

SOCIETY IN AMERICA

BY

HARRIET MARTINEAU

AUTHOR OF "ILLUSTRATIONS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY."

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SOCIETY IN AMERICA.

P A R T III.

CIVILISATION.

“ This country, which has given to the world the example of physical liberty, owes to it that of moral emancipation also ; for as yet it is but nominal with us. The inquisition of public opinion overwhelms, in practice, the freedom asserted by the laws in theory.”

Jefferson.

THE degree of civilisation of any people corresponds with the exaltation of the idea which is the most prevalent among that people. The prominent idea of savages is the necessity of providing for the supply of the commonest bodily wants. The first steps in civilisation, therefore, are somewhat refined methods of treating the body. When,

by combination of labour and other exercises of ingenuity, the wants of the body are supplied with regularity and comparative ease, the love of pleasure, the love of idleness, succeeds. Then comes the desire of wealth; and next, the regard to opinion. Further than this no nation has yet attained. Individuals there have been, probably in every nation under heaven, who have lived for a higher idea than any of these; and insulated customs and partial legislation have, among all communities, shown a tendency towards something loftier than the prevalent morality. The majesty of higher ideas is besides so irresistible, that an involuntary homage, purely inefficacious, has been offered to them from of old by the leaders of society.

“ Earth is sick,
And Heaven is weary of the hollow words
Which States and Kingdoms utter when they talk
Of truth and justice.”

Though, as yet, “profession mocks performance,” the profession, from age to age, of the same lofty something not yet attained, may be taken as a clear prophecy of ultimate performance. It shows a perception, however dim, a regard, however feeble, from which endeavour and attainment cannot but follow, in course of time. But the time is not yet. In the old world, the transition is, in its most en-

lightened parts, only beginning to be made, from the few governing the many avowedly for the good of the few, to governing the many professedly for the good of the many. The truth and justice under whose dominion every man would reverence all other men, would renounce himself for the sake of others, and feel it to be the highest destiny "not to be ministered unto, but to minister," are still "hollow words." The civilisation of the old world still corresponds with the low idea, that man lives in and for the outward, in and for what is around him rather than what is within him. It is still supposed, that whatever a few individuals say and do, the generality of men live for wealth, outward ease and dignity, and, at the highest, lofty reputation. The degree of civilisation corresponds with this. There is scarcely an institution or a custom which supposes anything higher. What educational arrangements there are, are new, and (however praiseworthy as being an actual advance) are so narrow and meagre as to show how unaccustomed is the effort to consider the man as nobler than the unit of society. The phrase is still the commonest of phrases in which parents, guardians, schoolmasters and statesmen embody their ambition for their wards—that any such ward "may become a useful and respectable member of society." The greater number of guardians would be terrified at the idea of

their wards becoming anything else; anything higher than “useful and respectable members of society,” while it is as clear as noon-day that room ought to be left,—that facilities ought to be afforded for every one becoming whatsoever his Maker has fitted him to be, so long as it appears that the noblest men by whom the earth has been graced, have been considered in their own time the very reverse of “useful and respectable members of society.” The most godlike of the race have been esteemed “pestilent fellows” in their day and generation. No student of the ways of Providence will repine at this order of affairs, or expect that any arrangement of society can be made by which the convictions and sympathies of the less gifted should be enabled suddenly to overtake those of the more gifted. He will not desire to change the great and good laws by which the chosen of his race are “made perfect through sufferings,” and by which the light of reason is ordained to brighten very gradually from dawn into day. He will only take note of the fact, that it is a low state of civilisation which presupposes specified and outward aims, and relies with such confidence on the mechanical means of attaining them as to be shocked, or anything but gratified, at the pursuit of singular objects by unusual methods. The observer will rightly judge such to be a low state of

civilisation, whatever lamentations or exultations he may daily hear about the very high point civilisation has reached, when the schoolmaster is abroad, when people can travel at the rate of fifty miles an hour, and eminent cooks are paid 1,200*l.* a-year. While truth and justice remain "hollow words," so far as that men cannot live for them, to the detriment of their fortunes, without being called mischievous and disreputable members of society, no one can reasonably speak of the high civilisation of the country to which they belong.

The old world naturally looks with interest to the new, to see what point of civilisation it reaches under fresh circumstances. The interest may be undefined, and partly unconscious; but it is very eager. The many, who conceive of no other objects of general pursuit than the old ones of wealth, ease, and honour, look only to see under what forms these are pursued. The few, who lay the blame of the grovelling at home upon outward restrictions alone, look to America with extravagant expectations of a perfect reign of virtue and happiness, because the Americans live in outward freedom. What is the truth?

While the republics of North America are new, the ideas of the people are old. While these republics were colonies, they contained an old people, living under old institutions, in a new country.

Now they are a mixed people, infant as a nation, with a constant accession of minds from old countries, living in a new country, under institutions newly combined out of old elements. It is a case so singular, that the old world may well have patience for some time, to see what will arise. The old world must have patience; for the Americans have no national character yet; nor can have, for a length of years. It matters not that they think they have: or it matters only so far as it shows to what they tend. Their veneration of Washington has led them to suppose that he is the type of their nation. Their patriotic feelings are so far associated with him that they conclude the nation is growing up in his likeness. If any American were trusted by his countrymen to delineate what they call their national character, it would infallibly come out a perfect likeness of Washington. But there is a mistake here. There were influences prior to Washington, and there are circumstances which have survived him, that cause some images to lie deeper down in the hearts of Americans than Washington himself. His character is a grand and very prevalent idea among them: but there are others which take the precedence, from being more general still. Wealth and opinion were practically worshipped before Washington opened his eyes on the sun which was to light him to his deeds;

and the worship of Opinion is, at this day, the established religion of the United States.

If the prevalent idea of society did not arise out of circumstances over which the mutations of outward events exercise but a small immediate influence, it is clear that, in this case, the idea should arise out of the characters of the benefactors who achieved the revolution, and must be consistent with the solemn words in which they conveyed their united Declaration. The principles of truth, and the rule of justice, according to which that Declaration was framed, and that revolutionary struggle undertaken and conducted, should, but for prior influences, have been the spirit inspiring the whole civilisation of the American people. There should then have been the utmost social as well as political freedom. The pursuit of wealth might then have been subordinated at pleasure: fear of injury, alike from opinion and from violence, should have been banished; and as noble facilities afforded for the progression of the inward, as for the enjoyment of the outward, man. But this was not given. Instead of it there was ordained a mingling of old and new influences, from which a somewhat new kind of civilisation has arisen.

The old-world estimation of wealth has remained among them, though, I believe and trust, somewhat diminished in strength. Though every man works

for it in America, and not quite every man does so in England, it seems to me that it is not so absolutely the foreground object in all views of life, the one subject of care, speculation, inquiry, and supposition, that it is in England. It is in America clearly subordinate to another idea, still an idol, but of a higher order than the former. The worship of Opinion certainly takes precedence of that of wealth.

In a country where the will of the majority decides all political affairs, there is a temptation to belong to the majority, except where strong interests, or probabilities of the speedy supremacy of the minority, countervail. The minority, in such a case, must be possessed of a strong will, to be a minority. A strong will is dreaded by the weaker, who have so little faith as to believe that such a will endangers the political equality which is the fundamental principle of their institutions. This dread occasions persecution, or at least opprobrium: opprobrium becomes a real danger; and, like all dangers, is much more feared than it deserves, the longer it lasts, and the more it is dwelt upon. Thus, from a want of faith in the infallible operation of the principles of truth and the rule of justice, these last become "hollow words" in the States of the new, as in the kingdoms of the old world; and the infant nation, which was expected

to begin a fresh and higher social life, is acting out in its civilisation an idea but little more exalted than those which have operated among nations far less favoured than herself in regard to political freedom.

CHAPTER I.

IDEA OF HONOUR.

“Talent and worth are the only eternal grounds of distinction. To these the Almighty has affixed his everlasting patent of nobility; and these it is which make the bright, ‘the immortal names,’ to which our children may aspire, as well as others. It will be our own fault if, in our own land, society as well as government is not organised upon a new foundation.”

Miss Sedgwick.

It is true that it is better to live for honour than for wealth: but how much better, depends upon the idea of honour. Where truth and justice are more than hollow words, the idea of honour is such as to exclude all fear, except of wrong-doing. Where the honour is to be derived from present human opinion, there must be fear, ever present, and perpetually exciting to or withholding from action. In such a case, as painful a bondage is

incurred as in the pursuit of wealth. If riches take to themselves wings, and fly away, so does popularity. If rich freights are in danger afar off from storms, and harvests at home from blights, so is reputation, from differences of opinion, and varieties of views and tempers. If all that moralists have written, and wise men have testified, about the vanity and misery of depending on human applause be true, there can be no true freedom in communities, any more than for individuals, who live to opinion. The time will come when the Americans also will testify to this, as a nation, as many individual members of their society have done already. The time will come when they will be astonished to discover how they mar their own privileges by allowing themselves less liberty of speech and action than is enjoyed by the inhabitants of countries whose political servitude the Americans justly compassionate and despise.

This regard to opinion shows itself under various forms in different parts of the country, and under dissimilar social arrangements. In the south, where the labour itself is capital, and labour cannot therefore be regarded with due respect, there is much vanity of retinue, much extravagance, from fear of the imputation of poverty which would follow upon retrenchment; and great recklessness of life, from fear of the imputation of cowardice which might follow upon forgiveness of injuries

Fear of imputation is here the panic, under which men relinquish their freedom of action and speech. In the north, society has been enabled, chiefly by the religious influence which has descended from the fathers, to surmount, in some degree, this low kind of fear, so far as it shows itself in recklessness of life : but not altogether. I was amazed to hear a gentleman of New England declare, while complaining of the insolence of the southern members of Congress to the northern, under shelter of the northern men not being duellists, that, if he went to Congress, he would give out that he would fight. I do not believe that he would actually have proved himself so far behind the society to which he belonged as to have adopted a bad practice which it had outgrown,—adopted it from that very fear of imputation which he despised in the south; but the impulse under which he spoke testified to the danger of a fear of opinion taking any form, however low, when it exists under any other.

When I was at Philadelphia, a shocking incident happened in a family with which I was acquainted. The only son, a fine youth of nineteen, was insulted by a fellow-student. His father and uncle consulted what must be done; and actually sent the young man out to fight the person who had insulted him : the mother being aware of it, and praying that if either fell, it might be her son. She no doubt felt in her true heart, that it would

be better to die than to murder another from the selfish fear of imputation. The first aggressor lost a finger; and there, it was said, the matter ended. But the matter has not ended yet, nor will end; for the young man has had a lesson of low selfishness, of moral cowardice impressed upon him by the guardians of his youth, with a force which he is not likely to surmount: and the society in which he lives has seen the strongest testimony to false principles borne by two of its most respected members.

Not by any means as a fair specimen of society, but as an example of what kind of honour may be enjoyed where the fear of imputation is at its height, I give the description, as it was given me by a resident, of what a man may do in an eminently duelling portion of the southern country. "A man may kill another, and be no worse. He may be shabby in his money transactions, but may not steal. He may game, but not keep a gaming-house." It will not do for the duellists of the south to drop in conversation, as they do, that good manners can exist only where vengeance is the penalty of bad. The fear of imputation and the dread of vengeance are at least as contemptible as bad manners; and unquestionably lower than the fear of opinion prevalent in the north.

In the north there can be little vanity of retinue,

as retinue is not to be had: but there is, instead of it, much ostentation of wealth, in the commercial cities. It is here that the aristocracy form and collect; and, as has been before said, the aristocratic is universally the fearing, while the democratic is the hoping, party. The fear of opinion takes many forms. There is fear of vulgarity, fear of responsibility; and above all, fear of singularity. There is something more displeasing, at the first view, in the caution of the Yankees than in the recklessness of the cavalier race of the south. Till the individual exceptions come out from the mass; till the domestic frankness and generosity of the whole people are apparent, there is something little short of disgusting to the stranger who has been unused to witness such want of social confidence, in the caution which presents probably the strongest aspect of selfishness that he has ever seen.

The Americans of the northern States are, from education and habit, so accustomed to the caution of which I speak, as to be unaware of its extent and singularity. They think themselves injured by the remarks which strangers make upon it, and by the ridicule with which it is treated by their own countrymen who have travelled abroad. But the singularity is in themselves. They may travel over the world, and find no society but their own which will submit to the restraint of perpetual caution, and

reference to the opinions of others. They may travel over the whole world, and find no country but their own where the very children beware of getting into scrapes, and talk of the effect of actions upon people's minds; where the youth of society determine in silence what opinions they shall bring forward, and what avow only in the family circle; where women write miserable letters, almost universally, because it is a settled matter that it is unsafe to commit oneself on paper; and where elderly people seem to lack almost universally that faith in principles which inspires a free expression of them at any time, and under all circumstances.

"Mrs. B.," said a child of eleven to a friend of mine, "what church do you go to?"—"To Mr. —'s." "O, Mrs. B. are you a Unitarian?"—"No." "Then why do you go to that church?"—"Because I can worship best there." "O, but Mrs. B., think of the example,—the example, Mrs. B.!"

When I had been in the country some time, I remarked to one who knew well the society in which he lived, that I had not seen a good lady's letter since I landed; though the conversation of some of the writers was of a very superior kind. The letters were uniformly poor and guarded in expression, confined to common-places, and overloaded with flattery. "There are," replied he,

“no good letters written in America. The force of public opinion is so strong, and the danger of publicity so great, that men do not write what they think, for fear of getting into bad hands: and this acts again upon the women, and makes their style artificial.” It is not quite true that there are no good letters written in America: among my own circle of correspondents there, there are ladies and gentlemen whose letters would stand a comparison with any for frankness, grace, and epistolary beauty of every kind. But I am not aware of any medium between this excellence and the boarding-school insignificance which characterises the rest.

When the stranger has recovered a little from the first disagreeable impression of all this caution, he naturally asks what there can be to render it worth while. To this question, I never could discover a satisfactory answer. What harm the “force of public opinion,” or “publicity,” can do to any individual; what injury “bad hands” can inflict upon a good man or woman, which can be compared with the evil of living in perpetual caution, I cannot imagine. If men and women cannot bear blame, they had better hew out a space for themselves in the forest, and live there, as the only safe place. If they are afraid of observation and comment, they should withdraw from society altogether: for the interest which human beings take in each other is

so deep and universal, that observation and comment are unavoidable wherever there are eyes to see, and hearts and minds to yearn and speculate. An honest man will not naturally fear this investigation. If he is not sure of his opinions on any matter, he will say so, and endeavour to gain light. If he is sure, he will speak them, and be ready to avow the grounds of them, as occasion arises. That there should be some who think his opinions false and dangerous is not pleasant; but it is an evil too trifling to be mentioned in comparison with the bondage of concealment, and the torment of fear. This bondage, this torment is worse than the worst that the "force of public opinion" can inflict, even if such force should close the prospect of political advancement, of professional eminence, and of the best of social privileges. There are some members of society in America who have found persecution, excommunication, and violence, more endurable than the concealment of their convictions.

Few persons really doubt this when the plain case is set down before them. They agree to it in church on Sundays, and in conversation by the fireside: and the reason why they are so backward as they are to act upon it in the world, is that habit and education are too strong for them. They have worn their chains so long that they feel them less than might be supposed. I doubt whether they can

even conceive of a state of society, of its ease and comfort, where no man fears his neighbour, and it is no evil to be responsible for one's opinions : where men, knowing how undiscernible consequences are, and how harmless they must be to the upright, abide them without fear, and do not perplex themselves with calculating what is incalculable. Whenever the time shall come for the Americans to discover all this, to perceive how miserable a restraint they have imposed upon themselves by this servitude to opinion, they will see how it is that, while outwardly blessed beyond all parallel, they have been no happier than the rest of the world. I doubt whether, among the large "uneasy classes" of the Old World, there is so much heart-eating care, so much nervous anxiety, as among the dwellers in the towns of the northern States of America, from this cause alone. If I had to choose, I would rather endure the involuntary uneasiness of the Old World sufferers, than the self-imposed anxiety of those of the New: except that the self-imposed suffering may be shaken off at any moment. There are instances, few, but striking, of strong-minded persons who have discovered and are practising the true philosophy of ease; who have openly taken their stand upon principles, and are prepared for all consequences, meekly and cheerfully defying all possible inflictions of opinion. Though it does not

enter into their calculations, such may possibly find that they are enjoying more, and suffering less from opinion, than those who most daintily court it.

There would be something amusing in observing the operation of this habit of caution, if it were not too serious a misfortune. When Dr. Channing's work on Slavery came out, the following conversation passed between a lady of Boston and myself. She began it with—

“Have you seen Dr. Channing's book?”

“Yes. Have you?”

“O no. Do not you think it very ill-timed?”

“No; I think it well-timed; as it did not come out sooner.”

“But is it not wrong to increase the public excitement at such a time?”

“That depends upon the nature of the excitement. But this book seems to have a tranquillising effect: as the exhibition of true principles generally has.”

“But Dr. Channing is not a practical man. He is only a retired student. He has no real interest in the matter.”

“No worldly interest; and this, and his seclusion, enable him to see more clearly than others, in a case where principles enlighten men, and practice seems only to blind them.”

“ Well: I shall certainly read the book, as you like it so much.”

“ Pray don't, if that is your reason.”

A reply to Dr. Channing's book soon appeared;— a pamphlet which savoured only of fear, dollars, and, consequently, insult. A gentleman of Boston, who had, on some important occasions, shown that he could exercise a high moral courage, made no mention of this reply for some time after it appeared. At length, on hearing another person speak of it as it deserved, he said, “ Now people are so openly speaking of that reply, I have no objection to say what I think of it. I have held my tongue about it hitherto; but yesterday I heard —— speak of it as you do; and I no longer hesitate to declare that I think it an infamous production.”

It may be said that such are remarkable cases. Be it so: they still testify to the habit of society, by the direction which the caution takes. Elsewhere, the parties might be quite as much afraid of something else; but they would not dream of refraining from a good book, or holding their tongues about the badness of a vicious pamphlet, till supported by the opinions of others.

How strong a contrast to all this the domestic life of the Americans presents will appear when I come to speak of the spirit of intercourse. It is

an individual, though prevalent, selfishness that I have now been lamenting.

The traveller should go into the west when he desires to see universal freedom of manners. The people of the west have a comfortable self-complacency, equally different from the arrogance of the south, and the timidity of the north. They seem to unite with this the hospitality which distinguishes the whole country: so that they are, on the whole, a very bewitching people. Their self-confidence probably arises from their being really remarkably energetic, and having testified this by the conquests over nature which their mere settlement in the west evinces. They are the freest people I saw in America: and accordingly one enjoys among them a delightful exemption from the sorrow and indignation which worldly caution always inspires; and from flattery. If the stranger finds himself flattered in the west, he may pretty safely conclude that the person he is talking with comes from New England. "We are apt to think," said a westerner to me, "that however great and good another person may be, we are just as great and good." Accordingly, intercourse goes on without any reference whatever to the merits of the respective parties. In the sunshine of complacency, their free thoughts ripen into free deeds, and the world gains largely. There are, naturally, instances

of extreme conceit, here and there : but I do not hesitate to avow that, prevalent as mock-modesty and moral cowardice are in the present condition of society, that degree of self-confidence which is commonly called conceit grows in favour with me perpetually. An over-estimate of self appears to me a far less hurtful and disagreeable mistake than the idolatry of opinion. It is a mistake which is sure to be rectified, sooner or later ; and very often, it proves to be no mistake where small critics feel the most confident that they may safely ridicule it. The event decides this matter of self-estimate, beyond all question ; and while the event remains undisclosed, it is easy and pleasant to give men credit for as much as they believe themselves to be capable of:—more easy and pleasant than to see men restricting their own powers by such calculation of consequences as implies an equal want of faith in others and in themselves. If John Milton were now here to avow his hope that he should produce that which “ the world would not willingly let die,” what a shout there would be of “ the conceited fellow !” while, the declaration having been made venerable by the event, it is now cited as an instance of the noble self-confidence of genius.

The people of the west have a right to so much self-confidence as arises from an ascertainment of what they can actually achieve. They come from

afar, with some qualities which have force enough to guide them into a new region. They subdue this region to their own purposes; and, if they do often forget that the world elsewhere is progressing; if they do suppose themselves as relatively great in present society as they were formerly in the wilderness, it should be remembered, on their behalf, that they have effectually asserted their manhood in the conquest of circumstances.

If we are not yet to see, except in individual instances, the exquisite union of fearlessness with modesty, of self-confidence with meekness;—if there must be either the love of being grand in one's own eyes, or the fear of being little in other people's,—the friends of the Americans would wish that their error should be that which is allied to too much, rather than too little freedom.

As for the anxiety about foreign opinions of America, I found it less striking than I expected. In the south, there is the keenest sensibility to the opinion of the world about slavery; and in New England, the veneration for England is greater than I think any one people ought to feel for any other. The love of the mother country, the filial pride in her ancient sages, are natural and honourable: and so, perhaps, is a somewhat exalted degree of deference for the existing dwellers upon the soil of that mother country, and on the spot where

those sages lived and thought and spoke. But, as long as no civilised nation is, or can be ascertained to be, far superior or inferior to any other; as the human heart and human life are generally alike and equal, on this side barbarism, the excessive reverence with which England is regarded by the Americans seems to imply a deficiency of self-respect. This is an immeasurably higher and more healthy state of feeling than that which has been exhibited by a small portion of the English towards the Americans;—the contempt which, again, a sprinkling of Americans have striven to reciprocate. But the despisers in each nation, though so noisy as to produce some effect, are so few as to need no more than a passing allusion. If any English person can really see and know the Americans on their own ground, and fail to honour them as a nation, and love them as personal friends, he is no fair sample of the people whose name he bears; and is probably incapable of unperverted reverence: and if any American, having really seen and known the English on their own ground, does not reverence his own home exactly in proportion as he loves what is best in the English, he is unworthy of his home.

When I was on my voyage out, the Americans on board amused themselves with describing to me how incessantly I should be met by the question

how I liked America. When we arrived within a few miles of New York, a steam-boat met us, bringing the friends of some of the passengers. On board this steam-boat, the passengers went up to the city. It happened to be the smallest, dirtiest, and most clumsy steamer belonging to the port. A splashing rain drove us down into the cabin, where there was barely standing room for our company. We saw each other's faces by the dim light of a single shabby lamp. "Now, Miss M." said some of the American passengers, "how do you like America?" This was the first time of my being asked the question which I have had to answer almost daily since. Yet I do not believe that many of my interrogators seriously cared any more for my answer than those who first put the question in the dirty cabin; or than my little friend Charley, who soon caught the joke, and with grave face, asked me, every now and then, "How do you like this country?" I learned to regard it as a method of beginning conversation, like our meteorological observations in England; which are equally amusing to foreigners. My own impression is, that while the Americans have too exalted a notion of England, and too little self-respect as a nation, they are far less anxious about foreign opinions of themselves than the behaviour of American travellers in England would lead the

English to suppose. The anxiety arises on English ground. At home, the generality of Americans seem to see clearly enough that it is yet truer with regard to nations than individuals that, though it is very pleasant to have the favourable opinion of one's neighbours, yet, if one is good and happy within oneself, the rest does not much matter. I met with a few who spoke with a disgusting affectation of candour, (some, as if they expected to please me thereby, and others under the influence of sectional prejudice,) of what they called the fairness of the gross slanders with which they have been insulted through the English press: but I was thankful to meet with more who did not acknowledge the jurisdiction of observers disqualified by prejudice, or by something worse, for passing judgment on a nation. The irritability of their vanity has been much exaggerated, partly to serve paltry purposes of authorship; and yet more from the ridiculous exhibitions of some Americans in England, who are no more to be taken as specimens of the nation to which they belong than a young Englishman who, when I was at New York, went up the Hudson in a drizzling rain, pronounced that West Point was not so pretty as Richmond; descended the river in the dark, and declared on his return that the Americans were wonderfully proud of scenery that was nothing particular in any way.

It will be well for the Americans, particularly those of the east and south, when their idea of honour becomes as exalted as that which inspired their revolutionary ancestors. Whenever they possess themselves of the idea of their democracy, as it was possessed by their statesmen of 1801, they will moderate their homage of human opinion, and enhance their worship of humanity. Not till then will they live up to their institutions, and enjoy that internal freedom and peace to which the external are but a part of the means. In such improvement, they will be much assisted by the increasing intercourse between Britain and America; for, however fascinating to Americans may be the luxury, conversational freedom, and high intellectual cultivation of some portions of English society, they cannot fail to be disgusted with the aristocratic insolence which is the vice of the whole. The puerile and barbaric spirit of contempt is scarcely known in America: the English insolence of class to class, of individuals towards each other, is not even conceived of, except in the one highly disgraceful instance of the treatment of the people of colour. Nothing in American civilisation struck me so forcibly and so pleasurably as the invariable respect paid to man, as man. Nothing since my return to England has given me so much pain as the contrast there. Perhaps no Englishman can

become fully aware, without going to America, of the atmosphere of insolence in which he dwells; of the taint of contempt which infects all the intercourses of his world. He cannot imagine how all that he can say that is truest and best about the treatment of people of colour in America is neutralised on the spot, by its being understood how the same contempt is spread over the whole of society here, which is there concentrated upon the blacks.

SECTION I.

CASTE.

This word, at least its meaning, is no more likely to become obsolete in a republic than among the Hindoos themselves. The distinctive characteristics may vary; but there will be rank, and tenacity of rank, wherever there is society. As this is natural, inevitable, it is of course right. The question must be what is to entitle to rank.

As the feudal qualifications for rank are absolutely non-existent in America, (except in the slave States, where there are two classes, without any minor distinctions,) it seems absurd that the

feudal remains of rank in Europe should be imitated in America. Wherever the appearance of a conventional aristocracy exists in America, it must arise from wealth, as it cannot from birth. An aristocracy of mere wealth is vulgar everywhere. In a republic, it is vulgar in the extreme.

This is the only kind of vulgarity I saw in the United States. I imagine that the English who have complained the most copiously of the vulgarity of American manners, have done so from two causes: from using their own conventional notions as a standard of manners, (which is a vulgarism in themselves;) and also from their intercourses with the Americans having been confined to those who consider themselves the aristocracy of the United States; the wealthy and showy citizens of the Atlantic ports. Foreign travellers are most hospitably received by this class of society; introduced to "the first people in Boston,"—"in New York,"—"in Philadelphia;" and taught to view the country with the eyes of their hosts. No harm is intended here: it is very natural: but it is not the way for strangers to obtain an understanding of the country and the people. The traveller who chooses industriously to see for himself, not with European or aristocratic merely, but with human eyes, will find the real aristocracy of the country, not only in ball-rooms and bank-parlours, but also

in fishing-boats, in stores, in college chambers, and behind the plough. Till he has seen all this, and studied the natural manners of the natural aristocracy, he is no more justified in applying the word "vulgar" to more than a class, than an American would be who should call all the English vulgar, when he had seen only the London alderman class.

I had the opportunity of perceiving what errors might arise from this cause. I was told a great deal about "the first people in Boston:" which is perhaps as aristocratic, vain, and vulgar a city, as described by its own "first people," as any in the world. Happily, however, Boston has merits which these people know not of. I am far from thinking it, as they do, the most religious, the most enlightened, and the most virtuous city in the world. There are other cities in the United States which, on the whole, I think more virtuous and more enlightened: but I certainly am not aware of so large a number of peculiarly interesting and valuable persons living in near neighbourhood, anywhere else but in London. But it happens that these persons belong chiefly to the natural, very few to the conventional, aristocracy. They have little perceptible influence. Society does not seem to be much the better for them. They save their own souls; but, as regards society, the salt appears to

have lost its savour. It is so sprinkled as not to season the body. With men and women enough on the spot to redeem society from false morals, and empty religious profession, Boston is the headquarters of Cant. Notwithstanding its superior intelligence, its large provision of benevolent institutions, and its liberal hospitality, there is an extraordinary and most pernicious union, in more than a few scattered instances, of profligacy and the worst kind of infidelity, with a strict religious profession, and an outward demeanour of remarkable propriety. The profligacy and infidelity might, I fear, be found in all other cities, on both sides the water; but nowhere, probably, in absolute co-existence with ostensible piety. This is not the connexion in which to speak of the religious aspect of the matter; but, as regards the cant, I believe that it proceeds chiefly from the spirit of caste which flourishes in a society which on Sundays and holidays professes to have abjured it. It is true that the people of New England have put away duelling; but the feelings which used to vent themselves by the practice of duelling are cherished by the members of the conventional aristocracy. This is revealed, not only by the presence of cant, but by the confessions of some who are bold enough not to pretend to be either republicans or christians. There are some few who openly desire a monarchy; and a few more who constantly insinuate the advantages

in a double sense ; in being excluded yet more than in excluding. The republic suffers no further than by having within it a small class acting upon anti-republican morals, and becoming thereby its perverse children, instead of its wise and useful friends and servants.

In Philadelphia, I was much in society. Some of my hospitable acquaintances lived in Chesnut Street, some in Arch Street, and many in other places. When I had been a few weeks in the city, I found to my surprise that some of the ladies who were my admiration had not only never seen or heard of other beautiful young ladies whom I admired quite as much, but never would see or hear of them. I inquired again and again for a solution of this mystery. One person told me that a stranger could not see into the usages of their society. This was just what I was feeling to be true ; but it gave me no satisfaction. Another said that the mutual ignorance was from the fathers of the Arch Street ladies having made their fortunes, while the Chesnut Street ladies owed theirs to their grandfathers. Another, who was amused with a new fashion of curtsying, just introduced, declared it was from the Arch Street ladies rising twice on their toes before curtsying, while the Chesnut Street ladies rose thrice. I was sure of only one thing in the matter ; that it was a pity that the parties should lose the pleasure

of admiring each other, for no better reasons than these: and none better were apparent.

It is not to be supposed that the mere circumstance of living in a republic will ever eradicate that kind of self-love which takes the form of family pride. It is a stage in the transit from selfishness to benevolence; and therefore natural and useful in its proper time and place. As every child thinks his father the wisest man in the world, the loving member of a family thinks his relations the greatest, best and happiest of people, till he gets an intimate knowledge of some others. This species of exclusiveness exists wherever there are families. An eminent public man, travelling in a somewhat retired part of his State, told us how he had been amused with an odd instance of family pride which had just come under his notice. Some plain farmers, brothers, had claimed to be his cousins; and he found they were so. They introduced each other to him; and one brought his son,—a hideous little Flibbertigibbet, with a shock of carroty hair. His father complacently stroked his hair, and declared he was exactly like his uncle Richard: his uncle Richard over again; 'twas wonderful how like his uncle Richard he was in all respects: the hair was the very same; and his uncle Richard was dumb till very late, and then stammered: “and this little fellow,” said the father, with a complacent smile,—

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“ this little fellow is six years old, and he can't speak a word.”

No one will find fault with the pride of connexion in this stage. Supposing it to remain in its present state, it is harmless from its extreme smallness. In a city, under the stimulus of society, the same pride may be either perverted into the spirit of caste, or exalted into the affection of pure republican brotherhood. The alternative is significant as to the state of the republic, and all-important to the individual.

The extent and influence of the conventional aristocracy in the United States are significant of the state of the republic so far as that they afford an accurate measure of the anti-republican spirit which exists. Such an aristocracy must remain otherwise too insignificant to be dangerous. It cannot choose its own members, restrict its own numbers, or keep its gentility from contamination ; for it must be perpetuated, not by hereditary transmission, but by accessions from below. Grocers grow rich, and mechanics become governors of States ; and happily there is no law, nor reason, nor desire that it should be otherwise. This little cloud will always overhang the republic, like the perpetual vapour which hovers above Niagara, thrown up by the force and regularity of the movement below. Some observers may be sorry that the heaven is never to be quite

clear : but none will dread the little cloud. It would be about as reasonable to fear that the white vapour should drown the cataract from whence it issues as that the conventional aristocracy of America should swamp the republic.

SECTION II.

PROPERTY.

I found it an admitted truth, throughout the United States, that enormous private wealth is inconsistent with the spirit of republicanism. Wealth is power ; and large amounts of power ought not to rest in the hands of individuals.

Admitted truths are not complained of as hardships. I never met with any one who quarrelled with public opinion for its enmity to large fortunes : on the contrary, every one who spoke with me on the subject was of the same mind with everybody else. Amidst the prevalent desire of gain, against which divines are preaching, and moralists are writing in vain, there seems to be no desire to go

beyond what public opinion approves. The desire of riches merges in a regard to opinion. There is more of the spirit of competition and of ostentation in it, than desire of accumulation. It has been mentioned that there are not more than four or five hundred affluent men,—worth 100,000 dollars and upwards,—in all the six States of New England; in a population of above two millions.

The popular feeling is so strong against transmitting large estates, and favouring one child, that nobody attempts to do it. The rare endeavours made by persons of feudal prepossessions to perpetuate this vicious custom, have been all happily frustrated. Much ridicule was occasioned by the manœuvres of one such testator, who provided for the portions of a large estate reverting periodically; forgetting that the reversions were as saleable as anything else; and that, under a democracy, there can be no settling the private, any more than the public, affairs of future generations. The present Patroon of Albany, the story of whose hereditary wealth is universally known, intends to divide his property among his children,—in number, I believe, thirteen. Under him has probably expired the practice of favouring one child for the preservation of a large estate.

This remote approach to an equalisation of property is, as far as it goes, an improvement upon the

state of affairs in the Old World, where the accumulation of wealth into masses, the consequent destitution of large portions of society, and the divisions which thus are established between class and class, between man and man, constitute a system too absurd and too barbarous to endure. The remote approach made by the Americans to an equalisation of wealth is yet more important as indicating the method by which society is to be eventually redeemed from its absurdity and barbarism in respect of property. This method is as yet perceived by only a few: but the many who imitate as far as they can the modes of the Old World, and cherish to the utmost its feudal prepossessions, will only for time be able to resist the convictions which the working of republican principles will force upon them, that there is no way of securing perfect social liberty on democratic principles but by community of property.

There is, as there ought to be, as great a horror in America as everywhere else of the despotism that would equalise property arbitrarily. Such a despotism can never become more than the ghost of a fancy. The approach to equalisation now required by public opinion is that required by justice; it is required that no man should encroach on his neighbours for the sake of enriching himself; that no man should encroach on his younger children for

the sake of enriching the eldest; that no man should encroach on the present generation for the sake of enriching a future one. All this is allowed and required. But by the same rule, and for the sake of the same principle, no one will ever be allowed to take from the industrious man the riches won by his industry, and give them to the idle: to take from the strong to give to the weak: to take from the wise to give to the foolish. Such aggression upon property can never take place, or be seriously apprehended in a republic where all, except drunkards and slaves, are proprietors, and where the Declaration of Independence claims for every one, with life and liberty, the pursuit of happiness in his own way. There will be no attacks on property in the United States.

But it appears to me inevitable that there will be a general agreement, sooner or later, on a better principle of property than that under which all are restless; under which the wisdom and peace of the community fall far below what their other circumstances would lead themselves and their well-wishers to anticipate.

Their moralists are dissatisfied. "Our present civilisation," says Dr. Channing, "is characterised and tainted by a devouring greediness of wealth; and a cause which asserts right against wealth, must stir up bitter opposition, especially in cities where this

divinity is most adored." . . . "The passion for gain is everywhere sapping pure and generous feeling, and everywhere raises up bitter foes against any reform which may threaten to turn aside a stream of wealth. I sometimes feel as if a great social revolution were necessary to break up our present mercenary civilisation, in order that Christianity, now repelled by the almost universal worldliness, may come into new contact with the soul, and may reconstruct society after its own pure and disinterested principles."* This is a prophecy. Men to whom truth and justice are not "hollow words" are the prophets of the times to come.

The scholars of America are dissatisfied. They complain of the superficial character of scholarship; of the depression, or rather of the non-existence, of literature. Some hope that matters will be better hereafter, merely from the nation having grown older. The greater number ascribe the mischief to men having to work at their employments; and some few of these believe that America would have a literature if only she had a hereditary aristocracy; this being supposed the only method of leaving to individuals the leisure and freedom of spirit necessary for literary pursuits. It has been pointed out that this is a mistake. Nature and social economy do not so agree as that

* Channing's Letter to Birney. 1837.

“I suppose it is their own choice to do so. I should make a different choice, perhaps; but if they prefer hard work and plenty of money to indulge their families with, to moderate work and less money, I do not see how you can expect me to blame them.”

“O, but we all live beyond our incomes.”

“In that case, your pleasures encroach on the rights of others, and I have no more to say.”

If this be true, how should this class be otherwise than restless and dissatisfied?

Are the mechanic and farming classes satisfied? No: not even they: outwardly blessed as they are beyond any class that society has ever contained. They, too, are aware that life must be meant to be passed far otherwise than in providing the outward means of living. They must be aware that though, by great industry, they can obtain some portion of time for occupations which are not money-getting, there must be something wrong in the system which compels men to devote almost the whole of their waking hours to procure that which, under a different combination of labour, might be obtained at a saving of three-fourths of the time. Whether their thoughts have been expressly turned to this subject or not, almost all the members of society are conscious that care for their external wants is so engrossing as to absorb almost all other

cares ; and that they would most thankfully agree to work in their vocation for the community for a short portion of every day, on condition of being spared all future anxiety about their physical necessities. They who best know the blessings inseparable from toil ; who are aware that the inner life is nourished by the activity of the outer, yet perceive of what infinite consequence it is to their progress that this activity should be varied in its objects, and separated as far as possible from association with physical necessities, and selfish possession. The poor man is rightly instructed, in the present state of things, when he is told that it is his first duty to provide for his own wants. The lesson is at present true, because the only alternative is encroachment on the rights of others : but it is a very low lesson in comparison with that which will be taught in the days when mutual and self-perfection will be the prevalent idea which the civilisation of the time will express. No thinking man or woman, who reflects on the amount of time, thought, and energy, which would be set free by the pressure of competition and money-getting being removed,—time, thought, and energy now spent in wearing out the body, and in partially stimulating and partially wasting the mind, can be satisfied under the present system.

In England, the prevalent dissatisfaction must

flourish without it. It may be had under the present system, but it is not. With community of property, it would be secured to every one. The requisite amount of work would bear a very small proportion to that of disposable time. It would then be fairly seen how much literature may owe to leisure.

The professional men of America are dissatisfied. The best of them complain that professions rank lower than in Europe; and the reasons they assign for this are, that less education is required; and that every man who desires to get on must make himself a party man, in theology, science, or law. Professional service is not well paid in the United States, compared with other countries, and with other occupations on the spot. Very severe toil is necessary to maintain a respectable appearance, except to those who have climbed the heights of their profession; and to them it has been necessary. One of these last, a man whom the world supposes to be blessed in all conceivable respects, told me that he had followed a mistaken plan of life; and that if he could begin again, he would spend his life differently. He had chosen his occupation rightly enough, and been wholly satisfied with his domestic lot: but his life had been one of toil and care in the pursuit of what he now found would have done all it could for him in

half the quantity. If he could set himself back twenty years, he would seek far less diligently for money and eminence, stipulate for leisure, and cultivate mirth. Though this gentleman cares for money only that he may have it to give away; though his generosity of spirit is the most remarkable feature of his character, he would gladly exchange the means of gratifying his liberal affections, for more capacity for mirth, more repose of spirit. The present mercenary and competitive system does not suit him.

I know of one professional man who has found this repose of spirit by retiring from the competitive system, and devoting himself to an object in which there was, when he entered upon it, but too little competition. He had, some time ago, earned a competence for himself and his family. A friend who visited him on his estate made some inquiries about investments in the region where his host lived. "I am the worst person you could ask," replied the host: "I know nothing about investments here. We are very happy with the money we have; and we do not know that we should be so happy if we had more: so I do not put myself in the way of hearing about profitable investments." He has most profitably invested his time and energy in the anti-slavery cause. He has been perhaps the most eminent defender of