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THE CAUSES OF KNOW-NOTHING SUCCESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

It was a strange spectacle that American politics presented on the morrow of the November elections in 1854. The time-honored parties found that they had been grappling in the dark with an unknown antagonist and that they had been terribly worsted. A wave of Know-nothing victory swept through the North. In nine states it elected governors; it filled the legislatures with new men; in the national House of Representatives a majority was claimed by the believers in the new dispensation, and the Senate was not without witnesses to their faith.¹

When the air had again become clear those who had been blind to the new order's rise found that they had been vanquished by a native American organization akin to the earlier nativist parties, but now decking itself out with the ever popular ceremonials of a secret order.² Its oath-bound members took for their leading principle the defence of American institutions from the dangers to which they deemed them exposed at the hands of men of alien birth and of Roman Catholic creed.³

¹J. P. Hambleton, *A History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855*, p. 144. Speech of Henry A. Wise.

²There had been periodic ebullitions of nativist ardor. Thus in John Adams's administration it was shown in the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts and in the lengthening of the naturalization term to fourteen years. In the Hartford Convention it was clearly evidenced in the sixth resolution: "No person who shall hereafter be naturalized shall be eligible as a member of the Senate or House of Representatives of the United States or capable of holding any civil office under the authority of the United States." Twenty years had not passed before it broke out in riot and convent-burning in Massachusetts. A few years later followed the rise and decline of the Native American party, accompanied by not a little rioting and bloodshed in Philadelphia.

³It is the aim of this paper simply to analyze the conditions which made possible the phenomenal success of Know-nothingism in Massachusetts. It therefore touches only incidentally upon the history of the movement and upon the distinctive principles of those whose devotion to the order was genuine and disinterested. The following planks from the American Party's platform in 1856 may serve as a brief summary of Know-nothing principles: "3. Americans must rule America, and to this end native-born citizens should be elected to all state, federal and municipal offices of government employment in preference to all others. . . . 5. No person should be selected for political station whether native or foreign-born who recognizes any allegiance or obligation of any description to any foreign prince, potentate or power, or who refuses to recognize the federal and state constitutions (each within its sphere) as paramount to all other rules of political action. . . . 9. A change in the laws of naturalization making a continuous residence of twenty-one years an indispensable requisite for citizenship hereafter." Stanwood's *History of Elections*, p. 195.

In one form or other the entire separation of church and state, the use of the Bible in schools and the prohibition of the use of public funds for sectarian schools were usu-

In no other state was the victory so overwhelming as in Massachusetts. In the years since the rise of the Free Soil party there had been no choice of governor by the people. But this Know-nothing nominee received a clear majority of nearly 33,000 over all opponents. Sixty-three per cent. of the total vote was cast for this candidate of a secret society. In the new senate every member was a Know-nothing; in the house the roll included one Whig, one Democrat, one Free Soiler, and 376 Know-nothings. In the legislature, thus, the combined opposition constituted less than one per cent. Nor was this supremacy confined to a single year. In 1855 and 1856 this Know-nothing governor was re-elected and in both these years the "Americans" were credited with a majority in each house of the legislature.¹ Hardly had the legislature assembled in January, 1855, when it made haste to elect a Know-nothing, Henry Wilson, to fill the vacancy in the United States Senate. In the congressional delegation Know-nothings were in the majority, and the long contest over the speakership resulted in the election of a Massachusetts Know-nothing. In the early national conventions of the order no leaders were more prominent than those from the Bay State, and for the presidency no one was at first considered a more available candidate than the Know-nothing governor of Massachusetts. In view of the unparalleled victory which the Know-nothings won at home, of the influence swayed by her representatives in Congress, and of the dominant part played by her leaders in the national councils of the organization, it would seem that Massachusetts stood in the fore-front of Know-nothing commonwealths.

ally insisted upon. After 1855 no attempt was made to conceal the constitution of the order. Copies of the Springfield platform (August 7, 1855), which placed the Massachusetts State Council upon an anti-slavery basis, may be found in the library of the Worcester Society of Antiquity, Worcester, Mass.

Among the best sources of information as to the general movement are the following: *The Origin and Progress of the American Party in Politics*, by John Hancock Lee, Philadelphia, 1855; *Sam, or the History of a Mystery; A Defence of the American Policy*, by Whitney; *A History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855, together with the Life of Henry A. Wise*, by J. P. Hambleton; *Sons of the Sires, including a Reply to the Letter of the Hon. Henry A. Wise against the Know-nothings*. The pamphlet material is very copious; the Winthrop collection in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society is especially rich. For local phases of the subject the newspapers, of course, furnish the most valuable material. What purport to be authoritative accounts of the oaths, rites and ceremonies of the order were published in the *Richmond Examiner* (quoted in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 19, 1854), and in the *New Haven Register* (quoted in the *Worcester Palladium*, Dec. 6, 1854). The writer of the present paper has investigated the history of the order in Worcester, Mass. (*A Chapter from the Local History of Know-nothingism*, *New England Magazine*, Sept., 1896) and the career of the Massachusetts legislature of 1855 (*ibid.*, March, 1897; Report of the American Historical Association for 1896).

¹ *Boston Almanack*, 1854, 1855, 1856, 1857.

No such far-reaching political upheaval, however sudden, is entirely unheralded, nor can it come until causes, adequate although perhaps unseen or obscure, have prepared its way. Within the several states the historian will find that much the same causes were at work, but modified—here strengthened, here weakened relatively to one another—by the peculiar local conditions of race or of creed, of social or of economic relations.

In explaining the tremendous upheaval which Know-nothingism occasioned in Massachusetts, vague as the suggestion may at first seem, no slight weight is to be attributed to close-drawn notions of citizenship inherited from pious forefathers. In recent years with eager zeal historians have been defending the founders of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies against any imputation of intending to establish in the new world liberty of conscience as we know it to-day. Such a charge those worthies would have repelled with righteous indignation. In reality their ideal of government was a theocracy; to realize this ideal was the chief end of the citizen. The thought of an absolute separation between church and state would have seemed no less than impious. The "freemen," enjoying the full rights and privileges of citizens, constituted a close corporation for admission to which church membership—not membership of *a* church, but of *the* church of the colony leaders—was the essential qualification.¹ Even for admittance to the minor privileges of an "inhabitant" the candidate was narrowly scanned from the point of view of the orthodox church member. To the petitions of the unenfranchised and to the demands of the king's commissioners for the liberalizing of these conditions of citizenship the Massachusetts "freemen" offered a resistance so stubborn that it well-nigh forfeited their charter. Only after years of controversy, and then only under the stress of necessity, were the restrictions relaxed. But unconsciously not a little of this old theocratic theory

¹ 1631, *Records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, Vol. I., p. 87. 1636, *ibid.*, p. 168. November 30, 1635, the Boston freemen voted that no further allotments of land should be made to any newcomers "but such as may be likely to be received members of the congregation." *Rec. Comm. Report*, II., Bos. Rec., 1634-1660, p. 5. Although the Plymouth colony had no church membership test upon its statute books, in practice its equivalent was insisted upon. Thus in 1639 the General Court censured the town of Sandwich because of the remissness of its committees "in receiving into the town many inhabitants that are not fit for church society" and made the admittance of all inhabitants in future conditional upon the approbation of the pastor of the church. *Plym. Col. Rec.*, I. 134, 153. In 1675 it was enacted, "for the preventing of profaneness increasing in the colony which is so provoking to God, and threatening to bring judgments upon us," that improperly admitted inhabitants should be warned out of the colony and fined five shillings a week if they did not speedily heed the warning, "hoping the court will be careful; that whom they accept off; are persons orthodox in their judgments." *Ibid.*, XI. 248. *Representation and Suffrage in Massachusetts* (Johns Hopkins University Studies), p. 74.

survived from generation to generation. Its savor can often be detected in the hill towns even to this day. And when, suddenly, in the middle of the century, tens of thousands of aliens, most of them of Roman Catholic faith, came clamoring at our doors for speedy admittance to citizenship and to full political privileges, it is small wonder that the apprehensions of the sons of the Puritans were profoundly stirred.

Again, Massachusetts found herself confronted by perplexing problems that demanded prompt solution. Strangely neglectful of obvious facts seems Von Holst's statement, in discussing the rise of Know-nothingism, that "nothing had happened specially to attract attention to the immigrant and Catholic questions at this time."¹ For the forty years following the peace of 1815 the tide of immigration rose gradually. It was not until the famine summer of 1847 that the immense acceleration came which for the first time gave this country an immigrant problem.² In that single year the number of immigrant arrivals makes a leap of 80,000. Taking the figures of the year 1844 as a standard of comparison, they are multiplied by three in 1847, by four in 1850 and by five and one-half in 1854, the year when the Know-nothings began their political career. This year, 1854, marks a high-water point, 427,833, of the immigrant flood;³ in the next decade only once did the figures rise within 200,000 of this maximum; it was not exceeded until 1873, and not until 1880, more than a quarter of a century later, did the regular tide of immigration overpass this mark. Still more striking, in some respects, are the figures of emigration from Great Britain and Ireland to the United States, which show that three-fourths of the astonishing leap in the figures of 1847 was due to the outflow from the United Kingdom.⁴ This tide of emigration reached its flood in 1850, when it stood six times as high as in 1844. In the earlier years the stream had set toward Canada, but the famine hardships on English vessels and the heavy head-money exacted by Canada, together with a growing popularity of the United States, served to turn the stream to our shores.⁵

Next to New York, no other city except New Orleans rivalled

¹ *Constitutional History of the United States*, V. 117.

² E. E. Hale, *Letters on Irish Immigration*, 1852, p. 10.

³ Kennedy, *Abstract of the Eighth Census of the United States*, pp. 13, 14. Not without interest are the figures by decades:

1830-40	552,000
1840-50	1,558,300
1850-60	2,707,624.

⁴ *Report of British Emigration Commissioners*, 1861, quoted in *United States Census 1860, Population*, p. 43.

⁵ E. E. Hale, *Letters on Irish Immigration* p. 11.

Boston as a port of entry for the immigrants.¹ The dominant nationalities among the newcomers were the Irish and the German.² No direct steamship lines connected Boston with the German ports and hence this stream was diverted from New England.³ Nearly all the Boston steamships sailed from Liverpool, bringing therefore, for the most part, Irish immigrants who were almost to a man Roman Catholics. Although the Irish element in the total volume of immigration was outstripped by the German after 1851, this changed ratio was not noticeable in Massachusetts, where the vast bulk of the immigrants continued to be Irish and where but few Germans were to be found.⁴

The previous industrial development of Massachusetts seems to have been somewhat as follows: In the period from 1765 to 1790, notwithstanding the evils of the war, population spread over the sparsely settled western sections of the state and increased faster than during any equal period in the next half-century. They found plenty of unoccupied land and upon this they settled as farmers. During the next thirty years, 1790 to 1820, almost all of the land available for agriculture having been taken up, the surplus population emigrated to the frontier states and the increase of population was comparatively slight. In the next twenty years, 1820 to 1840, the number of inhabitants increased in much larger proportion. Emigration to the West was checked. The encouragements to manufacturing enterprises retained the population more and more at home. During this period the manufacturing class increased 154.50 per cent., while the agricultural class increased but 38.41 per cent., and even this gain was in the vicinity of thriving commercial or manufacturing towns. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that the increase of population was wholly owing to the growth of manufacturing.⁵ It may be doubted if there was any more agriculture, properly so called, in 1840 than twenty years earlier.

The logic of physical geography was working against it. With

¹ *Eighth Census of the United States*. Custom House Returns.

² In 1853, out of a total immigration of 368,643 persons, 161,481 were of Irish birth, 140,635 of German, 30,353 of English, and 10,770 of French. *Report of Secretary of State*, quoted in *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 1, 1854.

³ Scanty data would warrant an estimate that at New Orleans three Germans arrived for every Irishman. *Boston Advertiser*, June 2 and 5, 1854.

⁴ *Boston Advertiser*, June 2, 1854. The relative rates of German and Irish immigration were as follows:

	1849	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854 (five months)
Irish	112,691	116,582	163,256	115,537	113,164	17,649.
German	55,705	45,402	69,882	118,126	119,644	44,248.

⁵ Jesse Chickering, *Statistical View of the Population of Massachusetts, 1765-1840*, pp. 41-2. 88 of the principal manufacturing and commercial towns aggregated an increase nearly equal to that of the whole state. Their rate of increase was 79.62 per cent., that of the state 40.97, while the 213 towns which were mainly agricultural in character increased only 8.50 per cent. In the decade 1830-40, 89 towns actually decreased in population 11,812, or 9.55 per cent.

the improved means of transportation between the sea-board and the West, Massachusetts could no longer figure as a producer of agricultural staples. In the New England states between 1820 and 1850 the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture fell steadily and decisively; in the Middle States it fell and then rose, while in all other sections it was rapidly rising. Meantime, the relative number engaged in commerce was declining in New England, while gaining elsewhere except in the South.¹ During the same period Massachusetts' manufacturing population had increased six-fold. In no other state not subject to abnormal frontier conditions had the increase exceeded three-fold, and only New York surpassed Massachusetts in the absolute number of persons engaged in manufacturing enterprises.² And this development was bound to continue. In the years 1830 to 1860 the increase of population in her manufacturing towns was on the average five times as great as the increase in the towns of the same counties not so prominently engaged in manufacturing.³

In the middle of the century, with the single exception of Rhode Island, the growth of white population was going on in no one of the older states more rapidly than in Massachusetts. In 1840 Massachusetts had been more densely populated than any other state in the Union, and during the next decade she gained 33 per square mile, while Rhode Island gained only 29, and in no other state did the gain exceed 14.⁴ Such a gain is the more remarkable from the fact that few of the states were contributing more of their sons as pioneers in developing the West. In 1850 there were nearly one-third as many natives of Massachusetts residing in other states as there were still remaining within her own borders.⁵

To a community thus rapidly growing and adjusting itself to an entirely new industrial system immigration brought perplexing prob-

¹ DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States; Compendium of the Census of 1850*, Table CXXXI., p. 129. Commerce was gaining in Massachusetts, but not enough to offset the relative decline in New England.

² New York 199,349; Massachusetts 165,938. Their populations were in the ratio 3:1. *Ibid.*, Table CXXXII.

³ *Abstract of Census of Massachusetts, from the Eighth United States Census*. For example:

Bristol County increased	89.13%	Worcester County	89.27%
7 manufacturing towns increased	164.42%	16 manufacturing towns	196.20%
All other towns	10.12%	All others	28.27%
Aggregate increase in the State	101.67%		

⁴ The rise is from 94.58 to 127.50. *Compendium of United States Census, 1850*, p. 40, Table XII. During the next decade 30.33 was added to the population per square mile, Massachusetts leading the New England states for this decade, and for the whole period 1790-1860. During this same decade Massachusetts rose from eighth to sixth place in point of population among the states. Kennedy.

⁵ De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States*.

lems. By reason of the not inconsiderable native emigration to the frontier, coupled with the more rapid increase of the foreign-born and of their children, the alien population was making large gains upon that of native stock. In five years, 1850-1855, the proportion of the foreign-born to the total white population rose from 16.60 to 21.79 per cent.¹ Moreover this immigration was almost exclusively of a single nationality. In 1850 in the United States natives of Ireland constituted 43.04 per cent. of the alien population, but in Massachusetts the percentage was 71.41, and, notwithstanding the rapid falling-off in general Irish immigration after 1854, the percentage in Massachusetts had sunk only to 71.28 in 1860, 15.06 per cent. of the total population having been born in Ireland.² That this state's foreign-born population was so overwhelmingly Irish modified the problem very materially. In the first place this element was almost unanimously and with ardent loyalty attached to the Roman Catholic church. Early in the century this denomination had but slight hold in Massachusetts, but in 1850 she had become the sixth state in the number of its church accommodations and the seventh in the value of its church property.³ In the second place, the predominance of Irish immigrants meant a more settled drift toward the cities, for in this respect there was a noticeable contrast between the Irish and the Germans.⁴ These were the years of the phenomenal growth of urban communities, especially of manufacturing centres.⁵ It was in the larger cities that the Irish found their most congenial quarters. Boston statistics showed that after 1845 the entire population either increased very slowly or else positively decreased, while the foreign-born advanced at giant strides and soon outstripped the native.⁶ Among the coun-

¹ In 1850, with the exception of New York and Louisiana, no other states except those on the frontier had so high a ratio. De Witt, *Abstract of Massachusetts Census*, pp. 118, 231-2.

² *Abstract of the Census of Massachusetts. United States Census*, p. 335.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 136.

⁴ In 1850 39.76% of the Irish-born residents of the United States lived in large cities, as contrasted with 36.43% of the Germans. DeBow, p. 128.

⁵ Ten cities were incorporated between 1846 and 1854. In a single decade, 1850-1860, six of these thriving towns increased at rates varying from 100 to 126.67 per cent.; two between 75 and 100 per cent., while twenty more made a gain of from 50 to 75 per cent.

⁶ De Witt, pp. 231-6. Children of foreigners, under 21 years of age, are here classed as to nativity with their parents :

Years.	Population.		Percentage.		Increase.		Per cent. of Increase.	
	American.	Foreign.	American.	Foreign.	American.	Foreign.	American.	Foreign.
1845	77,077	37,289	67.40	32.60				
1850	75,322	63,466	54.27	45.73	-1,755	26,177	-2.27	70.20
1855	75,922	85,507	47.02	52.98	600	22,041	.80	34.73

ties the immigrants were distributed very unevenly. In Suffolk County, of which Boston comprised the principal part, there were 67 of the foreign-born to every 100 natives. In Middlesex and Norfolk the proportion was about one in four, in Worcester one in five. To our modern thought these figures do not seem startling, but it is to be borne in mind that most of the people then living remembered Massachusetts as a community principally engaged in farming, and peopled almost entirely by natives.

The fact that the Irish immigrant was rapidly becoming more and more in evidence aroused a two-fold anxiety which speedily developed into a two-fold prejudice against him. What was to be his part in politics? His training in self-control at home had not been such as to make him a devotee of order and an upholder of government. What result might be expected from his transplanting? How would he vote on the "Maine" law? What stand would he take on the then much-mooted question of the basis of representation? Would he attack the public school in the interest of his church? As it became apparent what a make-weight the Irish vote might become, and that the alien vote was increasing in Boston twelve times as fast as the native vote, it became a serious question whether the existing naturalization laws were not inadequate in substance and too lax in enforcement.¹ The question became the fruitful theme of much Know-nothing oratory during the next few years, but the resulting legislation was neither important nor consistent.² No evidence is to be found that the immigrant

¹ In Boston in 1845 out of 9,763 adult males of foreign birth only 1,623 were naturalized. (De Bow.) In 1850, though the proportion of foreign to native born was about one-half, they polled only one-eleventh as many votes. (Ibid. and *Boston Daily Bee*, November 1, 1853.) But between 1850 and 1855 while the native voters in Boston increased 14.72 per cent., the foreign-born voters increased no less than 194.64 per cent. (Dr. Josiah Curtis, quoted by De Witt, p. 236.) As the qualifications for the suffrage required in addition to United States citizenship only a residence of one year in the state and of six months in the voting area, with the payment of a poll-tax, any laxness in the naturalization laws or in their enforcement reflected itself speedily at the polls.

² In 1848 an act of Congress had dispensed with the requirement that the five years of residence should be continuous (30th Congress, ch. 72, amending ch. 42 of 1813). The preliminary declaration of intention to become a citizen might be made in the police courts, and the final taking of the oath of allegiance and admittance to citizenship might take place before the Courts of Common Pleas of the Commonwealth. The feeling that there was altogether too much laxness both in the laws and in their administration reflected itself in the act of February 27, 1855, which made it not lawful for any court established by the laws of the Commonwealth to entertain any jurisdiction over the naturalization of aliens. Two months later (April 18, 1855), a resolution of the Massachusetts legislature urged Congress to take action in the direction of restricting naturalization to federal courts. An act of March 13, 1856, restores jurisdiction over naturalization to the Supreme Judicial Court and the Courts of Common Pleas (called Superior Courts since 1858). See also ch. 47, laws of 1856, and ch. 44, 1858. It must be confessed that much of the debate over the law of 1855 turned upon the question who should receive the fees, the clerks of the federal or of the state courts. *Boston Advertiser*, February 20, 1855.

vote was ever marshalled for the support of any distinctively class legislation either favoring immigrants or for the behoof of the Roman Catholic Church. But with a loyalty that rarely wavered,¹ the Irish vote went solidly to the Democrats and for the first time in many years gave them a fighting chance in the struggle with the Whigs, who had come to consider the state theirs by prescriptive right. Again and again the choice of governor was thrown into the legislature. To the rank and file of the Whigs the mere fact that the working of naturalization and suffrage laws was such as to strengthen their opponents to the point of imperilling Whig success carried with it, doubtless, the conclusion that the welfare of the state was seriously endangered.

Hardly less pronounced, though certainly even less well grounded, than the fear of the immigrant as a voter was the prejudice against him as a wage-earner. There was complaint of low wages; yet in 1850, in the five classes of labor investigated for the census, the average wages in Massachusetts were invariably higher than in any other state except where abnormal rates are to be accounted for by inflation, as in California, or by the scarcity of skilled labor, as in the slave states.² Nor were living expenses correspondingly high; so far as these figures go their showing is distinctly to the advantage of the Massachusetts wage-earner. Unfortunately statistics were not compiled from the factory industries in which the greatest proportion of her laborers were coming to be employed. The rank and file of the laboring class proved themselves devoted believers in the wage-fund theory. That labor was daily creating the product from which it was paid they overlooked in their jealous watching of the throng of newcomers who were to share with them the wage-fund. That these thousands of the foreign-born could find places in industry without crowding out their betters did not occur to them and that that very jostling was gradually raising the level of the native wage-earner was a philosophy quite too deep for "practical" men.³ In the rapidly growing factory industries the

¹ Almost the only instance was in 1853, when the Whigs succeeded in so splitting the Irish vote as to ensure the defeat of the revised constitution which had been the work of the coalition convention. *Worcester Palladium*, August 23, 1854.

² *Compendium of United States Census*, 1850, Table CLXXV, p. 164.

³ "They (the Irish immigrants) do the manual labor. It does not follow that natives who must otherwise have performed it, do nothing or starve. They are simply pushed up into foremen of factories, superintendents of farms, railroad agents, machinists, inventors, etc." "Manual labor forms the basis of your pyramid." "Exclude your foreign population and your whole fabric sinks. You find you have still men at hard and loathsome labor. They are now your own sons. You have lost what you had; the highest results of your civilization. For every grade descended when you moved the lowest grade away." Edward Everett Hale, *Letters on Irish Immigration*, 1852. Forty years later Hon Carroll D. Wright, United States Commissioner of Labor, described the part played by

workmen were developing a strong class feeling. The Irishmen were becoming disagreeably numerous. The native "hands" did not like them and did not propose to work with them if they could help it. This combined race-antipathy and craft-jealousy contributed in large measure to swell the ranks of Know-nothingism in the Bay State.

The geographical position of Massachusetts exposed her to an unusually high tide of immigration; her peculiar stage of industrial development made the problem the more difficult; but it was by blunders in legislative attempts to deal with the problem that the most disagreeable aspects of immigration were brought home with exceptional force to her people. So puzzling became the questions arising in connection with this influx that as early as 1848 a law provided for the appointment of a Superintendent of Alien Passengers whose duty it should be to inspect all immigrants before allowing them to land.¹ For any alien passenger who seemed likely to become a public charge he was to require from the ship-owner or master a bond to the Commonwealth in the sum of \$1,000 that the aforesaid immigrant should never become a burden to any city or town in the state. Persons whom from the evidence he deemed unlikely to become a public charge he might allow to land on payment to him for the Commonwealth of two dollars for every person so landed.²

Not many months of the flood of immigration were needed to show that Massachusetts had not yet blundered into an effective system of dealing with her paupers. In 1852, with a population of just about a million, it was estimated that in the last seven years 133,826 persons had arrived from abroad, while New York, with a population of three millions, had received a million immigrants during the same time. Yet Massachusetts found it necessary to support a number of foreigners more than three-fifths that of New York.³ This glaring disproportion was partly due to differences in classification. But for the most part it was a real difference due to legislative blunders. The act of 1848 made the bond required of ship-owners, as a guarantee against the danger of the immigrant becoming a pauper, far more onerous in Massachusetts than in New York. The law thus defeated its own purpose; it encouraged the practice of landing in the Irish immigrants in almost the very same words. Lecture before Johns Hopkins University students in history and politics, February 6, 1891.

¹ Laws of 1848, chapter 313.

² Slight changes were made from time to time in this system. In 1851 a Commission in Relation to Alien Passengers was appointed, with instructions to inspect places where state paupers were maintained. Ch. 105, 1850; ch. 342, 1851. For other modifications see ch. 360, 1853; ch. 219, 1854.

³ E. E. Hale, *Letters on Irish Immigration*, 1852.

New York immigrants bound for Massachusetts, and then transporting them thither by rail. In 1850 five thousand more immigrants entered Massachusetts than in 1849, but one thousand less came by water than in that year. An official report of the commissioners declares: "We are permitting our neighbors to take the bonds which are to indemnify their loss, while we are supporting the paupers; while at the same time we are diminishing the commercial operations of the state."¹ Statistics showed that the burden was not inconsiderable. In 1851 it cost Massachusetts nearly \$212,000 for the support of paupers having no legal residence in the state. Of the 10,267 who applied for such aid 8,527 were foreigners or born of foreign parents. From alien passengers only \$37,000 were received, while against this stood about \$10,000 as the expenses of the commission. Within a decade the costs of the state nearly trebled. The ratio of foreign paupers was increasing yearly. Not only was the burden heavy; it was so badly adjusted as to be a constant source of friction and ill-feeling between the state and the towns. In the early years after this increase of foreign-born paupers began to be marked, the state had no almshouse of its own; paupers having no settlement within the state were maintained in the almshouses of the several towns, especially of those along the seaboard, and for their support the state paid a shamefully inadequate sum.² Instead of a unified administration of state aid, the relief of these paupers was in the hands of 327 separate town boards, each feeling no responsibility to the state treasury, and trying to elbow the unfortunates on to neighboring towns.

In 1852 the legislature authorized the erection of three almshouses in different parts of the state, in which paupers having no legal town settlement might be decently maintained under systematic discipline.³ Two years later these almshouses were opened and they

¹ Report of Joint Committee to the Senate, April 29, 1852, *Boston Advertiser*, May 8, 1852. See also lecture by Edward Everett, *The Discovery and Colonization of America and Immigration*, before N. Y. Hist. Soc., June 1, 1853, p. 30.

² A single instance will suffice to show the causes for dissatisfaction. During 1851 at the Cambridge almshouse were 522 paupers, only 80 of whom had a legal settlement in the Commonwealth. The state paupers numbered 252, of whom 235 were foreign-born, principally from England and Ireland. The average weekly cost of support at the Cambridge almshouse was \$1.75, but the state paid on the basis of 28 cents per week for a child of twelve years or under and 49 cents for an adult pauper, of twelve years or over. Of the annual expense of the almshouse, \$10,000, the state paid less than \$2,000, although the state paupers numbered at least five-sixths of the whole number supported. The labor performed amounted to only \$400, and all of this went to the state. *Cambridge Chronicle*, quoted in *Boston Advertiser*, January 28, 1852. For other similar facts, see the account of the overcrowding of the Boston Lunatic Hospital. *Boston Advertiser*, April 12, 1853.

³ Report, April 29, 1852. *Boston Advertiser*, May 8, 1852.

accomplished not a little good.¹ An unjust burden was removed from the towns and sea-board cities ; moreover, the prospect of life under more rigid discipline and away from their favorite haunts persuaded large numbers of these public charges to make an effort to be self-supporting and it thus sorted out the really dependent from the impostors. But these two years were the very years of the origin and rapid spread of Know-nothingism, and, without question, to this outburst the rapidly increasing and as yet wretchedly adjusted burden of foreign pauperism in no small degree contributed. In every town whose almshouse was infested with paupers who did not properly belong there and for whose maintenance the state was contributing a mere pittance, each tax-payer must have been restive under the exactions inflicted upon him.²

The census returns brought out clearly some of the other grounds of the prevalent impatience with the immigrants. They showed, for example, that with the single exception of New York no other state was carrying a burden of foreign pauperism nearly so heavy as that which fell to Massachusetts.³ Illiteracy and insanity, too, had evidently increased within the decade and were found to a disproportionately great extent among those of foreign birth.⁴ Still more startling were the statistics of criminality. Of the 27,000 persons convicted of crime in the United States during the year ending June 1, 1850, more than half were from the ranks of the foreign-born, who then constituted only eleven per cent. of the total population. In Massachusetts they, though but 16.6 per cent. of the population, furnished 53.5 per cent. of the law breakers, an aggregate of 3884 foreign-born criminals, while no other state excepting New York exceeded 908 as its total of criminals, native and foreign.⁵ Of course, much is to be said in qualification of the bad impression which these figures make. In the first place the apparent prevalence of crime in Massachusetts in a measure merely reflected the exceptionally active prosecution of crime. The more

¹ At Middlebury, Tewksbury and Monson. *Boston Advertiser*, July 15, 1854 ; March 24, 1855.

² From time to time the state government grappled with the problem. Head-money was tried ; an attempt was made to make railway companies responsible for the immigrants whom they brought into the state, and in various ways Massachusetts tried to shoulder off these unfortunates upon her neighbor states. Report of Alien Passengers Commission, reviewed in *Boston Advertiser*, May 19, 1855.

³ *Abstract of the United States Census*. In Massachusetts the native paupers numbered 9,530, the foreign born, 9,247, the total expense being \$392,715. In Pennsylvania, with a population nearly two and a half times as great, the numbers were 5,898 and 5,653 respectively and the total expense \$232,138.

⁴ De Witt, p. 246.

⁵ *Abstract of the United States Census*, p. 29. According to the state census of 1855 the showing was somewhat improved; 45.70 per cent. of the "convicts" were of foreign birth. In Suffolk County their percentage was 64.

stringent a state's laws and the more rigorous their enforcement, the worse will its record show if tested merely by the number of convictions. Again, an increase of crime might naturally have been expected in a community which was so rapidly stumbling into urban conditions of life. It was a transitional stage of development to which traditional ratios could no longer apply. Even the excessive proportion of offenders against law among the foreign-born did not prove that they were necessarily bad material for citizenship. The mass of immigrants were living on the margin of subsistence; with little training in self-control, they had been suddenly removed from the traditional restraints of their native land. In getting acclimated to the freedom of the new environment it is small wonder that their record of offenses was a long one. But in the early 50's the average voter was in no mind to discount statistics or to reason out causes. Since the immigrants had so enormously increased in numbers the state had shown alarming symptoms. Just what disease they might portend he did not know, but he dreaded much. It was in this frame of mind that he received a visit from zealous physicians of a new school. They confirmed his worst fears; the body politic was in desperate straits; only heroic treatment could save it and he was persuaded to make trial of their nostrum.

The early successes or failures of a new movement in politics seem often to bear little relation to its principles or its leaders. The first steps of its career are determined by the circumstances under which it first sees the light, by the nature of the community into which it is born. A lucky hour, a favoring environment, may atone for many an hereditary defect. We have seen that the early fifties were years of great unsteadiness, of stumbling transition in Massachusetts' social and industrial development. That in the midst of this time of doubts the tide of immigration should have suddenly risen to the flood was cause quite sufficient to fill timid souls with grave apprehension for the safety of American institutions. Had these phenomena occurred ten years earlier they would doubtless have evoked a considerable revival of nativism. If the mechanism of the secret order could then have been exploited the movement might have made itself formidable, but it certainly would have elected no governors, packed no legislatures and sent no representatives and senators to Congress; for in ordinary times nine-tenths of the voters cast a straight party ticket. But by 1854 normal or calculable politics had become a thing of the past; everything was turmoil. In 1848 bolters from the convention that nominated Taylor had called into being the Free Soil party. Among its founders and most ardent leaders were Charles Allen and Henry Wilson of Massachusetts. In no other state during the next few years did the new party put

politics in greater confusion. The compromise of 1850 proved entirely ineffective for the healing of the breach. Webster's Seventh of March speech embittered instead of harmonizing the disputants.¹ The Free Soilers soon polled a vote large enough to throw the election of governor into the legislature. Then came the much-denounced coalition with the Democrats which sent Charles Sumner to the United States Senate and called the constitutional convention of 1853. Massachusetts furnished her full quota of abolitionists, the Emigrant Aid Company took its rise here, and the Kansas-Nebraska bill called forth the bitterest antagonism between sometime friends in politics. Questions relating to liquor legislation, to constitutional amendment, to immigrant problems, were mere ripples upon the surface; the slavery issue was moving politics from beneath. Old alliances no longer held. Democrats and Whigs alike were dissatisfied with the attitude of their parties and recognized that a change of base was imminent. The Free Soilers had done much to loosen party ties. But apparently their position was too radical. They could carry elections only by coalitions which would subordinate them to one of the older parties.

It was just at this opportune juncture that the Know-nothing organization made its appearance in Massachusetts and held out its seductively mysterious appeal for votes. The Democrat listened with comparative indifference. In the nativist issue he felt but a negative interest, for the vast majority of the newcomers became loyal members of his party. As regarded slavery the new party at first professed to take a neutral stand, the very attitude which the Democratic party was exerting all its agility to maintain. From the Whig the appeal met with a more cordial reception, for the Whig party was thoroughly at odds with itself over slavery. The compromise of 1850 had aroused bitter resentment, and the Kansas-Nebraska bill crowded slavery to the fore; the issue would not down. The immigrants had brought only disaster to the Whigs, and aside from political antagonism, there was the prejudice against foreigners, for the Whig party represented the more conservative and aristocratic elements of the population. There were besides not a few Whigs, who, sympathizing mildly with the nativist tendencies of the American association, nevertheless believed that slavery was the issue of the hour, but that it could never be settled by the existing parties. They believed that the time had come for break-up and readjustment, and regretfully left their old allegiance in the hope that out from the welter a new and vitalized Whig party might arise. As for the Free Soilers, coalition had become second nature to them. By

¹Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, II. 254. Rhodes, *History of the United States since the Compromise of 1850*, I. 154.

it alone they had been able to elect their United States Senator and call the constitutional convention. But their revised constitution had been rejected, and the Democrats were making it evident that the partnership with them must soon end; Free-Soil principles were not to be advanced through Democratic allies. What more natural, then, than to attempt the capture of the new organization? The nativist part of the programme would make many a man wince, but every day it was becoming more apparent what a powerful engine the new party could be made if only it could be run upon the Free-Soil track. An analysis of gubernatorial votes shows beyond question that the Free Soilers, to a far greater extent than any other party men, merged their organization into the new party.¹ This they did not from devotion to the fundamental principles of Know-nothingism, but with the definite plan of making the Know-nothing mechanism serve their ends, if not in directly furthering Free-Soilism at any rate in breaking down the old parties.² The capture of the Know-nothing organization by the Free Soilers in Massachusetts was an extremely clever piece of political sharp practice. That office-holders, the "machine," those with whom party principles were synonymous with individual self-interest, should have put on the regalia of the new order so soon as it held up visions of spoils was to be expected as a matter of course; their principles were as readily changed as their coats, and the unsophisticated nativists in the Know-nothing councils soon found that they had to deal with a motley and voracious crowd of political adventurers within their very midst.³

That Know-nothingism took exceptionally vigorous root in Massachusetts was due to peculiar local conditions which to the short-

¹ "Of the three leading parties of last year the Free Soilers have most nearly approached a total absorption in the secret order. No less than 77 per cent. of them have disappeared, while 62 per cent. of the Bishop Democrats, and but 55 per cent. of the Whigs have deserted their standards." *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 15, 1854; December 20, 1854.

² A friend, John Rogers, asked Henry Wilson "How he could consistently use his endeavors to overthrow a political organization from which he had received the most desirable office in the gift of the people of Massachusetts. Hon. Henry Wilson, Massachusetts representative in the Senate, replied, 'I'll blow the whole thing (the American party) to hell and damnation.'" *Boston Daily Bee*, September 26, 1855.

³ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 28, 1854. "Free Soilers have seven out of the eleven members of Congress for two years, the Senator for four years. The Whigs have the Governor for one year. The distribution is no concern of ours, but it looks to us as though the Free Soilers had taken the turkey for their part, given the Whigs the hawk, and allowed the Democrats to smell of the game." *Worcester Palladium*, February 14, 1855. "We do not believe it ever happened before this year that a majority of the holders of office, elected by a party, betook themselves to an opposite party within a year and participated in the defeat of the men who placed them in office." *Boston Telegraph*, quoted in *Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1854.

sighted might naturally seem to afford some justification for the platform if not for the methods of the new order. To a conservative community, perplexed by rapid and radical changes in its industrial economy, Irish Catholic immigration, increasing at a pace unexampled, brought a host of new embarrassments. But the political success of the movement, as overwhelming as it was short-lived, was due not to the prevalence of nativist or of anti-Catholic sentiments, but to the widespread political unrest. The old faiths were everywhere rudely shaken. The question became not "Why should I leave my party?" but "Can I with a good conscience remain in my party?" With the Free Soilers the resolution was speedily taken; they planned and effected the capture of the Know-nothing organization. Real burdens and problems connected with immigration had been the occasion of its rise. But from the time of its entrance into state politics its phenomenal career is that of an army carrying the nativist flag but officered and manœuvred by Free Soilers and political adventurers.¹

GEORGE H. HAYNES.

¹Within a month after the opening of the legislature the *Boston Daily Bee*, the leading Know-nothing organ, complained bitterly that in spite of the overwhelming American majority in each house, the conduct of public business was not in the hands of those who had the principles of the American party sincerely at heart.