VARIOUS

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Содержание

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THINGS IN EXPECTATION

The passing age is acknowledged to be remarkable in various respects. Great advances in matters of practical science; a vast development of individual enterprise, and general prosperity;—at the same time, strange retardations in things of social concern; a singular want of earnestness in carrying out objects of undeniable utility. Much grandeur, but also much meanness of conception; much wealth, but also much poverty. A struggle between greatness and littleness; intelligence and ignorance; light and darkness. Sometimes we feel as if going forward, sometimes as if backward. One day, we seem as if about to start a hundred years in advance; on the next, all is wrong somewhere, and we feel as if hurriedly retreating to the eighteenth century!

Upon the whole, however, we are ourselves inclined to look at the bright side of affairs; and in doing so, we are not without hope of being able to make some proselytes. Let us just see

what are the prospects of the next twenty years—a long enough space for a man to look forward to in anything else than a dream. War, it is true, may intervene, or some other terrible catastrophe; but we shall not admit this into our hypothesis, which proceeds on the assumption, that although people may wrangle here and there, and here and there fly at each other's throats, still the bulk of civilised mankind will go on tranquilly enough to present no direct barrier to the advancing tide. Here is a list of a few trifles in expectation.

A line of communication by railway from England to the principal cities in India, interrupted only by narrow sea-channels, and these bridged by steamboats. It will then be possible to travel from London to Calcutta in a week.

At the same time, there will be railways to other parts of Asia —Ispahan, Bagdad, Damascus, and Jerusalem. From the last-mentioned city, a line will probably proceed through the land of Edom, to Suez and Cairo; thence to Alexandria. This last portion is already in hand. Think of a railway station in the Valley of Jehoshaphat! As the course of the Jordan presents few 'engineering difficulties,' there might be a single line all the way from Nazareth to the Dead Sea, on which a steamer might take passengers to the neighbourhood of Petra. At a point near the shore of that mysterious sheet of water, a late traveller indicates the spot where Lot's wife was transformed into a pillar of salt. How interesting it would be to make this a stopping-place for tourists to view the adjacent scenery—rocky, wild, and scorched,

as if fresh from the wondrous work of devastation!

It cannot be doubted that in a period much short of twenty years, railways will have penetrated from Berlin northwards to Russia; and therefore a communication of this kind through the whole of Europe, even to the shores of the Indian Ocean, will be among the ordinary things of the day.

As for communication by electric telegraph, where will it not be? Every town of any importance, from Moscow to Madras, will be connected by the marvellous wires. These wires will cross seas; they will reach from London to New York, and from New York to far-western cities—possibly to California. The sending of messages thousands of miles, in the twinkling of an eye, will be an everyday affair. 'Send Dr So-and-so on by the next train,' will be the order despatched by a family in Calcutta, when requiring medical assistance from London; and accordingly the doctor will set off in his travels per express, from the Thames to the banks of the Ganges. Spanning the globe by thought will then be no longer a figure of speech—it will be a reality. Science will do it all.

Long before twenty years—most likely in two or three—a journey round the world by steam may be achieved with comparative ease and at no great expense. Here is the way we shall go: London to Liverpool by rail; Liverpool to Chagres by steamer; Chagres to Panama by rail; Panama to Hong-Kong, touching at St Francisco; Hong-Kong to Sincapore, whence, if you have a fancy, you can diverge to Borneo, Australia, and

New Zealand; Sincapore to Madras, Bombay, Aden, and Suez —the whole of the run to this point from Panama being done by steamer; Suez to Cairo, and Cairo to Alexandria (rail in preparation); lastly, by steamer from Alexandria to England. It is deeply interesting to watch the progress of intrusion on the Pacific. Already, within these few years, its placid surface has been tracked with steam-navigation; of which almost every day brings us accounts of the extension over that beautiful ocean. Long secluded, by difficulty of access from Europe, it is now in the course of being effectually opened up by the railway across the Isthmus of Panama. And the grandeur of this invasion by steam is beyond the reach of imagination. Thousands of islands, clothed in gorgeous yet delicate vegetation, and enjoying the finest climate, lie scattered like diamonds in a sea on which storms never rage—each in itself an earthly paradise. When these islands can be reached at a moderate outlay of time, money, and trouble, may we not expect to see them visited by the curious, and flourishing as seats of civilised existence? There is reason to believe, that the equable climate of many of them would prove suitable for persons affected with the complaints of northern regions; and therefore they may become the Sanatoria of Europe. 'Gone to winter-quarters in the Pacific!'—a pleasant notice this of a health-seeking trip twenty years hence.

It may be reasonably conjectured, that this great and varied extension of journeying round the earth, and in all climates, will not be unaided by new discoveries in motive power. At

present, we speak of steam; but there is every probability of new agents being brought into operation, less bulky and less costly, before twenty years elapse. Even while we write, men of science are painfully poring over the subject, and giving indications that in chemistry or electricity reside powers which may be advantageously pressed into the service of the traveller. Admitting, however, that steam will be retained as the prevailing agent of locomotion, we have grounds for anticipating improvements in its application, which will materially cheapen its use. As regards safety to life and limb, much will be done by better arrangements. In steam-voyaging, we may expect that means will be adopted to avert, or at least assuage, the terrible calamities of conflagration and shipwreck—better acquaintance with the principles of spontaneous combustion, and with the natural law of storms, being of itself a great step towards this important result.

One of the latest wonders in practical science, is a plan for cooling the air in dwellings in hot climates; by which persons residing in India, and other oppressively warm countries, may live habitually in an atmosphere cooled down to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, or the ordinary heat of a pleasant day in England. The very ingenious yet simple means by which this is to be effected, will form the subject of notice in our next number. Meanwhile, we may observe that the discovery is due to Mr C. Piazzi Smyth, astronomer-royal for Scotland; and if perfectly successful in practice, of which there can be no reasonable doubt, it will have

a most important effect in extending European influence over the globe.

The extension of the English language over the civilised world is a curiosity of the age. French, German, Italian, and other continental tongues, seem to have attained their limits as vernaculars. Each is spoken in its own country, and by a few fashionables and scholars beyond. But the language which pushes abroad is the English; and it may be said to be rooting out colonised French and Spanish, and becoming almost everywhere, beyond continental Europe, the spoken and written tongue. Long the Spanish enjoyed the supremacy in Central America; but it has followed the fate of the idle, proud, combative, and good-for-nothing people who carried it across the Atlantic, and is disappearing like snow before the sun of a genial spring. The sooner it is extinct the better. Already the English is the vernacular from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific, wherever civilised settlements are formed. As large a population now speaks this nervous language in America as in Great Britain; and this is only an indication of its progress. By means of a rapidly-increasing population, the English language will in twenty years be spoken by upwards of fifty million Americans; and if to these we add all within the home and colonial dominion, the number speaking it at that period will not be short of a hundred millions. What an amount of letter-writing and printing will this produce! And, after all, how small that amount in comparison with what will be seen a hundred years

hence, when many hundred millions of men are on the earth, English in speech and feeling, whatever may be their local and political distinctions! The gratification which one experiences in contemplating facts of this kind, transcends the power of language. To all appearance, our English tongue is the expression of civil and religious freedom—in fact, of common sense; and its spread over the globe surely indicates the progress of civilised habits and institutions.

In referring to the qualities which are usually found in connection with the prevalence of English as a vernacular, we are led to anticipate prodigious strides in the popularising of literature during the next twenty years. What, also, may we not expect to see done for the extension of epistolary correspondence? Intercourse by letter has advanced only one step of its progress, by the system of inland penny-postage. Another step remains to be effected: the system of carrying letters oversea on the same easy terms. That this Ocean Penny-Postage, as it is termed, will be carried out, at least as regards the larger British colonies, within a period much under twenty years, is exceedingly probable. When this grand achievement is accomplished, there will ensue a stream of intercommunication with distant lands, of which we can at present form no proper conception, and which will go far towards binding all parts of the earth in a general bond of brotherhood.

Such are a few of the things which we may be said to be warranted in looking for within a reasonably short period of

time. Other things, equally if not more contributive to human melioration, are less distinctly in expectation. The political prospects of the continental nations are for the present under a cloud. With all the glitter of artistic and social refinement that surrounds them, the bulk of them appear to have emerged but little beyond the middle ages; and one really begins to inquire, with a kind of pity, whether they have natural capacities for anything better. The near proximity to England of populations so backward in all ideas of civil polity, and so changeful and impulsive in their character, cannot but be detrimental to our hopes of national advancement among ourselves; so true is it that peace and happiness are not more matter of internal conviction than of external circumstances.

Unfortunately, if there be something to lament in the condition of our neighbours, there is also something to humiliate on turning our attention homeward. In a variety of things which are required to give symmetry and safety to the social fabric, there appears to be an almost systematic and hopeless stoppage.

Nearly the whole of the law and equity administration of England seems to be a contrivance to put justice beyond reach; and whether any substantial remedy will be applied during the present generation may be seriously doubted.

It is universally admitted that, for the sake of the public health, interment in London and other large cities should be legally prohibited; and that various other sanitary arrangements in relation to these populous localities should be enforced. Yet,

legislation on this subject seems to be beyond the grasp of statesmen.

The system of poor-laws throughout the United Kingdom is, with the best intentions, a cause of widely-spread demoralisation. These laws, in their operation, are, in fact, a scheme for robbing the industrious to support the idle. But where is the legislator who will attack and remodel this preposterous system?

The prevention of crime is another of our formidable social difficulties. Every one sees how young and petty criminals grow up to be old and great ones. It is admitted that the punishment of crime, after disorderly habits are confirmed, is no sufficient check; and that, if the evil is to be cured, we must go at once to its root. But when or how is this to be done? Again, there is a call for that scarcest of all things—statesmanship.

The bitterness of sectarian contention is another of the things which one feels to be derogatory to an age of general progress. No longer are men permitted to kill each other in vindication of opinion, but how mournful to witness persecution by inuendo, vituperation, and even falsehood. Individuals and classes are seen bombarding each other in vile, abusive, and certainly most unchristian language, all ostensibly in the name of a religion which has for a fundamental principle, an utter repudiation of strife! Whether any amendment is to be looked for in this department of affairs within the next twenty years is exceedingly uncertain.

In the roll of disheartening circumstances in our social

condition, it would be unpardonable to omit the enormities of intemperance, which, though groaned over day after day, remain pretty much what they have been for years; and it is to be feared, that so long as reformers confine themselves to attacking mere symptoms, instead of going to the foundation of the evil—a deficiency of self-respect, growing out of a want of instruction in things proper to be known, and for which the education of the country makes no provision—all will be in vain. How far there will prevail a more enlarged view of this painful subject, is not discoverable from the present temper of parties.

The legislative conservation of ignorance in the humbler classes of the community, to which reference has just been made, is surely a blot on our social economy. It is seemingly easier to girdle the globe with a wire, than to make sure that every child in Her Majesty's dominions shall receive the simplest elements of education. Within the sphere of the mechanic or the chemist, flights beyond the bounds of imagination may be pursued without restraint, and indeed with commendation; but anything in social economics, however philanthropic in design and beneficial in tendency, falls into the category of disputation and obstruction; and, worst of all, education, on which so much depends, is, through the debates of contending 'interests,' kept at a point utterly inadequate for the general enlightenment and wellbeing.

Thus, many matters of moment are either at a stand, or advancing by feeble and hesitating steps, and the distance to be

ultimately reached remains vague and undefinable. At the same time, it is well to be assured that improvements, moral and social, are really in progress; and that, on the whole, society is on the move not in a retrograde direction. Even with a stone tied to its leg, the world, as we have said, contrives 'to get on some way or other.'

THE WRECKER

On a certain part of the coast of Brittany, some years back, a gang of wreckers existed, who were the terror of all sailors. Ever on the look-out for the unfortunate vessels, which were continually dashed upon their inhospitable shores, their delight was in the storm and the blast; they revelled in the howling of fierce wind, and the lightning's glare was to them more delightful than the brightest show of fireworks to the dweller in large towns. Then they came out in droves, hung about the cliffs and rocks, hid in caverns and holes, and waited with intense anxiety for the welcome sight of some gallant ship in distress. So dreadful were the passions lit up in these men by the love of lucre, that they even resorted to infamous stratagems to lure vessels on shore. They would light false beacons; and strive in every way to delude the devoted bark to its destruction.

The village of Montreaux was almost wholly inhabited by men, who made wrecking their profession. It was a collection of miserable huts, built principally out of the broken materials of the various vessels driven on shore; and ostensibly inhabited by fishermen, who, however, rarely resorted to the deep, except when a long continuance of fine weather rendered their usual avocation less prosperous than usual. They consisted in all of about thirty families, wreckers, for the most part, from father to son, and even from mother to daughter—for women joined freely

in the atrocious trade. Atrocious indeed! for murder necessarily accompanied pillage, and it rarely happened that many of the crew and passengers of the unfortunate vessels escaped alive. Bodies were indeed found along the shore; but even if they exhibited the marks of blows, the sea and the rocks got the credit of the deed.

The interior of the huts of the hamlet presented a motley appearance. Their denizens were usually clothed in all kinds of costume—from the peculiar garments of Englishmen, to the turbans, shawls, and petticoats of Lascars, Malays, and others. Cases of spirits, chests of tools, barrels of flour, piles of hams, cheeses, curious arms, spy-glasses, compasses, &c. were thrust into coffers and corners; while all the villagers were in the habit of spending money that certainly was not coined in France. The state of the good people of Montreaux was one of splendid misery; for, with all their ill-gotten wealth, their improvidence and carelessness was such, that they often wanted necessaries—so true is it that ill-got money is never well-spent money. A month of fine weather would almost reduce them to starvation, forcing them to sell to disadvantage whatever they still possessed.

This was not, however, the case with every one of them. A man dwelt among them, and had done so for many years, who seemed a little wiser and more careful than the rest of the community. His name was Pierre Sandeau. He was not a native of the place; but had long been established among them, and had at once shewn himself a worthy brother. He was pitiless, selfish, and

cold. Less fiery than his fellows, he had an amount of caution, which made them feel his value; and a ready wit, which often helped them out of difficulties. His influence was soon felt, and he became a kind of chief. He was at last recognised as the head of the village, and the leader in all marauding expeditions. But the great source of his power was his foresight. He had always either money or provisions at hand, and was always ready to help one of his companions—for a consideration. In times of distress, he bought up all the stock on hand, and even sold on credit. In course of time, he had become rich, had a better house than the rest, and could, if he liked, have retired from business. But he seemed chained to his trade, and never gave any sign of abandoning his disgraceful occupation.

One day, however, he left Montreaux, and stayed away nearly a fortnight. When he came back, he was not alone: he was accompanied by a young and lovely girl—one of those energetic but sweet creatures, whose influence would be supreme with a good man. Madeleine Sandeau was eighteen—tall, well-proportioned, and exceedingly handsome; she was, moreover, educated. Her father had taken her from school, to bring her to his house, which, though so different from what she was used to, she presided over at once with ease and nature. Great was the horror of the young girl when she found out the character of the people around her. She remonstrated freely with her father as to the dreadful nature of his life; but the old man was cold and inexorable. 'He had brought her there to preside over his

solitary house,' he said, 'and not to lecture him:' and Madeleine was forced to be silent.

She saw at once the utter futility of any attempt to civilise or humanise the degraded beings she associated with; and so she took to the children. With great difficulty, she formed a school, and made it her daily labour to instil not only words, but ideas and principles, into the minds of the young, unfledged wreckers. She gained the goodwill of the elders, by nursing both young and old during their hours of sickness, as well as by a slight knowledge of medicine, which she had picked up in a way she never explained, but which always made her silent and sad when she thought of it.

When a black and gloomy night came round, and the whole village was on foot, then Madeleine locked herself in her room, knelt down, and remained in prayer. Now and then she would creep to the window, look out, and interrogate the gloom. She never came forth to greet her father on his return from these expeditions. Her heart revolted even against seeing her parent under such circumstances, and towards morning she went to bed —rarely, however, to sleep.

On one occasion, after a cold and bitter day, the evening came on suddenly. Black clouds covered the horizon as with a funeral pall; the wind began to howl round the hamlet with fearful violence; and Madeleine shuddered, for she knew what was to be expected that night. Scarcely had the gale commenced, when Pierre rose, put on a thick pea-jacket and a sou'-wester, armed himself, and swallowing a glass of brandy, went out. He was the

last to leave the village; all the rest had preceded him. He found them encamped in a narrow gorge, round a huge fire, carefully concealed behind some rocks. It was a cold, windy, wet night; but the wreckers cared not, for the wind blew dead on shore, and gave rich promise of reward for whatever they might endure.

A man lay on the look-out at the mouth of the gorge under a tarpaulin. He had a night-glass in his hand, with which he swept the dark horizon, for some time in vain. But the wind was too good to fail them, and the wreckers had patience.

It was really a terrible night. It was pitchy dark: not a star, nor one glimpse of the pale moon could be distinguished. The wind howled among the rocks, and cast the spray up with violence against the cliffs, which, however, in front of the gorge, gave way to a low sandy beach, forming the usual scene of the wreckers' operations. A current rushed into this narrow bight, and brought on shore numerous spars, boxes, and boats—all things welcome to these lawless men.

'A prize!' cried the look-out suddenly. 'A tall Indiaman is not more than a mile off shore. She is making desperate efforts to clear the point, but she won't do it. She is ours, lads!'

'Give me the glass!' exclaimed Pierre rising. The other gave him the telescope. 'Faith, a splendid brig!' said the patriarch with a sinister smile—'the finest windfall we have had for many a season. Jean, you must out with the cow, or perhaps it may escape us.'

The cow was an abominable invention which Pierre had taught

his comrades. A cow was tied to a stake, and a huge ship's lantern fastened to its horns. This the animal tossed about in the hope of disengaging himself, and in so doing presented the appearance of a ship riding at anchor—all that could be seen on such nights being the moving light. By this means had many a ship been lured to destruction, in the vain hope of finding a safe anchoring-ground. The cow, which was always ready, was brought out, and the trick resorted to, after which the wreckers waited patiently for the result.

The Indiaman was evidently coming on shore, and all the efforts of her gallant crew seemed powerless to save her. Her almost naked masts, and her dark hull, with a couple of lanterns, could now plainly be distinguished as she rose and fell on the waters. Suddenly she seemed to become motionless, though quivering in every fibre, and then a huge wave washed clean over her decks.

'She has struck on the Mistral Rock,' said Pierre. 'Good! she will be in pieces in an hour, and every atom will come on shore!'

'They are putting out the boats,' observed Jean.

The wreckers clutched their weapons. If the crew landed in safety, their hopes were gone. But no crew had for many years landed in safety on that part of the coast: by some mysterious fatality, they had always perished.

Presently, three boats were observed pulling for the shore, and coming towards the sandy beach at the mouth of the gorge. They were evidently crammed full of people, and pulling all for one

point. The boats approached: they were within fifty yards of the shore, and pulling still abreast. They had entered the narrow gut of water leading to the gorge, and were already out of reach of the huge waves, which a minute before threatened to submerge them. The wreckers extinguished the lantern on the cow's horn. There was no chance of the boats being able to put back to sea.

Suddenly a figure pushed through the crowd, and approached the fire near which Pierre Sandeau stood. It appeared to be one of the wreckers; but the voice, that almost whispered in the old man's ear, made him start.

'Father!' said Madeleine, in a low solemn voice, 'what are you about to do?'

'Fool! what want you here?' replied Pierre, amazed and angry at the same time.

'I come to prevent murder! Father, think what you are about to do? Here are fifty fellow-creatures coming in search of life and shelter, and you will give them death!'

'This is no place for you, Madeleine!' cried the other in a husky voice. 'Go home, girl, and let me never see you out again at night!'

'Away, Madeleine!—away!' said the crowd angrily.

'I will not away!—I will stay here to see you do your foul deed—to fix it on my mind, that day and night I may shout in your ears that ye are murderers! Father,' added she solemnly, 'imbrue your hands in the blood of one man to-night, and I am no child of yours. I will beg, I will crawl through the world on my hands, but never more will I eat the bread of crime!'

'Take her away, Pierre,' said one more ruffianly than the rest, 'or you may repent it.'

'Go, girl, go,' whispered Pierre faintly, while the wreckers moved in a body to the shore, where the boats were about to strike.

'Never!' shrieked Madeleine, clinging franticly to her father's clothes.

'Let me go!' cried Pierre, dragging her with him.

At that moment a terrible event interrupted their struggle. A man stood upright in the foremost boat, guiding their progress. Just as they were within two yards of the shore, this man saw the wreckers coming down in a body.

'As I expected!' he cried in a loud ringing voice. 'Fire!—shoot every one of the villains!'

A volley of small arms, within pistol-shot of the body of wreckers, was the unexpected greeting which these men received. A loud and terrible yell shewed the way in which the discharge had told. One-half of the pillagers fell on the stony beach, the other half fled.

Among those who remained was Madeleine. She was kneeling by her father, who had received several shots, and lay on the ground in agony.

'You were right, girl,' he groaned; 'I see it now, when it is too late, and I feel I have deserved it.'

'Better,' sobbed Madeleine, 'better be here, than have imbrued your hands in the blood of one of those miraculously-delivered

sailors.'

'Say you so, woman?' said a loud voice near her. 'Then you are not one of the gang. I knew them of old, as well as their infernal cut-throat gorge, and pulled straight for it, but quite prepared to give them a warm reception.'

Madeleine looked up. She saw around her more than fifty men, three women, and some children. She shuddered again at the thought of the awful massacre which would have occurred but for the sailor's prudence.

'My good girl,' continued the man, 'we are cold, wet, and hungry; can you shew us to some shelter?'

'Yes; but do you bid some of your men carry my father, who, I fear, is dying.'

'It is no more than he merits,' replied the man; 'but for your sake I will have him taken care of.'

'It is what I merit,' said Pierre, in a strange and loud tone; 'but not from your hands, Jacques.'

'Merciful God!' cried the sailor, 'whose voice is that?'

'You will soon know; but do as your sister bids you, and then we can talk more at ease.'

Madeleine cast herself sobbing into her brother's arms, who, gently disengaging her, had a litter prepared for his father, and then, guided by Madeleine, the procession advanced on its way. An armed party marched at the head, and in a quarter of an hour the village of Montreaux was reached. It was entirely deserted. There were fires in the houses, and lamps lit, and even suppers

prepared, but not a living thing. Even the children and old women on hearing the discharge of musketry, had fled to a cave where they sometimes took shelter when the coast-guard was sent in search of them.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.