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POLLUTION, "PROGRESS OR DECAY"

If it were possible to drain all the polluted water in the U.S. into one vast puddle, perhaps it would also be possible to get the concerted action necessary to abate pollution wherever it exists. The sum total of all the concentrated filth and stench of this mess of pollution would arouse the people to demand action from the politicians whose insensitive noses are now indifferent to the problem, and perhaps, it might also jar our spiritual, cultural and educational leaders out of the lethargic complacency with which they have generally viewed it. Except in rare instances, every community in this land of ours is faced with pollution in some degree. The total cost to the people in money, health and aesthetic values from pollution would startle even those who believe the national debt "doesn't mean anything because we owe it to ourselves!" Unlike the national debt which is somewhat intangible because the human mind cannot comprehend its vastness, pollution is real and is perceptible to all our senses in every locality where it exists. Even though we can see it, smell it or taste it, people tend to look upon pollution as an area or a local problem to be solved by the people directly affected in the locality. While the people living along the Willamette in Oregon can see the damage being done by pollution to that river, the people in New York, Texas or Florida are not concerned about it, anymore than the people of Oregon are concerned about the pollution in the other states.

Nor is this lack of concern by the people only an interstate matter. It also exists intra-state. For example, the people of Superior probably feel no direct concern over pollution in the Fox River valley, while the people in the valley very likely are disinterested in pollution in Superior harbor. It is this lack of overall concern which has done much to contribute to the sad picture of pollution as it exists in our land today.

The abatement of pollution in our country is of tremendous importance to all of the people. Water is one of the vital basic resources of the nation. Without an abundant supply of clean water this nation would soon degenerate to a "have not" status. Look at the condition of the people who live in the arid and semi-arid areas of the world! We do not find physical well being among the inhabitants. Nor do we find the material comforts with which we identify prosperity in the industrial age.

It is always easy to find apologists for wrongs. We have them now trying to justify the pollution with which we are afflicted as a nation. They say it is the inevitable result of population growth, industrial expansion and the progress of civilization. If we attempt to follow the theory that pollution is evidence of progress, it is conceivable that with continued population growths and industrial progress we can as a nation "progress" ourselves right out of clean waters as well as other basic renewable resources. That kind of progress leads to destruction. To build our civilization on the theory that "progress" means to destroy a basic resource is to build on crumbling sand. Eventually the structure must collapse because the element of "destruction" was used in the building.

The real truth of the matter is that pollution as it exists today is the result of political and industrial expediency. It was easier to dump raw sewage into a stream than to float a bond issue for a sewage disposal plant. It is easier to pay a dividend and a high salary by throwing industrial wastes into the water than it is to build a pollution abatement facility and charge it against cost of operation. The shame of it is we have billions for questionable purposes scattered over the world; we have science with the "know how" to make an atom bomb; we have the industrial capacity and ingenuity to bring the world to our doors; but, we don't have the will, the sense of duty or the cultural "progress" to overwhelmingly demand the end of pollution in our land.

There is hope, however. We are beginning to see determined attempts to stop pollution in almost all sections of the country. These attempts still do not match the urgency of the need. Moreover, a new concept is developing as to the right we, as individuals, have in the use of our natural resources. Man is beginning to realize he cannot take his land, his factories or his money with him when he dies. But he can leave the resources nature permitted him to use for his wealth and enjoyment in a useful state for those who become his heirs. Thus he is forming the conviction that our resources are but a trust and that he is a trustee of them. Our soils, our waters, our forests, our air should be left as nearly as possible in the condition we inherited them. Otherwise man is destined to become a mere living robot, scratching for a living out of a defiled earth and quenching his thirst on polluted water; -- in effect, a human lamprey eel whose ancestors thru their greed for material things left nothing for the "progress" and development of the soul.

I leave it to you. Where does a boy come closer to God- near a clean, cool babbling brook, or on the bank of a dirty, stinking river fouled by man's "progress". What are you going to do about it?

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