of Australians were lamentably indifferent to its importance until the Japanese bombed Port Darwin. An impression is now growing in the southern mind that it is neither desolate nor useless.

By working out these two equations, we will solve the whole national problem. But unless we cultivate a firm faith in Australia, so necessary to that purpose, future historians will, in all seeming probability, refer to us—either in sympathy or scorn—as an extinct branch of the human species.

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To Be Used in Government Offices

Let us pray.

O Lord, grant that this day we come to no decisions, neither run we into any kind of responsibility, but that all our doings may be ordered to establish new and quite unwanted departments for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn.

O Thou who seest all things below
Grant that Thy servants may go slow,
That they may study to comply
With Regulations till they die.

Teach us, O Lord, to reverence
Committees more than commonsense.
Impress our minds to make no plan,
But pass the baby when we can.

And when the Tempter seeks to give
Us feelings of initiative,
Or when alone we go too far,
Chastise us with a Circular.

Mid-war and tumult, fire and storms,
Strengthen us, we pray, with Forms.

Thus will Thy servants ever be
A flock of perfect sheep for Thee. Amen.

—Weekly Dispatch

Chinese Pirates Busy Again

A Well-Organised Profession

By RICHARD C. STONE

The Chinese pirates are in the news again

"THERE be land-rats and water-rats," said Shylock, speaking of pirates. The Chinese variety is a combination of both, and now that civil commerce is commencing again along the Chinese coast, John Chinaman of the Skull and Cross-bones (although he does not fly them) is setting up business again.

These Gentlemen of the Eastern Seas have developed their piracy into a fine art, and before the war, despite the vigilance of the gunboats of several navies, they found the game a profitable one. They have the cheek of the devil, and in October 300 passengers in a Chinese coastal steamer were robbed within sight and gun range of British warships lying in Victoria Harbor, Hong Kong.

Before the war the Royal Navy maintained its anti-pirate gunboat patrol on the Yangtze and in coastal waters, and it is back on the job again. But the Chinese pirate of the twentieth century is no easy game to run to ground. He and his allies in evil know every cove, creek and river mouth along the immense coast; and, what is more important, just where the gunboats aren't at any particular time.

They have a first-class intelligence service, and plenty of well-wishers and cronies along every water-front and among the native crews. Information sometimes costs heavily in dollars, but the pickings from a successful piracy, in cash, stolen clothes, freight, and ransom money, often cover these many times over.

The pirates get to know every ship that leaves and exactly who is traveling. The two busiest and most profitable seasons are just before Christmas to the middle of February, and during June and July. The first covers the Chinese New Year, a time of national festivity, when large numbers of wealthy Chinese go home for the revels; and the second is when the rivers are at their height, swollen with the snows from the mountains, and there is an immense amount of river traffic.

The pirate profession is exceedingly well organized, and when a likely vessel is due to sail, some of the particular gang involved, all tough, daring fellows, are detailed to board her. But not in their true colors at first. They take their places at the docks among the bundle-carrying, blue-clad, clamorous crowd, pay third class fares and take their places, squatting on the jammed lower deck, jabbering, smoking, talking, eating and drinking floods of tea.

All the time they are keeping their eyes open, getting to know every movement of the armed guards which most ships carry as a precaution against their like. Then, at the appointed rendezvous along the river or off-shore, they make their rush. Weapons are drawn from their bundles or from the folds of their loose clothes; the officers are pounced on, overpowered, disarmed and batted down; the man at the wheel feels cold steel in the nape of his neck, and has to keep the ship on the course directed, or the pirates put one of their own crew there, for