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ECLECTIC MAGAZINE OF FOREIGN LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND ART, APRIL 1885

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A WORD MORE ABOUT AMERICA
BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

When I was at Chicago last year, I was asked whether Lord Coleridge would not write a book about America. I ventured to answer confidently for him that he would do nothing of the kind. Not at Chicago only, but almost wherever I went, I was asked whether I myself did not intend to write a book about America. For oneself one can answer yet more confidently than for one's friends, and I always replied that most assuredly I had no such intention. To write a book about America, on the strength of having made merely such a tour there as mine was, and with no fuller equipment of preparatory studies and of local observations than I possess, would seem to me an impertinence.

It is now a long while since I read M. de Tocqueville's famous work on Democracy in America. I have the highest respect for M. de Tocqueville; but my remembrance of his book is that it

deals too much in abstractions for my taste, and that it is written, moreover, in a style which many French writers adopt, but which I find trying – a style cut into short paragraphs and wearing an air of rigorous scientific deduction without the reality. Very likely, however, I do M. de Tocqueville injustice. My debility in high speculation is well known, and I mean to attempt his book on Democracy again when I have seen America once more, and when years may have brought to me, perhaps, more of the philosophic mind. Meanwhile, however, it will be evident how serious a matter I think it to write a worthy book about the United States, when I am not entirely satisfied with even M. de Tocqueville's.

But before I went to America, and when I had no expectation of ever going there, I published, under the title of "A Word about America," not indeed a book, but a few modest remarks on what I thought civilisation in the United States might probably be like. I had before me a Boston newspaper-article which said that if I ever visited America I should find there such and such things; and taking this article for my text I observed, that from all I had read and all I could judge, I should for my part expect to find there rather such and such other things, which I mentioned. I said that of aristocracy, as we know it here, I should expect to find, of course, in the United States the total absence; that our lower class I should expect to find absent in a great degree, while my old familiar friend, the middle class, I should expect to find in full possession of the land. And then betaking myself to those

playful phrases which a little relieve, perhaps, the tedium of grave disquisitions of this sort, I said that I imagined one would just have in America our Philistines, with our aristocracy quite left out and our populace very nearly.

An acute and singularly candid American, whose name I will on no account betray to his countrymen, read these observations of mine, and he made a remark upon them to me which struck me a good deal. Yes, he said, you are right, and your supposition is just. In general, what you would find over there would be the Philistines, as you call them, without your aristocracy and without your populace. Only this, too, I say at the same time: you would find over there something besides, something more, something which you do not bring out, which you cannot know and bring out, perhaps, without actually visiting the United States, but which you would recognise if you saw it.

My friend was a true prophet. When I saw the United States I recognised that the general account which I had hazarded of them was, indeed, not erroneous, but that it required to have something added to supplement it. I should not like either my friends in America or my countrymen here at home to think that my "Word about America" gave my full and final thoughts respecting the people of the United States. The new and modifying impressions brought by experience I shall communicate, as I did my original expectations, with all good faith, and as simply and plainly as possible. Perhaps when I have yet again visited America, have seen the great West, and

have had a second reading of M. de Tocqueville's classical work on Democracy, my mind may be enlarged and my present impressions still further modified by new ideas. If so, I promise to make my confession duly; not indeed to make it, even then, in a book about America, but to make it in a brief "Last Word" on that great subject – a word, like its predecessors, of open-hearted and free conversation with the readers of this Review.

I suppose I am not by nature disposed to think so much as most people do of "institutions." The Americans think and talk very much of their "institutions;" I am by nature inclined to call all this sort of thing *machinery*, and to regard rather men and their characters. But the more I saw of America, the more I found myself led to treat "institutions" with increased respect. Until I went to the United States I had never seen a people with institutions which seemed expressly and thoroughly suited to it. I had not properly appreciated the benefits proceeding from this cause.

Sir Henry Maine, in an admirable essay which, though not signed, betrays him for its author by its rare and characteristic qualities of mind and style – Sir Henry Maine in the *Quarterly Review* adopts and often reiterates a phrase of M. Scherer, to the effect that "Democracy is only a form of government." He holds up to ridicule a sentence of Mr. Bancroft's History, in which the American democracy is told that its ascent to power "proceeded as uniformly and majestically as the laws of being and was as certain as the decrees of eternity." Let us be willing

to give Sir Henry Maine his way, and to allow no magnificent claim of this kind on behalf of the American democracy. Let us treat as not more solid the assertion in the Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal, are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Let us concede that these natural rights are a figment; that chance and circumstance, as much as deliberate foresight and design, have brought the United States into their present condition, that moreover the British rule which they threw off was not the rule of oppressors and tyrants which declaimers suppose, and that the merit of the Americans was not that of oppressed men rising against tyrants, but rather of sensible young people getting rid of stupid and overweening guardians who misunderstood and mismanaged them.

All this let us concede, if we will; but in conceding it let us not lose sight of the really important point, which is this: that their institutions do in fact suit the people of the United States so well, and that from this suitableness they do derive so much actual benefit. As one watches the play of their institutions, the image suggests itself to one's mind of a man in a suit of clothes which fits him to perfection, leaving all his movements unimpeded and easy. It is loose where it ought to be loose, and it sits close where its sitting close is an advantage. The central government of the United States keeps in its own hands those functions which, if the nation is to have real unity, ought to be kept there; those functions it takes to itself and no others. The State governments and the

municipal governments provide people with the fullest liberty of managing their own affairs, and afford, besides, a constant and invaluable school of practical experience. This wonderful suit of clothes, again (to recur to our image), is found also to adapt itself naturally to the wearer's growth, and to admit of all enlargements as they successively arise. I speak of the state of things since the suppression of slavery, of the state of things which meets a spectator's eye at the present time in America. There are points in which the institutions of the United States may call forth criticism. One observer may think that it would be well if the President's term of office were longer, if his ministers sate in Congress or must possess the confidence of Congress. Another observer may say that the marriage laws for the whole nation ought to be fixed by Congress, and not to vary at the will of the legislatures of the several States. I myself was much struck with the inconvenience of not allowing a man to sit in Congress except for his own district; a man like Wendell Phillips was thus excluded, because Boston would not return him. It is as if Mr. Bright could have no other constituency open to him if Rochdale would not send him to Parliament. But all these are really questions of *machinery* (to use my own term), and ought not so to engage our attention as to prevent our seeing that the capital fact as to the institutions of the United States is this: their suitableness to the American people and their natural and easy working. If we are not to be allowed to say, with Mr. Beecher, that this people has "a genius for the organisation of States," then

at all events we must admit that in its own organisation it has enjoyed the most signal good fortune.

Yes; what is called, in the jargon of the publicists, the political problem and the social problem, the people of the United States does appear to me to have solved, or Fortune has solved it for them, with undeniable success. Against invasion and conquest from without they are impregnably strong. As to domestic concerns, the first thing to remember is, that the people over there is at bottom the same people as ourselves, a people with a strong sense for conduct. But there is said to be great corruption among their politicians and in the public service, in municipal administration, and in the administration of justice. Sir Lepel Griffin would lead us to think that the administration of justice, in particular, is so thoroughly corrupt, that a man with a lawsuit has only to provide his lawyer with the necessary funds for bribing the officials, and he can make sure of winning his suit. The Americans themselves use such strong language in describing the corruption prevalent amongst them that they cannot be surprised if strangers believe them. For myself, I had heard and read so much to the discredit of American political life, how all the best men kept aloof from it, and those who gave themselves to it were unworthy, that I ended by supposing that the thing must actually be so, and the good Americans must be looked for elsewhere than in politics. Then I had the pleasure of dining with Mr. Bancroft in Washington; and however he may, in Sir Henry Maine's opinion, overlaud the pre-established

harmony of American democracy, he had at any rate invited to meet me half a dozen politicians whom in England we should pronounce to be members of Parliament of the highest class, in bearing, manners, tone of feeling, intelligence, information. I discovered that in truth the practice, so common in America, of calling a politician "a thief," does not mean so very much more than is meant in England when we have heard Lord Beaconsfield called "a liar" and Mr. Gladstone "a madman." It means, that the speaker disagrees with the politician in question and dislikes him. Not that I assent, on the other hand, to the thick-and-thin American patriots, who will tell you that there is no more corruption in the politics and administration of the United States than in those of England. I believe there *is* more, and that the tone of both is lower there; and this from a cause on which I shall have to touch hereafter. But the corruption is exaggerated; it is not the wide and deep disease it is often represented; it is such that the good elements in the nation may, and I believe will, perfectly work it off; and even now the truth of what I have been saying as to the suitableness and successful working of American institutions is not really in the least affected by it.

Furthermore, American society is not in danger from revolution. Here, again, I do not mean that the United States are exempt from the operation of every one of the causes – such a cause as the division between rich and poor, for instance – which may lead to revolution. But I mean that comparatively with the old countries of Europe they are free from the danger

of revolution; and I believe that the good elements in them will make a way for them to escape out of what they really have of this danger also, to escape in the future as well as now – the future for which some observers announce this danger as so certain and so formidable. Lord Macaulay predicted that the United States must come in time to just the same state of things which we witness in England; that the cities would fill up and the lands become occupied, and then, he said, the division between rich and poor would establish itself on the same scale as with us, and be just as embarrassing. He forgot that the United States are without what certainly fixes and accentuates the division between rich and poor – the distinction of classes. Not only have they not the distinction between noble and bourgeois, between aristocracy and middle class; they have not even the distinction between bourgeois and peasant or artisan, between middle and lower class. They have nothing to create it and compel their recognition of it. Their domestic service is done for them by Irish, Germans, Swedes, Negroes. Outside domestic service, within the range of conditions which an American may in fact be called upon to traverse, he passes easily from one sort of occupation to another, from poverty to riches, and from riches to poverty. No one of his possible occupations appears degrading to him or makes him lose caste; and poverty itself appears to him as inconvenient and disagreeable rather than as humiliating. When the immigrant from Europe strikes root in his new home, he becomes as the American.

It may be said that the Americans, when they attained their independence, had not the elements for a division into classes, and that they deserve no praise for not having invented one. But I am not now contending that they deserve praise for their institutions, I am saying how well their institutions work. Considering, indeed, how rife are distinctions of rank and class in the world, how prone men in general are to adopt them, how much the Americans themselves, beyond doubt, are capable of feeling their attraction, it shows, I think, at least strong good sense in the Americans to have forborne from all attempt to invent them at the outset, and to have escaped or resisted any fancy for inventing them since. But evidently the United States constituted themselves, not amid the circumstances of a feudal age, but in a modern age; not under the conditions of an epoch favorable to subordination, but under those of an epoch of expansion. Their institutions did but comply with the form and pressure of the circumstances and conditions then present. A feudal age, an epoch of war, defence, and concentration, needs centres of power and property, and it reinforces property by joining distinctions of rank and class with it. Property becomes more honorable, more solid. And in feudal ages this is well, for its changing hands easily would be a source of weakness. But in ages of expansion, where men are bent that every one shall have his chance, the more readily property changes hands the better. The envy with which its holder is regarded diminishes, society is safer. I think whatever may be said of the worship of the almighty dollar in

America, it is indubitable that rich men are regarded there with less envy and hatred than rich men are in Europe. Why is this? Because their condition is less fixed, because government and legislation do not take them more seriously than other people, make grandees of them, aid them to found families and endure. With us, the chief holders of property are grandees already, and every rich man aspires to become a grandee if possible. And therefore an English country-gentleman regards himself as part of the system of nature; government and legislation have invited him so to do. If the price of wheat falls so low that his means of expenditure are greatly reduced, he tells you that if this lasts he cannot possibly go on as a country-gentleman; and every well-bred person amongst us looks sympathising and shocked. An American would say: "Why should he?" The Conservative newspapers are fond of giving us, as an argument for the game-laws, the plea that without them a country-gentleman could not be induced to live on his estate. An American would say: "What does it matter?" Perhaps to an English ear this will sound brutal; but the point is that the American does not take his rich man so seriously as we do ours, does not make him into a grandee; the thing, if proposed to him, would strike him as an absurdity. I suspect that Mr. Winans himself, the American millionaire who adds deer-forest to deer-forest, and will not suffer a cottier to keep a pet lamb, regards his own performance as a colossal stroke of American humor, illustrating the absurdities of the British system of property and privilege. Ask Mr. Winans if he

would promote the introduction of the British game-laws into the United States, and he would tell you with a merry laugh that the idea is ridiculous, and that these British follies are for home consumption.

The example of France must not mislead us. There the institutions, an objector may say, are republican, and yet the division and hatred between rich and poor is intense. True; but in France, though the institutions may be republican, the ideas and morals are not republican. In America not only are the institutions republican, but the ideas and morals are prevailingly republican also. They are those of a plain, decent middle class. The ideal of those who are the public instructors of the people is the ideal of such a class. In France the ideal of the mass of popular journalists and popular writers of fiction, who are now practically the public instructors there, is, if you could see their hearts, a Pompadour or du Barry *régime*, with themselves for the part of Faublas. With this ideal prevailing, this vision of the objects for which wealth is desirable, the possessors of wealth become hateful to the multitude which toils and endures, and society is undermined. This is one of the many inconvenience which the French have to suffer from that worship of the great goddess Lubricity to which they are at present vowed. Wealth excites the most savage enmity there, because it is conceived as a means for gratifying appetites of the most selfish and vile kind. But in America Faublas is no more the ideal than Coriolanus. Wealth is no more conceived as the minister to the pleasures

of a class of rakes, than as the minister to the magnificence of a class of nobles. It is conceived as a thing which almost any American may attain, and which almost every American will use respectably. Its possession, therefore, does not inspire hatred, and so I return to the thesis with which I started – America is not in danger of revolution. The division between rich and poor is alleged to us as a cause of revolution which presently, if not now, must operate there, as elsewhere; and yet we see that this cause has not there, in truth, the characters to which we are elsewhere accustomed.

A people homogeneous, a people which had to constitute itself in a modern age, an epoch of expansion, and which has given to itself institutions entirely fitted for such an age and epoch, and which suit it perfectly – a people not in danger of war from without, not in danger of revolution from within – such is the people of the United States. The political and social problem, then, we must surely allow that they solve successfully. There remains, I know, the human problem also; the solution of that too has to be considered; but I shall come to that hereafter. My point at present is, that politically and socially the United States are a community living in a natural condition, and conscious of living in a natural condition. And being in this healthy case, and having this healthy consciousness, the community there uses its understanding with the soundness of health; it in general sees its political and social concerns straight, and sees them clear. So that when Sir Henry Maine and M. Scherer tell us that democracy

is "merely a form of government," we may observe to them that it is in the United States a form of government in which the community feels itself in a natural condition and at ease; in which, consequently, it sees things straight and sees them clear.

More than half one's interest in watching the English people of the United States comes, of course, from the bearing of what one finds there upon things at home, amongst us English people ourselves in these islands. I have frankly recorded what struck me and came as most new to me in the condition of the English race in the United States. I had said beforehand, indeed, that I supposed the American Philistine was a livelier sort of Philistine than ours, because he had not that pressure of the Barbarians to stunt and distort him which befalls his English brother here. But I did not foresee how far his superior liveliness and naturalness of condition, in the absence of that pressure, would carry the American Philistine. I still use my old name *Philistine*, because it does in fact seem to me as yet to suit the bulk of the community over there, as it suits the strong central body of the community here. But in my mouth the name is hardly a reproach, so clearly do I see the Philistine's necessity, so willingly I own his merits, so much I find of him in myself. The American Philistine, however, is certainly far more different from his English brother than I had beforehand supposed. And on that difference we English of the old country may with great profit turn our regards for awhile, and I am now going to speak of it.

Surely if there is one thing more than another which all the

world is saying of our community at present, and of which the truth cannot well be disputed, it is this: that we act like people who do not think straight and see clear. I know that the Liberal newspapers used to be fond of saying that what characterised our middle class was its "clear, manly intelligence, penetrating through sophisms, ignoring commonplaces, and giving to conventional illusions their true value." Many years ago I took alarm at seeing the *Daily News*, and the *Morning Star*, like Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah, thus making horns of iron for the middle class and bidding it "Go up and prosper!" and my first efforts as a writer on public matters were prompted by a desire to utter, like Micaiah the son of Imlah, my protest against these misleading assurances of the false prophets. And though often and often smitten on the cheek, just as Micaiah was, still I persevered; and at the Royal Institution I said how we seemed to flounder and to beat the air, and at Liverpool I singled out as our chief want the want of lucidity. But now everybody is really saying of us the same thing: that we fumble because we cannot make up our mind, and that we cannot make up our mind because we do not know what to be after. If our foreign policy is not that of "the British Philistine, with his likes and dislikes, his effusion and confusion, his hot and cold fits, his want of dignity and of the steadfastness which comes from dignity, his want of ideas and of the steadfastness which comes from ideas," then all the world at the present time is, it must be owned, very much mistaken.

Let us not, therefore, speak of foreign affairs; it is needless,

because the thing I wish to show is so manifest there to everybody. But we will consider matters at home. Let us take the present state of the House of Commons. Can anything be more confused, more unnatural? That assembly has got into a condition utterly embarrassed, and seems impotent to bring itself right. The members of the House themselves may find entertainment in the personal incidents which such a state of confusion is sure to bring forth abundantly, and excitement in the opportunities thus often afforded for the display of Mr. Gladstone's wonderful powers. But to any judicious Englishman outside the House the spectacle is simply an afflicting and humiliating one; the sense aroused by it is not a sense of delight at Mr. Gladstone's tireless powers, it is rather a sense of disgust at their having to be so exercised. Every day the House of Commons does not sit judicious people feel relief, every day that it sits they are oppressed with apprehension. Instead of being an edifying influence, as such an assembly ought to be, the House of Commons is at present an influence which does harm; it sets an example which rebukes and corrects none of the nation's faults, but rather encourages them. The best thing to be done at present, perhaps, is to avert one's eyes from the House of Commons as much as possible; if one keeps on constantly watching it welter in its baneful confusion, one is likely to fall into the fulminating style of the wrathful Hebrew prophets, and to call it "an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse."

Well, then, our greatest institution, the House of Commons,

we cannot say is at present working, like the American institutions, easily and successfully. Suppose we now pass to Ireland. I will not ask if our institutions work easily and successfully in Ireland; to ask such a question would be too bitter, too cruel a mockery. Those hateful cases which have been tried in the Dublin Courts this last year suggest the dark and ill-omened word which applies to the whole state of Ireland —*anti-natural*. *Anti-natural*, *anti-nature*– that is the word which rises irresistibly in my mind as I survey Ireland. Everything is unnatural there – the proceedings of the English who rule, the proceedings of the Irish who resist. But it is with the working of our English institutions there that I am now concerned. It is unnatural that Ireland should be governed by Lord Spencer and Mr. Campbell Bannerman – as unnatural as for Scotland to be governed by Lord Cranbrook and Mr. Healy. It is unnatural that Ireland should be governed under a Crimes Act. But there is necessity, replies the Government. Well, then, if there is such evil necessity, it is unnatural that the Irish newspapers should be free to write as they write and the Irish members to speak as they speak – free to inflame and further exasperate a seditious people's mind, and to promote the continuance of the evil necessity. A necessity for the Crimes Act is a necessity for absolute government. By our patchwork proceedings we set up, indeed, a make-believe of Ireland's being constitutionally governed. But it is not constitutionally governed; nobody supposes it to be constitutionally governed, except, perhaps, that born swallower

of all clap-trap, the British Philistine. The Irish themselves, the all-important personages in this case, are not taken in; our make-believe does not produce in them the very least gratitude, the very least softening. At the same time it adds an hundred fold to the difficulties of an absolute government.

The working of our institutions being thus awry, is the working of our thoughts upon them more smooth and natural? I imagine to myself an American, his own institutions and his habits of thought being such as we have seen, listening to us as we talk politics and discuss the strained state of things over here. "Certainly these men have considerable difficulties," he would say; "but they never look at them straight, they do not think straight." Who does not admire the fine qualities of Lord Spencer? – and I, for my part, am quite ready to admit that he may require for a given period not only the present Crimes Act, but even yet more stringent powers of repression. *For a given period*, yes! – but afterwards? Has Lord Spencer any clear vision of the great, the profound changes still to be wrought before a stable and prosperous society can arise in Ireland? Has he even any ideal for the future there, beyond that of a time when he can go to visit Lord Kenmare, or any other great landlord who is his friend, and find all the tenants punctually paying their rents, prosperous and deferential, and society in Ireland settling quietly down again upon the old basis? And he might as well hope to see Strongbow come to life again! Which of us does not esteem and like Mr. Trevelyan, and rejoice in the high promise of his

career? And how all his friends applauded when he turned upon the exasperating and insulting Irish members, and told them that he was "an English gentleman"! Yet, if one thinks of it, Mr. Trevelyan was thus telling the Irish members simply that he was just that which Ireland does not want, and which can do her no good. England, to be sure, has given Ireland plenty of her worst, but she has also given her not scantily of her best. Ireland has had no insufficient supply of the English gentleman, with his honesty, personal courage, high bearing, good intentions, and limited vision; what she wants is statesmen with just the qualities which the typical English gentleman has not – flexibility, openness of mind, a free and large view of things.

Everywhere we shall find in our thinking a sort of warp inclining it aside of the real mark, and thus depriving it of value. The common run of peers who write to the *Times* about reform of the House of Lords one would not much expect, perhaps, to "understand the signs of this time." But even the Duke of Argyll, delivering his mind about the land-question in Scotland, is like one seeing, thinking, and speaking in some other planet than ours. A man of even Mr. John Morley's gifts is provoked with the House of Lords, and straightway he declares himself against the existence of a Second Chamber at all; although – if there be such a thing as demonstration in politics – the working of the American Senate demonstrates a well-composed Second Chamber to be the very need and safeguard of a modern democracy. What a singular twist, again, in a man of Mr.

Frederic Harrison's intellectual power, not, perhaps, to have in the exuberance of youthful energy weighted himself for the race of life by taking up a grotesque old French pedant upon his shoulders, but to have insisted, in middle age, in taking up the Protestant Dissenters too; and now, when he is becoming elderly, it seems as if nothing would serve him but he must add the Peace Society to his load! How perverse, yet again, in Mr. Herbert Spencer, at the very moment when past neglects and present needs are driving men to co-operation, to making the community act for the public good in its collective and corporate character of *the State*, how perverse to seize this occasion for promulgating the extremest doctrine of individualism; and not only to drag this dead horse along the public road himself, but to induce Mr. Auberon Herbert to devote his days to flogging it!

We think thus unaccountably because we are living in an unnatural and strained state. We are like people whose vision is deranged by their looking through a turbid and distorting atmosphere, or whose movements are warped by the cramping of some unnatural constraint. Let us just ask ourselves, looking at the thing as people simply desirous of finding the truth, how men who saw and thought straight would proceed, how an American, for instance – whose seeing and thinking has, I have said, if not in all matters, yet commonly in political and social concerns, this quality of straightness – how an American would proceed in the three confusions which I have given as instances of the many confusions now embarrassing us: the confusion of our foreign

affairs, the confusion of the House of Commons, the confusion of Ireland. And then, when we have discovered the kind of proceeding natural in these cases, let us ask ourselves, with the same sincerity, what is the cause of that warp of mind hindering most of us from seeing straight in them, and also where is our remedy.

The Angra Pequeña business has lately called forth from all sides many and harsh animadversions upon Lord Granville, who is charged with the direction of our foreign affairs. I shall not swell the chorus of complainers. Nothing has happened but what was to be expected. Long ago I remarked that it is not Lord Granville himself who determines our foreign policy and shapes the declarations of Government concerning it, but a power behind Lord Granville. He and his colleagues would call it the power of public opinion. It is really the opinion of that great ruling class amongst us on which Liberal Governments have hitherto had to depend for support – the Philistines or middle class. It is not, I repeat, with Lord Granville in his natural state and force that a foreign Government has to deal; it is with Lord Granville waiting in devout expectation to see how the cat will jump – and that cat the British Philistine! When Prince Bismarck deals with Lord Granville, he finds that he is not dealing mind to mind with an intelligent equal, but that he is dealing with a tumult of likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, stock-jobbing intrigues, missionary interests, quidnuncs, newspapers – dealing, in short, with *ignorance* behind his intelligent equal. Yet ignorant as our

Philistine middle class may be, its volitions on foreign affairs would have more intelligibility and consistency if uttered through a spokesman of their own class. Coming through a nobleman like Lord Granville, who has neither the thoughts, habits, nor ideals of the middle class, and yet wishes to act as proctor for it, they have every disadvantage. He cannot even do justice to the Philistine mind, such as it is, for which he is spokesman; he apprehends it uncertainly and expounds it ineffectively. And so with the house and lineage of Murdstone thundering at him (and these, again, through Lord Derby as their interpreter) from the Cape, and the inexorable Prince Bismarck thundering at him from Berlin, the thing naturally ends by Lord Granville at last wringing his adroit hands and ejaculating disconsolately: "It is a misunderstanding altogether!" Even yet more to be pitied, perhaps, was the hard case of Lord Kimberley after the Majuba Hill disaster. Who can ever forget him, poor man, studying the faces of the representatives of the dissenting interest and exclaiming: "A sudden thought strikes me! May we not be incurring the sin of blood-guiltiness?" To this has come the tradition of Lord Somers, the Whig oligarchy of 1688, and all Lord Macaulay's Pantheon.

I said that a source of strength to America, in political and social concerns, was the homogeneous character of American society. An American statesman speaks with more effect the mind of his fellow-citizens from his being in sympathy with it, understanding and sharing it. Certainly one must admit that if,

in our country of classes, the Philistine middle class is really the inspirer of our foreign policy, that policy would at least be expounded more forcibly if it had a Philistine for its spokesman. Yet I think the true moral to be drawn is rather, perhaps, this: that our foreign policy would be improved if our whole society were homogeneous.

As to the confusion in the House of Commons, what, apart from defective rules of procedure, are its causes? First and foremost, no doubt, the temper and action of the Irish members. But putting this cause of confusion out of view for a moment, every one can see that the House of Commons is far too large, and that it undertakes a quantity of business which belongs more properly to local assemblies. The confusion from these causes is one which is constantly increasing, because, as the country becomes fuller and more awakened, business multiplies, and more and more members of the House are inclined to take part in it. Is not the cure for this found in a course like that followed in America, in having a much less numerous House of Commons, and in making over a large part of its business to local assemblies, elected, as the House of Commons itself will henceforth be elected, by household suffrage? I have often said that we seem to me to need at present, in England, three things in especial: more equality, education for the middle classes, and a thorough municipal system. A system of local assemblies is but the natural complement of a thorough municipal system. Wholes neither too large nor too small, not necessarily of equal population by

any means, but with characters rendering them in themselves fairly homogeneous and coherent, are the fit units for choosing these local assemblies. Such units occur immediately to one's mind in the provinces of Ireland, the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland, Wales north and south, groups of English counties such as present themselves in the circuits of the judges or under the names of East Anglia or the Midlands. No one will suppose me guilty of the pedantry of here laying out definitive districts; I do but indicate such units as may enable the reader to conceive the kind of basis required for the local assemblies of which I am speaking. The business of these districts would be more advantageously done in assemblies of the kind; they would form a useful school for the increasing number of aspirants to public life, and the House of Commons would be relieved.

The strain in Ireland would be relieved too, and by natural and safe means. Irishmen are to be found, who, in desperation at the present state of their country, cry out for making Ireland independent and separate, with a national Parliament in Dublin, with her own foreign office and diplomacy, her own army and navy, her own tariff, coinage and currency. This is manifestly impracticable. But here again let us look at what is done by people who in politics think straight and see clear; let us observe what is done in the United States. The Government at Washington reserves matters of imperial concern, matters such as those just enumerated, which cannot be relinquished without relinquishing the unity of the empire. Neither does it

allow one great South to be constituted, or one great West, with a Southern Parliament, or a Western. Provinces that are too large are broken up, as Virginia has been broken up. But the several States are nevertheless real and important wholes, each with its own legislature; and to each the control, within its own borders, of all except imperial concerns is freely committed. The United States Government intervenes only to keep order in the last resort. Let us suppose a similar plan applied in Ireland. There are four provinces there, forming four natural wholes – or perhaps (if it should seem expedient to put Munster and Connaught together) three. The Parliament of the empire would still be in London, and Ireland would send members to it. But at the same time each Irish province would have its own legislature, and the control of its own real affairs. The British landlord would no longer determine the dealings with land in an Irish province, nor the British Protestant the dealings with church and education. Apart from imperial concerns, or from disorder such as to render military intervention necessary, the government in London would leave Ireland to manage itself. Lord Spencer and Mr. Campbell Bannerman would come back to England. Dublin Castle would be the State House of Leinster. Land-questions, game-laws, police, church, education, would be regulated by the people and legislature of Leinster for Leinster, of Ulster for Ulster, of Munster and Connaught for Munster and Connaught. The same with the like matters in England and Scotland. The local legislatures would regulate them.

But there is more. Everybody who watches the working of our institutions perceives what strain and friction is caused in it at present, by our having a Second Chamber composed almost entirely of great landowners, and representing the feelings and interests of the class of landowners almost exclusively. No one, certainly, under the condition of a modern age and our actual life, would ever think of devising such a Chamber. But we will allow ourselves to do more than merely state this truism, we will allow ourselves to ask what sort of Second Chamber people who thought straight and saw clear would, under the conditions of a modern age and of our actual life, naturally make. And we find, from the experience of the United States, that such provincial legislatures as we have just now seen to be the natural remedy for the confusion in the House of Commons, the natural remedy for the confusion in Ireland, have the further great merit besides of giving us the best basis possible for a modern Second Chamber. The United States Senate is perhaps, of all the institutions of that country, the most happily devised, the most successful in its working. The legislature of each State of the Union elects two senators to the Second Chamber of the national Congress at Washington. The senators are the Lords – if we like to keep, as it is surely best to keep, for designating the members of the Second Chamber, the title to which we have been for so many ages habituated. Each of the provincial legislatures of Great Britain and Ireland would elect members to the House of Lords. The colonial legislatures also would elect members

to it; and thus we should be complying in the most simple and yet the most signal way possible with the present desire of both this country and the colonies for a closer union together, for some representation of the colonies in the Imperial Parliament. Probably it would be found expedient to transfer to the Second Chamber the representatives of the Universities. But no scheme for a Second Chamber will at the present day be found solid unless it stands on a genuine basis of election and representation. All schemes for forming a Second Chamber through nomination, whether by the Crown or by any other voice, of picked noblemen, great officials, leading merchants and bankers, eminent men of letters and science, are fantastic. Probably they would not give us by any means a good Second Chamber. But certainly they would not satisfy the country or possess its confidence, and therefore they would be found futile and unworkable.

So we discover what would naturally appear the desirable way out of some of our worst confusions to anybody who saw clear and thought straight. But there is little likelihood, probably, of any such way being soon perceived and followed by our community here. And why is this? Because, as a community, we have so little lucidity, we so little see clear and think straight. And why, again, is this? Because our community is so little homogeneous. The lower class has yet to show what it will do in politics. Rising politicians are already beginning to flatter it with servile assiduity, but their praise is as yet premature, the lower class is too little known. The upper class and the middle class we

know. They have each their own supposed interests, and these are very different from the true interests of the community. Our very classes make us dim-seeing. In a modern time, we are living with a system of classes so intense, a society of such unnatural complication, that the whole action of our minds is hampered and falsened by it. I return to my old thesis: inequality is our bane. The great impediments in our way of progress are aristocracy and Protestant dissent. People think this is an epigram; alas, it is much rather a truism!

An aristocratical society like ours is often said to be the society from which artists and men of letters have most to gain. But an institution is to be judged, not by what one can oneself gain from it, but by the ideal which it sets up. And aristocracy – if I may once more repeat words which, however often repeated, have still a value from their truth – aristocracy now sets up in our country a false ideal, which materialises our upper class, vulgarises our middle class, brutalises our lower class. It misleads the young, makes the worldly more worldly, the limited more limited, the stationary more stationary. Even to the imaginative, whom Lord John Manners thinks its sure friend, it is more a hindrance than a help. Johnson says well: "Whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future, predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings." But what is a Duke of Norfolk or an Earl Warwick, dressed in broadcloth and tweed, and going about his business or pleasure in hansom cabs and railways like the rest of us? Imagination herself would entreat

him to take himself out of the way, and to leave us to the Norfolks and Warwicks of history.

I say this without a particle of hatred, and with esteem, admiration, and affection for many individuals in the aristocratical class. But the action of time and circumstance is fatal. If one asks oneself what is really to be desired, what is expedient, one would go far beyond the substitution of an elected Second Chamber for the present House of Lords. All confiscation is to be reprobated, all deprivation (except in bad cases of abuse) of what is actually possessed. But one would wish, if one set about wishing, for the extinction of title after the death of the holder, and for the dispersion of property by a stringent law of bequest. Our society should be homogeneous, and only in this way can it become so.

But aristocracy is in little danger. "I suppose, sir," a dissenting minister said to me the other day, "you found, when you were in America, that they envied us there our great aristocracy." It was his sincere belief that they did, and such probably is the sincere belief of our middle class in general; or at any rate, that if the Americans do not envy us this possession, they ought to. And my friend, one of the great Liberal party which has now, I suppose, pretty nearly run down its deceased wife's sister, poor thing, has his hand and heart full, so far as politics are concerned, of the question of church disestablishment. He is eager to set to work at a change which, even if it were desirable (and I think it is not,) is yet off the line of those reforms which are really pressing.

Mr. Lyulph Stanley, Professor Stuart, and Lord Richard Grosvenor are waiting ready to help him, and perhaps Mr. Chamberlain himself will lead the attack. I admire Mr. Chamberlain as a politician because he has the courage – and it is a wise courage – to state large the reforms we need, instead of minimising them. But like Saul before his conversion, he breathes out threatenings and slaughter against the Church, and is likely, perhaps, to lead an assault upon her. He is a formidable assailant, yet I suspect he might break his finger-nails on her walls. If the Church has the majority for her, she will of course stand. But in any case this institution, with all its faults, has that merit which makes the great strength of institutions – it offers an ideal which is noble and attaching. Equality is its profession, if not always its practice. It inspires wide and deep affection, and possesses, therefore, immense strength. Probably the Establishment will not stand in Wales, probably it will not stand in Scotland. In Wales it ought not, I think, to stand. In Scotland I should regret its fall; but Presbyterian churches are born to separatism, as the sparks fly upward. At any rate, it is through the vote of local legislatures that disestablishment is likely to come, as a measure required in certain provinces, and not as a general measure for the whole country. In other words, the endeavor for disestablishment ought to be postponed to the endeavor for far more important reforms, not to precede it. Yet I doubt whether Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Lyulph Stanley will listen to me when I plead thus with them; there is so little lucidity

in England, and they will say I am priest-ridden.

One man there is, whom above all others I would fain have seen in Parliament during the last ten years, and beheld established in influence there at this juncture – Mr. Goldwin Smith. I do not say that he was not too embittered against the Church; in my opinion he was. But with singular lucidity and penetration he saw what great reforms were needed in other directions, and the order of relative importance in which reforms stood. Such were his character, style, and faculties, that alone perhaps among men of his insight he was capable of getting his ideas weighed and entertained by men in power; while amid all favor and under all temptations he was certain to have still remained true to his insight, "unshaken, unseduced, unterrified." I think of him as a real power for good in Parliament at this time, had he by now become, as he might have become, one of the leaders there. His absence from the scene, his retirement in Canada, is a loss to his friends, but a still greater loss to his country.

Hardly inferior in influence to Parliament itself is journalism. I do not conceive of Mr. John Morley as made for filling that position in Parliament which Mr. Goldwin Smith would, I think, have filled. If he controls, as Protesilaos in the poem advises, hysterical passion (the besetting danger of men of letters on the platform and in Parliament) and remembers to approve "the depth and not the tumult of the soul," he will be powerful in Parliament; he will rise, he will come into office; but he will not

do for us in Parliament, I think, what Mr. Goldwin Smith would have done. He is too much of a partisan. In journalism, on the other hand, he was as unique a figure as Mr. Goldwin Smith would, I imagine, have been in Parliament. As a journalist, Mr. John Morley showed a mind which seized and understood the signs of the times; he had all the ideas of a man of the best insight, and alone, perhaps, among men of his insight, he had the skill for making these ideas pass into journalism. But Mr. John Morley has now left journalism. There is plenty of talent in Parliament, plenty of talent in journalism, but no one in either to expound "the signs of this time" as these two men might have expounded them. The signs of the time, political and social, are left, I regret to say, to bring themselves as they best can to the notice of the public. Yet how ineffective an organ is literature for conveying them compared with Parliament and journalism!

Conveyed somehow, however, they certainly should be, and in this disquisition I have tried to deal with them. But the political and social problem, as the thinkers call it, must not so occupy us as to make us forget the human problem. The problems are connected together, but they are not identical. Our political and social confusions I admit; what Parliament is at this moment, I see and deplore. Yet nowhere but in England even now, not in France, not in Germany, not in America, could there be found public men of that quality – so capable of fair dealing, of trusting one another, keeping their word to one another – as to make possible such a settlement of the Franchise and Seat Bills as

that which we have lately seen. Plato says with most profound truth: "The man who would think to good purpose must be able to take many things into his view together." How homogeneous American society is, I have done my best to declare; how smoothly and naturally the institutions of the United States work, how clearly, in some most important respects, the Americans see, how straight they think. Yet Sir Lepel Griffin says that there is no country calling itself civilised where one would not rather live than in America, except Russia. In politics I do not much trust Sir Lepel Griffin. I hope that he administers in India some district where a profound insight into the being and working of institutions is not requisite. But, I suppose, of the tastes of himself and of that large class of Englishmen whom Mr. Charles Sumner has taught us to call the class of gentlemen, he is no untrustworthy reporter. And an Englishman of this class would rather live in France, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, than in the United States, in spite of our community of race and speech with them! This means that, in the opinion of men of that class, the human problem at least is not well solved in the United States, whatever the political and social problem may be. And to the human problem in the United States we ought certainly to turn our attention, especially when we find taken such an objection as this; and some day, though not now, we will do so, and try to see what the objection comes to. I have given hostages to the United States, I am bound to them by the memory of great, untiring, and most attaching kindness. I should not like to have

to own them to be of all countries calling themselves civilised, except Russia, the country where one would least like to live. —*Nineteenth Century.*

REVIEW OF THE YEAR
BY FREDERIC HARRISON

The opening of a new year again assembles us together to look back on the work of the year that is gone, to look faithfully into our present state, and to take forecast of all that yet awaits us in the visible life on earth, under the inspiring sense of the Great Power which makes us what we are, and who will be as great when we are not.

In the light of this duty to Humanity as a whole, how feeble is our work, how poor the result! And yet, looking back on the year that is just departed, we need not be down-hearted. Surely and firmly we advance. Not as the spiritualist movements advance, by leaps and bounds, as the tares spring up, as the stubble blazes forth, but by conviction, with system, with slow consolidation of belief resting on proof and tested by experience. If at the beginning of last year we could point to the formation of a new centre in North London, this year we can point to its maintenance with steady vigor, and to the opening of a more important new centre in the city of Manchester. Year by year sees the addition to our cause of a group in the great towns of the kingdom. Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, already have their weekly meetings and their organised societies.

I make no great store of all this. The religious confidence in

Humanity will not come about, I think, like the belief in the Gospel, or in the Church, or in any of the countless Protestant persuasions, by the formation of a small sect of believers, gradually inducing men to join some exclusive congregation. The trust in Humanity is an ineradicable part of modern civilisation: nay, it is the very motive power and saving quality of modern civilisation, and that even where it is encumbered by a conscious belief in God and Christ, in Gospel and salvation, or where it is disguised by an atheistical rejection of all religious reverence whatever. Positivists are not a sect. Positivism is not merely a new mode of worship. It is of small moment to us how numerous are the congregations who meet to-day to acknowledge Humanity in words. The best men and women of all creeds and all races acknowledge Humanity in their lives. For the full realisation of our hopes we must look to the improvement of civilisation; not to the extension of a sect. Let us shun all sects and everything belonging to them.

I shall say but little, therefore, of the growth of Positivist congregations. Where they are perfectly spontaneous and natural; where they are doing a real work in education; where they give solid comfort and support to the lives of those who form them, they are useful and living things, giving hope and sign of something better. But I see evil in them if they are artificial and premature; if they spring out of the incurable tendency of our age toward sects; if they are mere imitations of Christian congregations; and, above all, if their members look upon them

as adequate types of a regenerated society. The religion of Humanity, by its nature, is incapable of being narrowed down to the limits of a few hundreds of scattered believers and to casual gatherings of men and women divided in life and activity. And that for the same reason that civilisation or patriotism could not possibly be the privilege of a few scattered individuals. Where two or three are gathered together, there the Gospel may be duly presented, and God and Christ adequately worshipped. It is not so with Humanity. The service of Humanity needs Humanity. The only Church of Humanity is a healthy and cultured human society. It is the very business of Humanity to free us from all individualist religion, from all self-contained worship of the isolated believer. And though the idea of Humanity is able to strengthen the individual soul as profoundly as the idea of Christ, yet the idea of Humanity, the service of Humanity, the honoring of Humanity, are only fully realised in the living organism of a humane society of men.

For this reason I look on a Positivist community rather as a germ of what is to come, one which may easily degenerate into a hindrance to true life in Humanity. The utmost that we can do now as an isolated knot of scattered believers is so immeasurably short of what may be done by a united nation, familiar from generation to generation with the sense of duty to Humanity, saturated from infancy with the consciousness of Humanity, and with all the resources of an organised public opinion, and a disciplined body of teachers, poets, and

artists, to secure its convictions and express its emotions, that I am always dreading lest our puny attempts in the movement be stereotyped as adequate. Our English, Protestant habits are continually prompting us to look for salvation to sects, societies, self-sufficing congregations of zealous, but possibly self-righteous reformers. The egotistic spirit of the Gospel is constantly inclining us to look for a healthier religious ideal to some new religious exercises, to be performed in secret by the individual believer, in the silence of his chamber or in some little congregation of fellow-believers. Positivism comes, not to add another to these congregations, but to free us from the temper of mind which creates them. It comes to show us that religion is not to be found within any four walls, or in the secret yearnings of any heart, but in the right systematic development of an entire human society. Until there is a profound diffusion of the spirit of Humanity throughout the mass of some entire human society, some definite section of modern civilisation, there can be no religion of Humanity in any adequate degree; there can be no full worship of Humanity; there can be no true Positivist life till there be an organic Positivist community to live such a life. Let us beware how we imagine, that where two or three are gathered together there is a Positivist Church. There may be a synagogue of Positivist pharisees, it may be; but the sense of our vast human fellowship – which lies at the root of Positivist morality; the reality of Positivist religion, which means a high and humane life in the world; the glory of Positivist worship, which means the

noblest expression of human feeling in art – all these things are *not* possible in any exclusive and meagre synagogue whatever, and are very much retarded by the premature formation of synagogues.

I look, as I say always, to the leavening of opinion generally; to the attitude of mind with which the world around us confronts Positivism and understands, or feels interest in Positivism. And here, and not in the formation of new congregations, I find the grounds for unbounded hope. Within a very few years, and notably within the year just ended, there has been a striking change of tone in the way in which the thoughtful public looks at Positivism. It has entirely passed out of the stage of silence and contempt. It occupies a place in the public interest, not equal yet to its importance in the future; but far in excess, I fear, of anything which its living exponents can justify in the present. The thoughtful public and the religious spirits acknowledge in it a genuine religious force. Candid Christians see that it has much which calls out their sympathy. But apart from that, the period of misunderstanding and of ridicule is passed for Positivism for ever. Serious people are beginning now to say that there is nothing in Positivism so extravagant, nothing so mischievous as they used to think. Many of them are beginning to see that it bears witness to valuable truths which have been hitherto neglected. They are coming to feel that in certain central problems of the modern world, such as the possibility of preserving the religious sentiment, in defending the bases

of spiritual and temporal authority, in explaining the science of history, in the institution of property, in the future relations of men and women, employers and employed, government and people, teachers and learners, in all of these, Positivism holds up a ray of steady light in the chaos of opinion. They are asking themselves, the truly conservative and truly religious natures, if, after all, society may not be destined to be regenerated in some such ideal lines as Positivism shadows forth: —

> "Via prima salutis,
> Quod minimè reris, Graia pandetur ab urbe."

Here, then, is the great gain of the past year. It has for some time been felt that we have hold of a profound religious truth; that Positivism, as Mr. Mill says, does realise the essential conditions of religion. But we have now made it clear that we have hold of a profound philosophical truth as well; and a living and prolific social truth. The cool, instructed, practical intellect is now prepared to admit that it is quite a reasonable hope to look for the cultivation of a purely human duty towards our fellow beings and our race collectively as a solid basis of moral and practical life – nay, further, that so far as it goes, and without excluding other bases of life, this is a sound, and indeed, a very common, spring to right action. It is an immense step gained that the cool, instructed, practical intellect of our day goes with us up to this point. It is a minor matter, that in conceding so much,

this same intelligent man-of-the-world is ready to say, "You must throw over, however, all the mummery and priestcraft with which Positivism began its career." Positivism has no mummery or priestcraft to throw over. The whole idea of such things arose out of labored epigrams manufactured about the utopias of Comte when exaggerated into a formalism by some of his more excitable followers.

In the history of any great truth we generally find three stages of public opinion regarding it. The first, of unthinking hostility; the second, of minimising its novelty; the third, of adopting it as an obvious truism. Men say first, "Nothing more grotesque and mischievous was ever propounded!" Then they say, "Now that it has entirely changed its front, there is nothing to be afraid of, and not much that is new!" And in the third stage they say, "We have held this all our lives, and it is a mere commonplace of modern thought." Positivism has now passed out of the first stage. Men have ceased to think of it as grotesque or mischievous. They have now passed into the second stage, and say, "Now that it is showing itself as mere common-sense, it is little more than a re-statement of what reasonable men have long thought, and what good men have long aimed at." Quite so, only there has been no change of front, no abandoning of anything, and no modification of any essential principle. We have only made it clear that the original prejudices we had to meet were founded in haste, misconception, and mere caricature. We have shown that Positivism is just as truly scientific as it is religious; that it has

as much aversion to priestcraft, ritualism, and ceremony, as any Protestant sectary: and as deep an aversion to sects as the Pope of Rome or the President of the Royal Society. Positivism itself is as loyal to every genuine result of modern science as the Royal Society itself. The idea that any reasonable Positivist undervalues the real triumphs of science, or could dream of minimising any solid conclusion of science, or of limiting the progress of science, or would pit any unproven assertion of any man, be he Comte, or an entire Ecumenical Council of Comtists, so to speak, against any single proven conclusion of human research, this, I say, is too laughable to be seriously imputed to any Positivist.

If Auguste Comte had ever used language which could fairly be so understood, I will not stop to inquire. I do not believe he has. But if I were shown fifty such passages, they would not weigh with me a grain against the entire basis and genius of Positivism itself; which is that human life shall henceforward be based on a footing of solid demonstration alone. If enthusiastic Positivists, more Comtist than Comte, ever gave countenance to such an extravagance, I can only say that they no more represent Positivism than General Booth's brass band represents Christianity. If words of Auguste Comte have been understood to mean that the religion of Humanity can be summed up in the repetition of phrases, or can be summed up in anything less than a moral and scientific education of man's complex nature, I can only treat it as a caricature unworthy of notice. This hall is the centre in this country where the Positivist scheme

is presented in its entirety, under the immediate direction of Comte's successor. And speaking in his name and in the name of our English committee, I claim it as an essential purpose of our existence as an organised body, to promote a sound scientific education, so as to abolish the barrier which now separates school and Church; to cultivate individual training in all true knowledge, and the assertion of individual energy of character and brain; to promote independence quite as much as association; personal responsibility, quite as much as social discipline; and free public opinion, in all things spiritual and material alike, quite as much as organised guidance by trained leaders. Whatever makes light of these, whatever is indifferent to scientific education, whatever tends to blind and slavish surrender of the judgment and the will, whatever clings to mysticism, formalism, and priestcraft, such belongs not to Positivism, to Auguste Comte, or to humanity rightly regarded and honored. The first condition of the religion of Humanity is human nature and common sense.

Whilst Positivism has been making good its ground within the area of scientific philosophy, scientific metaphysics has been exhibiting the signal weakness of its position on the side of religion. To those who have once entered into the scientific world of belief in positive knowledge there is no choice between a belief in nothing at all and a belief in the future of human civilisation, between Agnosticism and Humanity. Agnosticism is therefore for the present the rival and antagonist of Positivism outside the orthodox fold. I say for the present, because by the

nature of the case Agnosticism is a mere raft or jurymast for shipwrecked believers, a halting-place, and temporary passage from one belief to another belief. The idea that the deepest issues of life and of thought can be permanently referred to any negation; that cultivated beings can feel proud of summing up their religious belief in the formula, that they "know nothing" this is too absurd to endure. Agnosticism is a milder form of the Voltairean hatred of religion that was current in the last century; but it is quite as passing a phase. For the moment, it is the fashion of the emancipated Christian to save all trouble by professing himself an Agnostic. But he is more or less ashamed of it. He knows it is a subterfuge. It is no real answer. It is only an excuse for refusing to answer a troublesome question. The Agnostic knows that he will have to give a better answer some day; he finds earnest men clamoring for an answer. He is getting uneasy that they will not take "Don't know" for an answer. He is himself too full still of theology and metaphysics to follow our practice, which is to leave the theological conundrum alone, and to proclaim *regard for the human race as an adequate solution of the human problem*. And in the meantime he staves off questions by making his own ignorance – his own ignorance! – the foundation of a creed.

We have just seen the failure of one, of these attempts. The void caused by the silent crumbling of all the spiritual creeds has to be filled in some way. The indomitable passion of mankind towards an object to revere and work for, has to be

met. And the latest device has been, as we have seen, to erect the "Unknowable" itself into the sole reality, and to assure us that an indescribable heap of abstract terms is the true foundation of life. So that, after all its protestations against any superstitious belief, Agnosticism floats back into a cloud of contradictions and negations as unthinkable as those of the Athanasian creed, and which are merely our old theological attributes again, dressed up in the language of Esoteric Buddhism.

II

I turn now, as is our custom, to review the work of the year under its three-fold heads of Cult, Education, Politics. You will see that I avoid the word Worship, because worship is so often misunderstood; and because it wholly fails to convey the meaning of the Positivist *cultus*, or stimulus of the noblest emotions of man. Worship is in no way a translation of Comte's word *culte*. In French we can talk of the *culte des mères*, or the *culte des morts*, or the *culte des enfants*, or the *culte de l'Art*. We cannot in English talk of *worshipping* our mothers, or *worshipping* our dead friends, or *worshipping* children, or *worshipping* art; or, if we use the words, we do not mean the same thing. Comte has suffered deeply by being crudely translated into English phrases, by people who did not see that the same phrase in English means something different. Now his *culte de l'Humanité* does not mean what Englishmen understand by the worship of Humanity: *i. e.*,

they are apt to fancy, kneeling down and praying to Humanity, or singing a hymn to Humanity. By *culte de l'Humanité* is meant, deepening our sense of gratitude and regard for the human race and its living or dead organs. And everything which does this is *cult*, though it may not be what we call in English worship. So *service* is a word I avoid; because the service of Humanity consists in the thousand ways in which we fulfil our social duties, and not in uttering exclamations which may or may not lead to anything in conduct, and which we have no reason to suppose are heard by any one, or affect any one outside the room where they are uttered. The commemoration of a great man such as William the Silent or Corneille is *cult*, though we do not worship him; the solemn delight in a piece of music in such a spirit is *cult*, though it is not *worship*, or *service*, in the modern English sense of these words. The ceremony of interring a dead friend, or naming a child is *cult*, though we do not worship our dead friend, nor do we worship the baby when brought for presentation. Cult, as we understand it, is a process that concerns the person or persons who worship, not the being worshipped. Whatever stimulates the sense of social duty and kindles the noblest emotions, whether by a mere historical lecture, or a grand piece of music, or by a solemn act, or by some expression of emotion – this is cult.

In the same way, I avoid the word *religion*, to signify any special department or any one side of our Positivist life. Religion is not a part of life, but a harmonious and true living of our lives; not the mere expression of feeling, but the right convergence of

feeling and thought into pure action. Some of our people seem to use the word "religion," in the theological sense, to mean the formal expression of a sentiment of devotion. This is a mere distortion of Comte's language, and essentially unworthy of the broad spirit of Positivism. The full meaning of *culte*, as Comte employed it, is every act by which man expresses and every means by which he kindles the sense of reverence, duty, love, or resignation. In that sense, and in that sense only, do I now employ *cult*, which is obviously a somewhat inadequate English phrase.

The past year opened with the commemoration of this day, in which, though the words of praise and devotion that we uttered were few, we sought to brace our spirits and clear our brains by pausing for an hour in the midst of the whirl of life, to look forth on the vast range of our social duties and the littleness of our individual performance. On the 5th of September, the twenty-seventh anniversary of the death of Auguste Comte, we met, as usual, to commemorate his life and work. The discourse then given will be shortly published. At the friendly repast and in the social meeting of that day we had the welcome presence of several members of our Positivist body in Paris and also from the northern cities of England. The hundredth year since the death of Diderot, the two hundredth since that of Corneille, the three hundredth since that of the great founder of the Netherlands, William of Orange, called the Silent, were duly commemorated by a discourse on their life and work. Such vague and unreal ideas are suggested by the phrase, the *worship of humanity*, that it is

useful to point out that this is what we in this hall mean by such a notion: the strengthening our sense of respect for the worthy men in the past by whom civilisation has been built up. This is what we mean by the worship of humanity. A mere historical lecture, if its aim and its effect be to kindle in us enthusiastic regard for the noble men who have gone before us, and by whose lives and deaths we are what we are, – this is the worship of humanity, and not the utterance of invocations to an abstract idea.

On the 28th of last month we held a commemoration of the great musician, Beethoven, in all respects like that which we had given two years ago for Mozart. Our friend Professor Henry Holmes and his admirable quartet again performed two of those immortal pieces, and our friend, Mr. Vernon Lushington, again gave us one of those beautiful discourses on the glorious art to which he and his have devoted so much of their lives. These occasions, which are a real creation of Positivism, I deeply enjoy. They are neither concert nor lecture, nor service specially, but all three together, and much more. It is the one mode in which at present the religion of the future can put forth its yearnings for a sacred art worthy to compare with the highest types of Christian art. We meet not to listen to a musical display – not to hear the history of the musician's life – not to commemorate his career by any formal ceremony; but we mingle with our words of gratitude, and honor and affection for the artist, the worthy rehearsing of his consummate ideas in a spirit of devotion for him and the glorious company of whom he is one of the most splendid chiefs.

Last night, as the year closed, we met as before to dwell on the past, on the departing year that was being laid to rest in the incalculable catacombs of time, and on the infinite myriads of human beings by whom those catacombs are peopled; and with music and with voice we sought to attune our spirits to the true meanings of the hour. The year has been to many of us one of cruel anxieties, of sad memories and irreparable loss. In Mr. Cutler we have lost a most sincere and valued brother. As we stood round his open grave, there was but one feeling in our gathered mourners – a sense of loss that could ill be borne, honor to his gentle and upright career, sympathy with those whom he had left. The occasion will long be remembered, perhaps, as the first on which our body has ever been called on to take part in a purely Positivist burial service. Did any one present feel that the religion of Humanity is without its power to dignify, to consecrate, and to console in the presence of death? I speak not for others, but for myself. And, for my part, when I remember the pathetic chant of our friends at the grave, the reality of their reverend sorrow, the consolatory sense of resignation and hope with which we laid our brother in his peaceful bed, I feel the conviction that in this supreme office, the great test of religious power, the faith in Humanity will surpass the faith in the fictions – in beauty, in pathos, in courage, and in consolation, even as it so manifestly surpasses them in reality.

The hand of death has been heavy on us both abroad and at home. The past year has carried off to their immortal life

two of the original disciples and friends of our master, Auguste Hadery and Fabien Magnin. Both have been most amply honored in funeral sermons by M. Laffitte. Fabien Magnin was one of those rare men who represent to the present the type that we look for in the future. A workman (he was an engine-pattern maker,) he chose to live and die a workman, proud of his order, and confident in its destinies; all through his long life without fortune, or luxury, or ambition; a highly-trained man of science; a thoroughly trained politician, loyal unshakenly to his great teacher and his successor; of all the men I have ever known the most perfect type of the cultivated, incorruptible, simple, courageous man of the people. With his personal influence over his fellow-workmen, and from the ascendency of his intellect and character, he might easily in France have forced his way into the foremost place. With his scientific resources, and his faculty both for writing and speech, he might easily have entered the literary or scientific class. With his energy, prudence, and mechanical skill, he might easily have amassed a fortune. The attractions of such careers never seemed to touch by a ripple the serene surface of his austere purity. He chose to live and die in the strictest simplicity – the type of an honest and educated citizen, who served to make us feel all that the future has to promise to the workman, when remaining a workman, devoted to his craft and to his order, he shall be as highly educated as the best of us to-day; as courteous and dignified as the most refined; as simple as the ideal village pastor; as ardent a Republican as the Ferrys and

Gambettas whose names fill the journals.

We have this past year also carried out another series of commemorations, long familiar to our friends in France, but which are a real creation of Positivist belief. I mean those Pilgrimages or religious visits to the scenes of the lives of our great men. This is a real revival of a noble mediæval and Oriental practice, but wholly without superstitious taint, and entirely in the current of modern scientific thought. We go in a body to some spot where one of our immortal countrymen lived or died, and there, full of the beauty of the scene on which he used to gaze, and of the *genius loci* by which he was inspired, we listen to a simple discourse on his life and work. In this way we visited the homes or the graves of Bacon, of Harvey, of Milton, of Penn, of Cromwell, and of our William of Orange. What may not the art of the future produce for us in this most fruitful mode, when in place of the idle picnics and holidays of vacant sightseers, in place of the formal celebration of some prayer-book saint, we shall gather in a spirit of real religion and honor round the birthplace, the home, it may be the grave, of some poet, thinker, or ruler; and amidst all the inspiration of Nature and of the sacred memories of the soil, shall fill our hearts with the joy in beauty and profound veneration of the mighty Dead?

III

In our Sunday meetings, which have been regularly continued

excepting during the four summer months, we have continued our plan of dealing alike with the religious, the social, and the intellectual sides of the Positivist view of life and duty. The Housing of the Poor, Art, Biology, Socialism, our social Duties, the Memory of the Dead, the Positivist grounds of Morality, and our Practical Duties in Life, formed the subject of one series. Since our re-opening in the autumn, we have had courses on the Bible, on the religious value of the modern poets, and on the true basis of social equality. Amongst the features of special interest in these series of discourses is that one course was given by a former Unitarian minister who, after a life of successful preaching in the least dogmatic of all the Christian Churches, has been slowly reduced to the conviction that the reality of Humanity is a more substantial basis for religion to rest on than the hypothesis of God, and that the great scheme of human morality is a nobler Gospel to preach than the artificial ideal of a subjective Christ. I would in particular note the series of admirable lectures on the Bible, by Dr. Bridges, which combined the results of the latest learning on this intricate mass of ancient writings with the sympathetic and yet impartial judgment with which Positivists adopt into their sacred literature the most famous and most familiar of all the religious books of mankind. And again I would note that beautiful series of discourses by Mr. Vernon Lushington on the great religious poets of the modern world: – Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Wordsworth and Shelley. When we have them side by side, we shall have before

us a new measure of the sound, sympathetic, and universal spirit of Positivist belief. It is only those who are strangers to it and to us who can wonder how we come to put the Bible and the poets in equal places of honor as alike the great organs of true religious feeling.

The systematic teaching of science, which is an essential part of our conception of Positivism, has been maintained in this hall with unabated energy. In the beginning of the year Mr. Vernon Lushington commenced and carried through (with what an effort of personal self-devotion no one of us can duly measure) his class on the history and the elements of Astronomy. This winter, Mr. Lock has opened a similar class on the History and Elements of Mathematics. Positivism is essentially a scheme for reforming education, and it is only through a reformed education, universal to all classes alike, and concerned with the heart as much as the intellect, that the religious meaning of Humanity can ever be unfolded. The singing class, the expense of which was again assumed by Mr. Lushington, was steadily and successfully maintained during the first part of the year. We are still looking forward to the formation of a choir. The social meetings which we instituted last year have become a regular feature of our movement, and greatly contribute to our closer union and our better understanding of the social and sympathetic meaning of the faith we profess.

The publications of the year have been first and chiefly, *The Testament and Letters of Auguste Comte*, a work long looked

for, the publication of which has been long delayed by various causes. In the next place I would call attention to the new and popular edition of *International Policy*, a work of combined essays which we put forward in 1866, nearly twenty years ago. Our object in that work was to state and apply to the leading international problems in turn the great principles of social morality on which it is the mission of Positivism to show that the politics of nations can only securely repose. In an epoch which is still tending, we are daily assured, to the old passion for national self-assertion, it is significant that the Positivist school alone can resolutely maintain and fearlessly repeat its dictates of morality and justice, whilst all the Churches, all the political parties, and all the so-called organs of opinion, which are really the creatures of parties and cliques, find various pretexts for abandoning them altogether. How few are the political schools around us who could venture to republish after twenty years, *their* political programmes of 1866, *their* political doctrines and practical solutions of the tangled international problems, and who could not find in 1885 a principle which they had discarded, or a proposal which to-day they are ashamed to have made twenty years ago.

Besides these books, the only separate publications of our body are the affecting address of Mr. Ellis *On the due Commemoration of the Dead*. The Positivist Society has met throughout the year for the discussion of the social and political questions of the day. The most public manifestation of its activity

has been the part that it took in the third centenary of the great hero of national independence, William, Prince of Orange, called the Silent. The noble and weighty address in which Mr. Beesly expressed to the Dutch Committee at Delft the honor in which we held that immortal memory, has deeply touched, we are told, those to whom it was addressed. And it is significant that from this hall, dedicated to peace, to the Republic, to the people, and to Humanity, there was sent forth the one voice from the entire British race in honor to the great prince, the soldier, the diplomatist the secret, subtle, and haughty chief, who, three hundred years ago, created the Dutch nation. We have learned here to care little for a purely insular patriotism. The great creators of nations are *our* forefathers and *our* countrymen. Protestant or Catholic are nothing to us, so long as either prepared the way for a broader faith. In our abhorrence of war we have learned to honor the chief who fought desperately for the solid bases of peace. In our zeal for the people, for public opinion, for simplicity of life, and for truthfulness and openness in word as in conduct, we have not forgotten the *relative* duty of those who in darker, fiercer, ruder times than ours used the weapons of their age in the spirit of duty, and to the saving of those precious elements where-out the future of a better Humanity shall be formed.

IV

Turning to the political field, I shall occupy but little of your time with the special questions of the year. We are as a body entirely dissevered from party politics. We seek to color political activity with certain moral general principles, but we have no interest in party politics as such. The idea that Positivists are, as a body, Radicals or Revolutionaries is an idle invention; and I am the more entitled to repudiate it, in that I have myself formally declined to enter on a Parliamentary career, on the express ground that I prefer to judge political questions without the trammels of any party obligation. On the one hand we are Republicans on principle, in that we demand a government in the interest of all and of no favored order, by the highest available capacity, without reference to birth, or wealth, or class. On the other hand, we are not Democrats, in that we acknowledge no abstract right to govern in a numerical majority. Whatever is best administered is best. We desire to see efficiency for the common welfare, responsible power intrusted to the most capable hand, with continuous responsibility to a real public opinion.

I am far from pretending that general principles of this kind entitle us to pass a judgment on the complex questions of current politics, or that all Positivists who recognize these principles are bound to judge current politics in precisely the same way. There is in Positivism a deep vein of true Conservatism; as there is

also an unquenchable yearning for a social revolution of a just and peaceful kind. But no one of these tendencies impel us, I think, to march under the banner either of Mr. Gladstone or Lord Salisbury. As Republicans on principle, we desire the end of all hereditary institutions. As believers in public opinion, we desire to see opinion represented in the most complete way, and without class distinctions. As men who favor efficiency and concentration in government, we support whatever may promise to relieve us of the scandalous deadlock to which Parliamentary government has long been reduced. It may be permitted to those who are wholly detached from party interests to express a lively satisfaction that the long electoral struggle is happily got out of the way, and that a great stride has been taken towards a government at once energetic and popular, without regarding the hobbies about the representation of women and the representation of inorganic minorities.

It is on a far wider field that our great political interests are absorbed. There is everywhere a revival of the spirit of national aggrandisement and imperial ambition. Under the now avowed lead of the great German dictator, the nations of Europe are running a race to extend their borders by conquest and annexation amongst the weak and uncivilised. There is to-day a scramble for Africa, as there was formerly a scramble for Asia; and the scramble in Asia, or in Polynesia, is only less urgent for the moment, in that the rivalry is just now keenest in Africa. But in Asia, in Africa, in Polynesia, the strong nations of Europe are

struggling to found Empires by violence, fraud, or aggression. Three distinct wars are being waged in the East; and in Africa alone our soldiers and our Government are asserting the rule of the sword in the North, on the East, in the centre, on the South, and on the West at the same time. Five years ago, we were told that for England at least there was to be some lull in this career of blood and ambition. It was only, we see, a party cry, a device to upset a government. There has been no lull, no pause in the scramble for empire. The empire swells year by year; year by year fresh wars break out; year by year the burden of empire increases whether Disraeli or Gladstone, Liberal or Conservative, are the actual wielders of power. The agents of the aggression, the critics, have changed sides; the Jingoes of yesterday are the grumblers of to-day; and the peaceful patriots of yesterday are the Jingoes of to-day. The empire and its appendages are even vaster in 1885 than in 1880; its responsibilities are greater; its risks and perplexities deeper; its enemies stronger and more threatening. And in the midst of this crisis, those who condemn this policy are fewer; their protests come few and faint. The Christian sects can see nothing unrighteous in Mr. Gladstone; the Liberal caucuses stifle any murmur of discontent, and force those who spoke out against Zulu, Afghan, and Trans-Vaal wars to justify, by the tyrant's plea of necessity, the massacre of Egyptian fellahs and the extermination of Arab patriots. They who mouthed most loudly about Jingoism are now the foremost in their appeals to national vanity. And the parasites of the

parasites of our great Liberal statesman can make such hubbub, in his utter absence of a policy, that they drive him by sheer clamor from one adventure into another. For nearly four years now we have continuously protested against the policy pursued in Egypt. Year after year we have told Mr. Gladstone that it was blackening his whole career and covering our country with shame. There is a monotony about our protests. But, when there is a monotony in evil-doing, there must alike be monotony in remonstrance. We complain that the blood and treasure of this nation should be used in order to flay the peasantry of the Nile, in the interests of usurers and speculators. We complain that we practically annex a people whom we will not govern and cannot benefit. We are boldly for what in the slang of the day is called "scuttling" out of Egypt. We think the robber and the oppressor should scuttle as quickly as possible, that he is certain to scuttle some day. We complain of massacring an innocent people merely to give our traders and money-dealers larger or safer markets. We complain of all the campaigns and battles as wanton, useless, and unjust massacres. We especially condemn the war in the Soudan as wanton and unjust even in the avowal of the very ministers who are urging it. The defender of Khartoum is a man of heroic qualities and beautiful nature; but the cause of civilisation is not served by launching amongst savages a sort of Pentateuch knight errant. And we seriously complain that the policy of a great country in a great issue of right and wrong should be determined by schoolboy shouting over the feats of our

English Garibaldi.

It is true that our Ministers, especially Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville, and Lord Derby, are the public men who are now most conspicuously resisting the forward policy, and that the outcry of the hour is against them on that ground. But ambition should be made of sterner stuff. Those who aspire to guide nations should meet the folly of the day with more vigorous assertion of principle. And the men who are waging a wanton, bloody, and costly war in the sands of Africa have no principle left to assert.

It may well be that Mr. Gladstone, and most of those who follow him in office, are of all our public men those who have least liking for these wars, annexations, and oppressive dealings with the weak. They may have less liking for them it may be, but they are the men who do these things. They are responsible. The blood lies on their doorstep. The guilt hangs on their fame. The corruption of the national conscience is their doing. The page of history will write their names and their deeds in letters of gore and of flame. It is mockery, even in the most servile parliamentary drudge, to repeat to us that the wrong lies at the door of the Opposition, foreign intriguers, international engagements, untoward circumstances. Keep these threadbare pretexts to defend the next official blunder amidst the cheers of a party mob. The English people will have none of such stale equivocation. The ministers who massacred thousands at Tel-el-Kebir, at Alexandria, at Teb, at Tamasi, who are sinking millions of our people's hard-won savings in the sands of Africa, in order

to slaughter a brave race whom they themselves declare to be heroes and patriots fighting for freedom; and who after three years of this bloodshed, ruin, and waste, have nothing to show for it – nothing, except the utter chaos of a fine country, the extreme misery of an innocent people, and all Europe glowering at us in menace and hate – the men who have done this are responsible. When they fail to annex some trumpery bit of coast, the failure is naturally set down to blundering, not to conscience. History, their country, their own conscience will make them answer for it. The headlong plunge of our State, already overburdened with the needs and dangers of a heterogeneous empire, the consuming rage for national extension, which the passion for money, markets, careers, breeds in a people where moral and religious principles are loosened and conflicting, this is the great evil of our time. It is to stem this that statesmen should address themselves. It is to fan this, or to do its bidding, that our actual statesmen contend. Mr. Gladstone in his heart may loathe the task to which he is set and the uses to which he lends his splendid powers. But there are some situations where weakness before powerful clamor works national ruin more readily even than ambition itself. How petty to our descendants will our squabbles in the parliamentary game appear, when history shall tell them that Gladstone waged far more wars than Disraeli; that he slaughtered more hecatombs of innocent people; that he oppressed more nations, embroiled us worse with foreign nations; left the empire of a far more unwieldy size, more exposed and on

more rotten foundations; and that Mr. Gladstone did all this not because it seemed to him wise or just, but for the same reason (in truth) that his great rival acted, viz., that it gave him unquestioned ascendency in his party and with those whose opinion he sought.

I have not hesitated to speak out my mind of the policy condemned, not in personal hostility or irritation, however much I respect the great qualities of Mr. Gladstone himself, however little I desire to see him displaced by his rivals. No one will venture to believe that I speak in the interest of party, or have any quarrel with my own countrymen. All that I have said in condemnation of the African policy of England I would say in condemnation of the Chinese policy in France. I would say it all the more because, for the reasons on which I will not now enlarge, our brethren in France have said so little, and that little with so broken a voice. It is a weakness to our common cause that so little has been said in France. But I rejoice to see that in the new number of our Review, our director, M. Laffitte, has spoken emphatically against all disturbance of the *status quo*, and the policy of founding colonial empires. It behooves us all the more to speak out plainly here. There is the same situation in France as in England. A ministry whom the majority trust, and whom the military and trading class can bend to do their will; a thirst in the rich to extend the empire; a thirst in the adventurers for careers to be won; a thirst in the journalists for material wherewith to pamper the national vanity. There, too, are in the East backward peoples to be trampled on, a confused tangle

of pretexts and opportunities, a Parliamentary majority to be secured, and a crowd of interests to be bribed. In the case of M. Ferry, we can see all the weakness, all the helpless vacillations, all the danger of his game; its cynical injustice, its laughable pretexts and excuses, its deliberate violation of the real interests of the nation, the formidable risks that he is preparing for his country, and the ruin which is as certain to follow it. In Mr. Gladstone's case there are national and party slaves for the conscience of the boldest critic.

The year, too, has witnessed a new form of the spread-eagle tendency in the revival of one of our periodical scares about the strength of the navy. About once in every ten or twenty years a knot of shipbuilders, journalists, seamen, and gunners, contrive to stir up a panic, and to force the nation into a great increase of its military expenditure. I am not going to discuss the truth about the Navy, or whether it be equal or not to the requirements of the Service. I look at this in a new way: I take up very different ground. I say that the service, to which we are now called on to make the navy equal, is a service that we ought not to undertake. The requirements demanded are wholly incompatible with the true interests of our nation. They are opposed to the real conditions of civilisation. They will be in a very few years, even if they are not now, beyond the power of this people to meet. The claim to a maritime supremacy, in the sense that this country is permanently to remain undisputed mistress of all seas, always able and ready to overwhelm any possible combination of any

foreign Powers, this claim in itself is a ridiculous anachronism. Whether the British fleet is now able to overpower the combined fleets of Europe, or even of several Powers in Europe, I do not know. Even if it be now able, such is the progress of events, the ambition of our neighbors, and the actual conditions of modern war, that it is physically impossible that such a supremacy can be permanently maintained. To maintain it, even for another generation, would involve the subjection of England to a military tyranny such as exists for the moment in Germany, to a crushing taxation and conscription, of which we have had no experience. We should have to spend, not twenty-five, but fifty millions a year on our army and navy if we intend to be really masters in every sea, and to make the entire British empire one continuous Malta and Gibraltar. And even that, or a hundred millions a year, would not suffice in the future for the inevitable growth of foreign powers and the constant growth of our own empire. To guarantee the permanent supremacy of the seas, we shall need some Bismarck to crush our free people into the vice of his military autocracy and universal conscription.

"Rule Britannia," or England's exclusive dominion of the seas, is a temporary (in my opinion, an unfortunate) episode in our history. To brag about it and fight for it is the part of a bad citizen; to maintain it would be a crime against the human race. To have founded, not an empire, but a scattered congeries of possessions in all parts of the world by conquest, intrigue, or arbitrary seizure, is a blot upon our history; to perpetuate it is a

burdensome inheritance to bequeath to our children. To ask that this inorganic heap of possessions shall be perpetually extended, made absolutely secure against all comers, and guarded by a fleet which is always ready to meet the world in arms – this is a programme which it is the duty of every good citizen to stamp out. Whilst this savage policy is in vogue, the very conditions of national morality, of peace, of true industrial civilisation are wanting. The first condition of healthy national progress is to have broken for ever with this national buccaneering. The commerce, the property of Englishmen on the seas must protect itself, like that of other nations, by just, prudent, and civilised bearing, and not by an exclusive dominion which other great nations do very well without. The commerce and the honor of Americans are safe all over the world, though their navy is not one-tenth of ours. And Germany can speak with us face to face on every ocean, though she can hardly put a first-rate ship in array of battle. To talk big about refusing to trust the greatness of England to the sufferance of her neighbors is mere claptrap. It is the phrase of Mexican or Californian desperadoes when they fill their pockets with revolvers and bowie-knives. All but two or three of the greatest nations are obliged, at all times, to trust their existence to the sufferance of their stronger neighbors. And they are just as safe, and quite as proud, and more civilised than their great neighbors in consequence. Human society, whether national or international, only begins when social morality has taken the place of individual violence.

Society, for men or nations, cannot be based on the revolver and bowie-knife principle.

We repudiate, then, with our whole souls the code of buccaneer patriotism. True statesmen are bound to check, not to promote, the expansion of England; to provide for the peaceful disintegration of the heterogeneous empire, the permanence of which is as incapable of being justified in policy as of being materially defended in arms. These aggressions and annexations and protectorates, these wanton wars amongst savages are at once blunders and crimes, pouring out by millions what good government and thrift at home save by thousands, degrading the present generation and deeply wronging the next. We want no fleet greater than that of our greatest neighbors, and the claim to absolute dominion at sea must be put away like the claim to the kingdom of France or exclusive right to the British Channel. We can afford to smile at the charge that we are degenerate Britons or wanting in patriotism. Patriotism to us is a deep and working desire for the good name of England, for the justice and goodness of her policy, for the real enlightenment and well-being of her sons, and for her front place in humanity and civilisation. We smile at the vaporing of men to whom patriotism means a good cry, and several extra editions.

It may seem for the moment that doctrines such as ours are out of credit, and that there is little hope of their ever obtaining the mastery. We are told that to-day not a voice is raised to oppose the doctrines of spoliation. It is true that, owing to the hubbub

of party politics, to the servility of the Christian Churches, and the low morality of the press, these national acts of rapacity have passed as yet with but small challenge. But at any rate here our voice has never wavered, nor have considerations of men, parties, or majorities led us to temporise with our principles. We speak out plainly – not more plainly than Mr. Gladstone and his followers on platform and in press spoke out once – and we shall go on to speak out plainly, whether we are many or whether we are few, whether the opinion of the hour is with us or not. But I am not despondent. Nor do I doubt the speedy triumph of our stronger morality. I see with what weather cock rapidity the noisiest of the Anti-Jingoes can change their tone. The tribe of Cleon, and the Sausage-seller are the same in every age. I will not believe that the policy of a great nation can be long dictated by firms of advertising touts, who will puff the new soap, a comic singer, and an imperial war in the same page; who are equally at home in the partition of Africa or a penny dreadful. Nations are not seriously led by the arts which make village bumpkins crowd to the show of the fat girl and the woolly pig. In the rapid degradation of the press to the lower American standard we may see an escape from its mischief. The age is one of democracy. We have just taken a great stride towards universal suffrage and the government of the people. In really republican societies, where power rests on universal suffrage, as in France, and in America, the power of the press is reduced to a very low ebb. The power of journalism is essentially one of town

life and small balanced parties. Its influence evaporates where power is held by the millions, and government appeals directly to vast masses of voters spread over immense areas. Cleon and the Sausage-seller can do little when republican institutions are firmly rooted over the length and breadth of a great country.

The destinies of this nation have now been finally committed to the people, and to the people we will appeal with confidence. The laborer and the workman have no interest in these wanton wars. In this imperial expansion, in this rivalry of traders and brag of arms; no taste for it and no respect for it. They find that they are dragged off to die in wars of which they know nothing; that their wages are taxed to support adventures which they loathe. The people are by instinct opponents of these crimes, and to them we will appeal. The people have a natural sense of justice and a natural leaning to public morality. Ambition, lucre, restlessness, and vainglory do not corrupt their minds to approve a financial adventure. They need peace, productive industry, humanity. Every step towards the true republic is a step towards morality. To the new voters, to the masses of the people, we will confidently appeal.

There is, too, another side to this matter. If these burdens are to be thrust on the national purse, and (should the buccaneers have their way) if the permanent war expenditure must be doubled, and little wars at ten and twenty millions each are inevitable as well, then in all fairness the classes who make these wars and profit by them must pay for them. We have

taken a great stride towards democracy, and two of the first taxes with which the new democracy will deal are the income-tax and the land-tax. The entire revision of taxation is growing inevitable. It is a just and sound principle that the main burden of taxation shall be thrown on the rich, and we have yet to see how the new democracy will work out that just principle. A graduated income-tax is a certain result of the movement. The steady pressure against customs duties and the steady decline in habits of drinking must combine to force the taxation of the future more and more on income and on land. A rapid rise in the scale of taxing incomes, until we reach the point where great fortunes cease to be rapidly accumulated, would check the wasteful expenditure on war more than any consideration of justice. Even a China merchant would hardly promote an opium war when he found himself taxed ten or twenty per cent. on his income.

One of the first things which will occur to the new rural voters is the ridiculous minimum to which the land-tax is reduced. Mr. Henry George and the school of land reformers have lately been insisting that the land-tax must be immensely increased. At present it is a farce, not one-tenth of what is usual in the nations of Europe. I entirely agree with them, and am perfectly prepared to see the land-tax raised till it ultimately brings us some ten or even twenty millions, instead of one million. If the result would be to force a great portion of the soil to change hands, and to pass from the rent receivers to the occupiers, all the more desirable.

But one inevitable result of the new Reform Act must be a great raising of the taxes on land, and when land pays one-fifth of the total taxation, our wars will be fewer and our armaments more modest.

One of the cardinal facts of our immediate generation is the sudden revival of Socialism and Communism. It was not crushed, as we thought, in 1848; it was not extinguished in 1871. The new Republic in France is uneasy with it. The military autocracy of Germany is honeycombed with it. Society is almost dissolved by it in Russia. It is rife in America, in Italy, in Denmark, in Austria. Let no man delude himself that Socialism has no footing here. I tell them (and I venture to say that I know) Socialism within the last few years has made some progress here. It will assuredly make progress still. With the aspirations and social aims of Socialism we have much in common, little as we are Communists and firmly as we support the institution of private property. But if Socialism is in the ascendant, if the new democracy is exceedingly likely to pass through a wave of Socialist tendency, are these the men, and is this the epoch to foster a policy of imperial aggression? With the antipathy felt by Socialists for all forms of national selfishness, with their hatred of war, and their noble aspirations after the brotherhood of races and nations, we as Positivists are wholly at one. Let us join hands, then, with Socialists, with Democrats, with Humanitarians, and reformers of every school, who repudiate a policy of national oppression; and together let us appeal to the new democracy from the old

plutocracy to arrest our nation in its career of blood, and to lift this guilty burden from the conscience of our children for ever.

So let us begin the year resolved to do our duty as citizens, fearlessly and honestly, striving to show our neighbors that social morality is a real religion in itself, by which men can order their lives and purify their hearts. Let us seek to be gentler as fathers, husbands, comrades, or masters; more dutiful as sons and daughters, learners or helpers; more diligent as workers, students, or teachers; more loving and self-denying as men and as women everywhere. Let us think less about calling on Humanity and more about being humane. Let us talk less about religion, and try more fully to live religion. We have sufficiently explained our principles in words. Let us manifest them in act. I do not know that more is to be gained by the further preaching of our creed – much less by external profession of our own conviction. The world will be ours, the day that men see that Positivism in fact enables men to live a more pure and social life, that it fills us with a desire for all useful knowledge, stimulates us to help one another and bear with one another, makes our homes the brighter, our children the better, our lives the nobler by its presence; and that on the foundation of order, and in the spirit of love, and with progress before us as our aim, we can live for others, live openly before all men. —*Fortnightly Review.*

THE POETRY OF TENNYSON
BY RODEN NOEL

It is perhaps difficult for men of middle age to estimate Tennyson aright. For we who love poetry were brought up, as it were, at his feet, and he cast the magic of his fascination over our youth. We have gone away, we have travelled in other lands, absorbed in other preoccupations, often revolving problems different from those concerning which we took counsel with him; and we hear new voices, claiming authority, who aver that our old master has been superseded, that he has no message for a new generation, that his voice is no longer a talisman of power. Then we return to the country of our early love, and what shall our report be? Each one must answer for himself; but my report will be entirely loyal to those early and dear impressions. I am of those who believe that Tennyson has still a message for the world. Men become impatient with hearing Aristides so often called just, but is that the fault of Aristides? They are impatient also with a reputation, which necessarily is what all great reputations must so largely be – the empty echo of living voices from blank walls. "Now again" – not the people, but certain critics – "call it but a weed." Yet how strange these fashions in poetry are! I well remember Lord Broughton, Byron's friend, expressing to me, when I was a boy, his astonishment

that the bust of Tennyson by Woolner should have been thought worthy of a place near that of Lord Byron in Trinity College, Cambridge. "Lord Byron was a great poet; but Mr. Tennyson, though he had written pretty verses," and so on. For one thing, the men of that generation deemed Tennyson terribly obscure. "In Memoriam," it was held, nobody could possibly understand. The poet, being original, had to make his own public. Men nurtured on Scott and Byron could not understand him. Now we hear no more of his obscurity. Moreover, he spoke as the mouthpiece of his own time. Doubts, aspirations, visions unfamiliar to the aging, breathed melodiously through him. Again, how contemptuously do Broad-church psychologists like George Macdonald, and writers for the *Spectator*, as well as literary persons belonging to what I may term the *finikin* school, on the other hand, now talk of our equally great poet Byron. How detestable must the North be, if the South be so admirable! But while Tennyson spoke to me in youth, Byron spoke to me in boyhood, and I still love both.

Whatever may have to be discounted from the popularity of Tennyson on account of fashion and a well-known name, or on account of his harmony with the (more or less provincial) ideas of the large majority of Englishmen, his popularity is a fact of real benefit to the public, and highly creditable to them at the same time. The establishment of his name in popular favor is but very partially accounted for by the circumstance that, when he won his spurs, he was among younger singers the only serious champion in the field, since, if I mistake not, he was at

one time a less "popular" poet than Mr. Robert Montgomery. *Vox populi* is not always *vox Dei*, but it may be so accidentally, and then the people reap benefit from their happy blunder. The great poet who won the laurel before Tennyson has never been "popular" at all, and Tennyson is the only true English poet who has pleased the "public" since Byron, Walter Scott, Tom Moore, and Mrs. Hemans. But he had to conquer their suffrages, for his utterance, whatever he may have owed to Keats, was original, and his substance the outcome of an opulent and profound personality. These were serious obstacles to success, for he neither went "deep" into "the general heart" like Burns, nor appealed to superficial sentiments in easy language like Scott, Moore, and Byron. In his earliest volume indeed there was a preponderance of manner over matter; it was characterized by a certain dainty prettiness of style, that scarcely gave promise of the high spiritual vision and rich complexity of human insight to which he has since attained, though it did manifest a delicate feeling for nature in association with human moods, an extraordinarily subtle sensibility of all senses, and a luscious pictorial power. Not Endymion had been more luxuriant. All was steeped in golden languors. There were faults in plenty, and of course the critics, faithful to the instincts of their kind, were jubilant to nose them. To adapt Coleridge's funny verses, not "the Church of St. Geryon," nor the legendary Rhine, but the "stinks and stenches" of Kölntown do such offal-feeders love to enumerate, and distinguish. But the poet in his verses on "Musty

Christopher" gave one of these people a Roland for his Oliver. Stuart Mill, as Mr. Mathews, in his lately published and very instructive lecture on Tennyson, points out, was the one critic in a million who remembered Pope's precept,

> "Be thou the first true merit to befriend,
> His praise is lost who waits till all commend."

Yet it is only natural that the mediocrities, who for a moment keep the door of Fame, should scrutinize with somewhat jaundiced eye the credentials of new aspirants, since every entry adds fresh bitterness to their own exclusion.

But really it is well for us, the poet's elect lovers, to remember that he once had faults, however few he may now retain; for the perverse generation who dance not when the poet pipes to them, nor mourn when he weeps, have turned upon Tennyson with the cry that he "is all fault who has no fault at all" – they would have us regard him as a kind of Andrea del Sarto, a "blameless" artistic "monster, "a poet of unimpeachable technical skill, but keeping a certain dead level of moderate merit. It is as well to be reminded that this at all events is false. The dawn of his young art was beautiful; but the artist had all the generous faults of youthful genius – excess, vision confused with gorgeous color and predominant sense, too palpable artifice of diction, indistinctness of articulation in the outline, intricately-woven cross-lights flooding the canvas, defect of living interest;

while Coleridge said that he began to write poetry without an ear for metre. Neither Adeline, Madeline, nor Eleanore are living portraits, though Eleanore is gorgeously painted. "The Ode to Memory" has isolated images of rare beauty, but it is kaleidoscopic in effect; the fancy is playing with loose foam-wreaths, rather than the imagination "taking things by the heart." But our great poet has gone beyond these. He has himself rejected twenty-six out of the fifty-eight poems published in his first volume; while some of those even in the second have been altogether rewritten. Such defects are eminently present in the lately republished poem written in youth, "The Lover's Tale," though this too has been altered. As a storehouse of fine imagery, metaphor, and deftly moulded phrase, of blank verse also whose sonorous rhythm must surely be a fabric of adult architecture, the piece can hardly be surpassed; but the tale as tale lingers and lapses, overweighted with the too gorgeous trappings under which it so laboriously moves. And such expression as the following, though not un-Shakspearian, is hardly quarried from the soundest material in Shakspeare – for, after all, Shakspeare was a euphuist now and then —

> "Why fed we from one fountain? drew one sun?
> Why were our mothers branches of one stem, if that same nearness
> Were father to this distance, and that *one*
> Vaunt courier to this *double*, if affection
> Living slew love, and sympathy hewed out

The bosom-sepulchre of sympathy?"

Yet "Mariana" had the virtue, which the poet has displayed so pre-eminently since, of concentration. Every subtle touch enhances the effect he intends to produce, that of the desolation of the deserted woman, whose hope is nearly extinguished; Nature hammering a fresh nail into her coffin with every innocent aspect or movement. Beautiful too are "Love and Death" and "The Poet's Mind;" while in "The Poet" we have the oft-quoted line: "Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love."

Mr. G. Brimley was the first, I believe, to point out the distinctive peculiarity of Lord Tennyson's treatment of landscape. It is treated by him dramatically; that is to say, the details of it are selected so as to be interpretative of the particular mood or emotion he wishes to represent. Thus in the two Marianas, they are painted with the minute distinctness appropriate to the morbid and sickening observation of the lonely woman, whose attention is distracted by no cares, pleasures, or satisfied affections. That is a pregnant remark, a key to unlock a good deal of Tennyson's work with. Byron and Shelley, though they are carried out of themselves in contemplating Nature, do not, I think, often take her as interpreter of moods alien to their own. In Wordsworth's "Excursion," it is true, Margaret's lonely grief is thus delineated though the neglect of her garden and the surroundings of her cottage; yet this is not so characteristic

a note of his nature-poetry. In the "Miller's Daughter" and the "Gardener's Daughter" the lovers would be little indeed without the associated scene so germane to the incidents narrated, both as congenial setting of the picture for a spectator, and as vitally fused with the emotion of the lovers; while never was more lovely landscape-painting of the gentle order than in the "Gardener's Daughter." Lessing, who says that poetry ought never to be pictorial, would, I suppose, much object to Tennyson's; but to me, I confess, this mellow, lucid, luminous word-painting of his is entirely delightful. It refutes the criticism that words cannot convey a picture by perfectly conveying it. *Solvitur ambulando*; the Gardener's Daughter standing by her rose-bush, "a sight to make an old man young," remaining in our vision to confound all crabbed pedants with pet theories.

In his second volume, indeed, the poet's art was well mastered, for here we find the "Lotos-eaters," "Œnone," "The Palace of Art," "A Dream of Fair Women," the tender "May-Queen," and the "Lady of Shalott." Perhaps the first four of these are among the very finest works of Tennyson. In the mouth of the love-lorn nymph Œnone he places the complaint concerning Paris into which there enters so much delightful picture of the scenery around Mount Ida, and of those fair immortals who came to be judged by the beardless apple-arbiter. How deliciously flows the verse! – though probably it flows still more entrancingly in the "Lotos-eaters," wandering there like clouds of fragrant incense, or some slow heavy honey, or a rare amber unguent poured

out. How wonderfully harmonious with the dream-mood of the dreamers are phrase, image, and measure! But we need not quote the lovely choric song wherein occur the lines —

> "Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
> Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes,"

so entirely restful and happy in their simplicity. If Art would always blossom so, she might be forgiven if she blossomed only for her own sake; yet this controversy regarding *Art for Art* need hardly have arisen, since Art may certainly bloom for her own sake, if only she consent to assimilate in her blooming, and so exhale for her votaries, in due proportion, all elements essential to Nature, and Humanity: for in the highest artist all faculties are transfigured into one supreme organ; while among forms her form is the most consummate, among fruits her fruit offers the most satisfying refreshment. What a delicately true picture have we here —

> "And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
> Along the cliff to fall, and pause and fall did seem,"

where we feel also the poet's remarkable faculty of making word and rhythm an echo and auxiliary of the sense. Not only have we the three cæsuras respectively after "fall," and "pause" and "fall," but the length, and soft amplitude of the vowel sounds with liquid consonants aid in the realization of the picture,

reminding of Milton's beautiful "From morn to noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve, a summer's day." The same faculty is notable in the rippling lilt of the charming little "Brook" song, and indeed everywhere. In the "Dream of Fair Women" we have a series of cabinet portraits, presenting a situation of human interest with a few animating touches, but still chiefly through suggestive surroundings. There occurs the magnificent phrase of Cleopatra: "We drank the Lybian sun to sleep, and lit lamps which outburned Canopus." The force of expression could be carried no further than throughout this poem, and by "expression" of course I do not mean pretty words, or power-words for there own sweet sake, for these, expressing nothing, whatever else they may be, are not "expression;" but I mean the forcible or felicitous presentment of thought, image, feeling, or incident, through pregnant and beautiful language in harmony with them; though the subtle and indirect suggestion of language is unquestionably an element to be taken into account by poetry. The "Palace of Art" is perhaps equal to the former poem for lucid splendor of description, in this instance pointing a moral, allegorizing a truth. Scornful pride, intellectual arrogance, selfish absorption in æsthetic enjoyment, is imaged forth in this vision of the queen's world-reflecting palace, and its various treasures – the end being a sense of unendurable isolation, engendering madness, but at last repentance, and reconcilement with the scouted commonalty of mankind.

The dominant note of Tennyson's poetry is assuredly the

delineation of human moods modulated by Nature, and through a system of Nature-symbolism. Thus, in "Elaine," when Lancelot has sent a courtier to the queen, asking her to grant him audience, that he may present the diamonds won for her in tourney, she receives the messenger with unmoved dignity; but he, bending low and reverently before her, saw "with a sidelong eye"

> "The shadow of some piece of pointed lace
> In the queen's shadow vibrate on the walls,
> And parted, laughing in his courtly heart."

The "Morte d'Arthur" affords a striking instance of this peculiarly Tennysonian method. That is another of the very finest pieces. Such poetry may suggest labor, but not more than does the poetry of Virgil or Milton. Every word is the right word, and each in the right place. Sir H. Taylor indeed warns poets against "wanting to make every word beautiful." And yet here it must be owned that the result of such an effort is successful, so delicate has become the artistic tact of this poet in his maturity.[1] For, good expression being the happy adaptation of language to meaning, it follows that sometimes good expression will be perfectly simple, even ordinary in character, and sometimes it

[1] But the loveliest lyrics of Tennyson do not suggest labor. I do not say that, like Beethoven's music, or Heine's songs, they may not be the result of it. But they, like all supreme artistic work, "conceal," not obtrude Art; if they are not spontaneous, they produce the effect of spontaneity, not artifice. They impress the reader also with the power, for which no technical skill can be a substitute, of sincere feeling, and profound realization of their subject-matter.

will be ornate, elaborate, dignified. He who can thus vary his language is the best verbal artist, and Tennyson can thus vary it. In this poem, the "Morte d'Arthur," too, we have "deep-chested music." Except in some of Wordsworth and Shelley, or in the magnificent "Hyperion" of Keats, we have had no such stately, sonorous organ-music in English verse since Milton as in this poem, or in "Tithonus," "Ulysses," "Lucretius," and "Guinevere." From the majestic overture,

> "So all day long the noise of battle rolled
> Among the mountains by the winter sea,"

onward to the end, the same high elevation is maintained.

But this very picturesqueness of treatment has been urged against Tennyson as a fault in his narrative pieces generally, from its alleged over-luxuriance, and tendency to absorb, rather than enhance, the higher human interest of character and action. However this be (and I think it is an objection that does apply, for instance, to "The Princess"), here in this poem picturesqueness must be counted as a merit, because congenial to the semi-mythical, ideal, and parabolic nature of Arthurian legend, full of portent and supernatural suggestion. Such Ossianic hero-forms are nearly as much akin to the elements as to man. And the same answer holds largely in the case of the other Arthurian Idylls. It has been noted how well-chosen is the epithet "water" applied to a lake in the lines, "On one side lay the ocean, and on one Lay a

great water, and the moon was full." Why is this so happy? For as a rule the concrete rather than the abstract is poetical, because the former brings with it an image, and the former involves no vision. But now in the night all Sir Bedevere could observe, or care to observe, was that there was "some great water." We do not – he did not – want to know exactly what it was. Other thoughts, other cares, preoccupy him and us. Again, of dying Arthur we are told that "all his greaves and caisses were dashed with drops of onset." "Onset" is a very generic term, poetic because removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war's pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also, and heroic hearts, since onset belongs to mettle and daring; the word for vast and shadowy connotation is akin to Milton's grand abstraction, "Far off *His coming* shone" or Shelley's, "Where the Earthquake Demon taught her young *Ruin*."

It has been noted also how cunningly Tennyson can gild and furbish up the most commonplace detail – as when he calls Arthur's mustache "the knightly growth that fringed his lips," or condescends to glorify a pigeon-pie, or paints the clown's astonishment by this detail, "the brawny spearman let his cheek Bulge with the unswallowed piece, and turning stared;" or thus characterizes a pun, "and took the word, and play'd upon it, and made it of two colors." This kind of ingenuity, indeed, belongs rather to talent than to genius; it is exercised in cold blood; but talent may be a valuable auxiliary of genius, perfecting skill in the technical departments of art. Yet such a gift is not without

danger to the possessor. It may tempt him to make his work too much like a delicate mosaic of costly stone, too hard and unblended, from excessive elaboration of detail. One may even prefer to art thus highly wrought a more glowing and careless strain, that lifts us off our feet, and carries us away as on a more rapid, if more turbid torrent of inspiration, such as we find in Byron, Shelley, or Victor Hugo. Here you are compelled to pause at every step, and admire the design of the costly tesselated pavement under your feet. Perhaps there is a jewelled glitter, a Pre-Raphaelite or Japanese minuteness of finish here and there in Tennyson, that takes away from the feeling of aërial perspective and remote distance, leaving little to the imagination; not suggesting and whetting the appetite, but rather satiating it; his loving observation of minute particulars is so faithful, his knowledge of what others, even men of science, have observed so accurate, his fancy so nimble in the detection of similitudes. But every master has his own manner, and his reverent disciples would be sorry if he could be without it. We love the little idiosyncracies of our friends.

I have said the objection in question does seem to lie against "The Princess." It contains some of the most beautiful poetic pearls the poet has ever dropped; but the manner appears rather disproportionate to the matter, at least to the subject as he has chosen to regard it. For it is regarded by him only semi-seriously; so lightly and sportively is the whole topic viewed at the outset, that the effect is almost that of burlesque; yet

there is a very serious conclusion, and a very weighty moral is drawn from the story, the workmanship being labored to a degree, and almost encumbered with ornamentation. But the poet himself admits the ingrained incongruity of the poem. The fine comparison of the Princess Ida in the battle to a beacon glaring ruin over raging seas, for instance, seems too grand for the occasion. How differently, and in what burning earnest has a great poet-woman, Mrs. Browning, treated this grave modern question of the civil and political position of women in "Aurora Leigh!" Tennyson's is essentially a man's view, and the frequent talk about women's beauty must be very aggravating to the "Blues." It is this poem especially that gives people with a limited knowledge of Tennyson the idea of a "pretty" poet; the prettiness, though very genuine, seems to play too patronizingly with a momentous theme. The Princess herself, and the other figures are indeed dramatically realized, but the splendor of invention, and the dainty detail, rather dazzle the eye away from their humanity. Here, however, are some of the loveliest songs that this poet, one of our supreme lyrists, ever sung: "Tears, idle tears!" "The splendor falls," "Sweet and low," "Home they brought," "Ask me no more," and the exquisite melody, "For Love is of the valley." Moreover, the grand lines toward the close are full of wisdom —

> "For woman is not undeveloped man,
> But diverse: could we make her as the man

Sweet love were slain," &c.

I feel myself a somewhat similar incongruity in the poet's treatment of his more homely, modern, half-humorous themes, such as the introduction to the "Morte d'Arthur," and "Will Waterproof;" not at all in the humorous poems, like the "Northern Farmer," which are all of a piece, and perfect in their own vein. In this introduction we have "The host and I sat round the wassail bowl, then half-way ebb'd;" but this metaphorical style is not (fortunately) sustained, and so, as good luck would have it, a metaphor not being ready to hand, we have the honester and homelier line, "Till I tired out with cutting eights that day upon the pond;" yet this homespun hardly agrees with the above stage-king's costume. And so again I often venture to wish that the Poet-Laureate would not say "flowed" when he only means "said." Still, this may be hypercriticism. For I did not personally agree with the critic who objected to Enoch Arden's fish-basket being called "ocean-smelling osier." There is no doubt, however, that "Stokes, and Nokes, and Vokes" have exaggerated the poet's manner, till the "murex fished up" by Keats and Tennyson has become one universal flare of purple. Beautiful as some of Mr. Rossetti's work is, his expression in the sonnets surely became obscure from over-involution, and excessive *fioriture* of diction. But then Rossetti's style is no doubt formed considerably upon that of the Italian poets. One is glad, however, that, this time, at all events, the right man has "got the porridge!"

In connection with "Morte d'Arthur," I may draw attention again to Lord Tennyson's singular skill in producing a rhythmical response to the sense.

> "The great brand
> Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
> And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch."

Here the anapest instead of the iambic in the last place happily imitates the sword Excalibur's own gyration in the air. Then what admirable wisdom does the legend, opening out into parable, disclose toward the end! When Sir Bedevere laments the passing away of the Round Table, and Arthur's noble peerage, gone down in doubt, distrust, treachery, and blood, after that last great battle in the West, when, amid the death-white mist, "confusion fell even upon Arthur," and "friend slew friend, now knowing whom he slew," how grandly comes the answer of Arthur from the mystic barge, that bears him from the visible world to "some far island valley of Avilion," "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world!" The new commencement of this poem, called in the idyls "The Passing of Arthur," is well worthy of the conclusion. How weirdly expressive is that last battle in the mist of those hours of spiritual perplexity, which overcloud even strongest natures and firmest faith, overshadowing whole communities, when we know not friend from foe, the holiest hope seems doomed to

disappointment, all the great aim and work of life have failed; even loyalty to the highest is no more; the fair polity built laboriously by some god-like spirit dissolves, and "all his realm reels back into the beast;" while men "falling down in death" look up to heaven only to find cloud, and the great-voiced ocean, as it were Destiny without love and without mind, with voice of days of old and days to be, shakes the world, wastes the narrow kingdom, yea, beats upon the faces of our dead! The world-sorrow pierces here through the strain of a poet usually calm and contented. Yet "Arthur shall come again, aye, twice as fair;" for the spirit of man is young immortally.

Who, moreover, has moulded for us phrases of more transcendent dignity, of more felicitous grace and import, phrases, epithets, and lines that have already become memorable household words? More magnificent expression I cannot conceive than that of such poems as "Lucretius," "Tithonus," "Ulysses." These all for versification, language, luminous picture, harmony of structure have never been surpassed. What pregnant brevity, weight, and majesty of expression in the lines where Lucretius characterizes the death of his namesake Lucretia, ending "and from it sprang the commonwealth, which breaks, as I am breaking now!" What masterly power in poetically embodying a materialistic philosophy, congenial to modern science, yet in absolute dramatic keeping with the actual thought of the Roman poet! And at the same time, what tremendous grasp of the terrible conflict of passion with reason,

two natures in one, significant for all epochs! In "Tithonus" and "Ulysses" we find embodiments in high-born verse and illustrious phrase of ideal moods, adventurous peril-affronting Enterprise contemptuously tolerant of tame household virtues in "Ulysses," and the bane of a burdensome immortality, become incapable even of love, in "Tithonus." Any personification more exquisite than that of Aurora in the latter were inconceivable.

M. Taine, in his *Litterature Anglaise*, represents Tennyson as an idyllic poet (a charming one), comfortably settled among his rhododendrons on an English lawn, and viewing the world through the somewhat insular medium of a prosperous, domestic and virtuous member of the English comfortable classes, as also of a man of letters who has fully succeeded. Again, either M. Taine, M. Scherer, or some other writer in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, pictures him, like his own Lady of Shalott, viewing life not as it really is, but reflected in the magic mirror of his own recluse fantasy. Now, whatever measure of truth there may formerly have been in such conceptions, they have assuredly now proved quite one-sided and inadequate. We have only to remember "Maud," the stormier poems of the "Idylls," "Lucretius," "Rizpah," the "Vision of Sin." The recent poem "Rizpah" perhaps marks the high-water mark of the Laureate's genius, and proves henceforward beyond all dispute his wide range, his command over the deeper-toned and stormier themes of human music, as well as over the gentler and more serene. It proves also that the venerable master's hand has not

lost its cunning, rather that he has been even growing until now, having become more profoundly sympathetic with the world of action, and the common growth of human sorrows. "Rizpah" is certainly one of the strongest, most intensely felt, and graphically realized dramatic poems in the language; its pathos is almost overwhelming. There is nothing more tragic in Œdipus, Antigone, or Lear. And what a strong Saxon homespun language has the veteran poet found for these terrible lamentations of half-demented agony, "My Baby! the bones that had sucked me, the bones that had laughed and had cried, Theirs! O no! They are mine not theirs – they had moved in my side." Then the heart-gripping phrase breaking forth ever and anon in the imaginative metaphorical utterance of wild emotion, to which the sons and daughters of the people are often moved, eloquent beyond all eloquence, white-hot from the heart! "Dust to dust low down! let us hide! but they set him so high, that all the ships of the world could stare at him passing by." In this last book of ballads the style bears the same relation to the earlier and daintier that the style of "Samson Agonistes" bears to that of "Comus." "The Revenge" is equally masculine, simple, and sinewy in appropriate strength of expression, a most spirited rendering of a heroic naval action – worthy of a place, as is also the grand ode on the death of Wellington, beside the war odes of Campbell, the "Agincourt" of Drayton, and the "Rule Britannia" of Thomson. The irregular metre of the "Ballad of the Fleet" is most remarkable as a vehicle of the sense, resonant with din

of battle, full-voiced with rising and bursting storm toward the close, like the equally spirited concluding scenes of "Harold," that depict the battle of Senlac. The dramatic characterizations in "Harold" and "Queen Mary" are excellent – Mary, Harold, the Conqueror, the Confessor, Pole, Edith, Stigand, and other subordinate sketches, being striking and successful portraits; while "Harold" is full also of incident and action – a really memorable modern play; but the main motive of "Queen Mary" fails in tragic dignity and interest, though there is about it a certain grim subdued pathos, as of still life, and there are some notable scenes. Tennyson is admirably dramatic in the portrayal of individual moods, of men or women in certain given situations. His plays are fine, and of real historic interest, but not nearly so remarkable as the dramatic poems I have named, as the earlier "St. Simeon Stylites," "Ulysses," "Tithonus," or as the "Northern Farmer," "Cobblers," and "Village Wife," among his later works. These last are perfectly marvellous in their fidelity and humorous photographic realism. That the poet of "Œnone," "The Lotus-eaters," and the Arthur cycle should have done these also is wonderful. The humor of them is delightful, and the rough homely diction perfect. One wishes indeed that the "dramatic fragments" collected by Lamb, like gold-dust out of the rather dreary sand-expanse of Elizabethan playwrights, were so little fragmentary as these. Tennyson's short dramatic poems are quintessential; in a brief glimpse he contrives to reveal the whole man or woman. You would know the old "Northern Farmer,"

with his reproach to "God Amoighty" for not "letting him aloan," and the odious farmer of the new style, with his "Proputty! Proputty!" wherever you met them. But "Dora," the "Grandmother," "Lady Clare," "Edward Gray," "Lord of Burleigh," had long since proved that Tennyson had more than one style at command; that he was master not only of a flamboyant, a Corinthian, but also of a sweet, simple, limpid English, worthy of Goldsmith or Cowper at their best.

Reverting, however, to the question of Tennyson's ability to fathom the darker recesses of our nature, what shall be said of the "Vision of Sin?" For myself I can only avow that, whenever I read it, I feel as if some horrible gray fungus of the grave were growing over my heart, and over all the world around me. As for passion, I know few more profoundly passionate poems than "Love and Duty." It paints with glowing concentrated power the conflict of duty with yearning passionate love, stronger than death. The "Sisters," and "Fatima," too, are fiercely passionate, as also is "Maud." I should be surprised to hear that a lover could read "Maud," and not feel the spring and mid-noon of passionate affection in it to the very core of him, so profoundly felt and gloriously expressed is it by the poet. Much of its power, again, is derived from that peculiarly Tennysonian ability to make Nature herself reflect, redouble, and interpret the human feeling. That is the power also of such supreme lyrics as "Break, break!" and "In the Valley of Cauterets;" of such chaste and consummate rendering of a noble woman's self-sacrifice as "Godiva," wherein

"shameless gargoyles" stare, but "the still air scarcely breathes for fear;" and likewise of "Come into the garden, Maud," an invocation that palpitates with rapture of young love, in which the sweet choir of flowers bear their part, and sing antiphony. The same feeling pervades the delicious passage commencing, "Is that enchanted moon?" and "Go not, happy day." All this may be what Mr. Ruskin condemns as "pathetic" fallacy, but it is inevitable and right. For "in our life doth nature live, ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud." The same Divine Spirit pervades man and nature; she, like ourselves, has her transient moods, as well as her tranquil immovable deeps. In her, too, is a passing as well as an eternal, while we apprehend either according to our own capacity, together with the emotional bias that dominates us at the moment. The vital and permanent in us holds the vital and permanent in her, while the temporary in us mirrors the transitory in her. I cannot think indeed that the more troubled and jarring moods of disharmony and fury are touched with quite the same degree of mastery in "Maud" as are the sunnier and happier. Tennyson hitherto had basked by preference in the brighter regions of his art, and the turbid Byronic vein appeared rather unexpectedly in him. The tame, sleek, daintily-feeding gourmêts of criticism yelped indeed their displeasure at these "hysterics," as they termed the "Sturm und Drang" elements that appeared in "Maud," especially since the poet dared appropriately to body these forth in somewhat harsh, abrupt language, and irregular metres. Such elements, in truth,

hardly seemed so congenial to him as to Byron or Hugo. Yet they were welcome, as proving that our chief poet was not altogether irresponsive to the terrible social problems around him, to the corruptions, and ever-festering vices of the body politic, to the doubt, denial, and grim symptoms of upheaval at his very doors. For on the whole some of us had felt that the Poet-Laureate was almost too well contented with the general framework of things, with the prescriptive rights of long-unchallenged rule, and hoar comfortable custom, especially in England, as though these were in very deed divine, and no subterranean thunder were ever heard, even in this favored isle, threatening Church and State, and the very fabric of society. But the temper of his class and time spoke through him. Did not all men rejoice greatly when Prince Albert opened the Exhibition of 1851; when Cobden and the Manchester school won the battle of free-trade; when steam-engines and the electric telegraph were invented; when Wordsworth's "glorious time" came, and the Revised Code passed into law; when science first told her enchanting fairy tales? Yet the Millennium tarries, and there is an exceeding "bitter cry."

But in "Maud," as indeed before in that fine sonorous chaunt, "Locksley Hall," and later in "Aylmer's Field," the poet's emphasis of appreciation is certainly reserved for the heroes, men who have inherited a strain of gloom, or ancestral disharmony moral and physical, within whom the morbific social humors break forth inevitably into plague-spots; the injustice and

irony of circumstance lash them into revolt, wrath, and madness. Mr. R. H. Hutton, a critic who often writes with ability, but who seems to find a little difficulty in stepping outside the circle of his perhaps rather rigid misconceptions and predilections, makes the surely somewhat strange remark that "'Maud' was written to reprobate hysterics." But I fear – nay, I hope and believe – that we cannot credit the poet with any such virtuous or didactic intention in the present instance, though of course the pregnant lines beginning "Of old sat Freedom on the heights," the royal verses, the recent play so forcibly objected to by Lord Queensberry, together with various allusions to the "red fool-fury of the Seine," and "blind hysterics of the Celt," do indicate a very Conservative and law-abiding attitude. But other lines prove that after all what he mostly deprecates is "the falsehood of extremes," the blind and hasty plunge into measures of mere destruction; for he praises the statesmen who "take occasion by the hand," and make "the bounds of freedom wider yet," and even gracefully anticipates "the golden year."

The same principle on which I have throughout insisted as the key to most of Tennyson's best poetry is the key also to the moving tale "Enoch Arden," where the tropical island around the solitary shipwrecked mariner is gorgeously depicted, the picture being as full-Venetian, and resplendent in color, as those of the "Day-Dream" and "Arabian Nights." But the conclusion of the tale is profoundly moving and pathetic, and relates a noble act of self-renouncement. Parts of "Aylmer's Field," too, are powerful.

And now we come to the "Idylls," around which no little critical controversy has raged. It has been charged against them that they are more picturesque, scenic, and daintily-wrought than human in their interest. But though assuredly the poet's love for the picturesque is in this noble epic – for epic the Idylls in their completed state may be accounted – amply indulged, I think it is seldom to the detriment of the human interest, and the remark I made about one of them, the "Morte d'Arthur," really applies to all. The Arthur cycle is not historical, as "Harold" or "Queen Mary" is, where the style is often simple almost to baldness; the whole of it belongs to the reign of myth, legend, fairy story, and parable. Ornament, image, and picture are as much appropriate here as in Spenser's "Fairy Queen," of which indeed Tennyson's poem often reminds me. But "the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream," are a new revelation, made peculiarly in modern poetry, of true spiritual insight. And this not only throws fresh illuminating light into nature, but deepens also and enlarges our comprehension of man. If nature be known for a symbol and embodiment of the soul's life, by means of their analogies in nature the human heart and mind may be more profoundly understood; while human emotions win a double clearness, or an added sorrow, from their fellowship and association with outward scenes. Nature can only be fathomed through her consanguinity with our own desires, aspirations, and fears, while these again become defined and articulate by means of her related appearances. A poet, then, who

is sensitive to such analogies confers a two-fold benefit upon us.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.