# VARIOUS

## THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEW, JANUARY 1883

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# Содержание

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## THE AMERICANS:

## A CONVERSATION AND A SPEECH, WITH AN ADDITION

**By HERBERT SPENCER**

## I.—A Conversation: *October 20, 1882*

[The state of Mr. Spencer's health unfortunately not permitting him to give in the form of articles the results of his observations on American society, it is thought useful to reproduce, under his own revision and with some additional remarks, what he has said on the subject; especially as the accounts of it which have appeared in this country are imperfect: reports of the conversation having been

abridged, and the speech being known only by telegraphic summary.

The earlier paragraphs of the conversation, which refer to Mr. Spencer's persistent exclusion of reporters and his objections to the interviewing system, are omitted, as not here concerning the reader. There was no eventual yielding, as has been supposed. It was not to a newspaper-reporter that the opinions which follow were expressed, but to an intimate American friend: the primary purpose being to correct the many misstatements to which the excluded interviewers had given currency; and the occasion being taken for giving utterance to impressions of American affairs.—Ed.]

Has what you have seen answered your expectations?

It has far exceeded them. Such books about America as I had looked into had given me no adequate idea of the immense developments of material civilization which I have everywhere found. The extent, wealth, and magnificence of your cities, and especially the splendour of New York, have altogether astonished me. Though I have not visited the wonder of the West, Chicago, yet some of your minor modern places, such as Cleveland, have sufficiently amazed me by the results of one generation's activity. Occasionally, when I have been in places of some ten thousand inhabitants where the telephone is in general use, I have felt somewhat ashamed of our own unenterprising towns, many of which, of fifty thousand inhabitants and more, make no use of it.

I suppose you recognize in these results the great benefits of

free institutions?

Ah! Now comes one of the inconveniences of interviewing. I have been in the country less than two months, have seen but a relatively small part of it, and but comparatively few people, and yet you wish from me a definite opinion on a difficult question.

Perhaps you will answer, subject to the qualification that you are but giving your first impressions?

Well, with that understanding, I may reply that though the free institutions have been partly the cause, I think they have not been the chief cause. In the first place, the American people have come into possession of an unparalleled fortune—the mineral wealth and the vast tracts of virgin soil producing abundantly with small cost of culture. Manifestly, that alone goes a long way towards producing this enormous prosperity. Then they have profited by inheriting all the arts, appliances, and methods, developed by older societies, while leaving behind the obstructions existing in them. They have been able to pick and choose from the products of all past experience, appropriating the good and rejecting the bad. Then, besides these favours of fortune, there are factors proper to themselves. I perceive in American faces generally a great amount of determination—a kind of "do or die" expression; and this trait of character, joined with a power of work exceeding that of any other people, of course produces an unparalleled rapidity of progress. Once more, there is the inventiveness which, stimulated by the need for economizing labour, has been so wisely fostered. Among us

in England, there are many foolish people who, while thinking that a man who toils with his hands has an equitable claim to the product, and if he has special skill may rightly have the advantage of it, also hold that if a man toils with his brain, perhaps for years, and, uniting genius with perseverance, evolves some valuable invention, the public may rightly claim the benefit. The Americans have been more far-seeing. The enormous museum of patents which I saw at Washington is significant of the attention paid to inventors' claims; and the nation profits immensely from having in this direction (though not in all others) recognized property in mental products. Beyond question, in respect of mechanical appliances the Americans are ahead of all nations. If along with your material progress there went equal progress of a higher kind, there would remain nothing to be wished.

That is an ambiguous qualification. What do you mean by it?

You will understand me when I tell you what I was thinking the other day. After pondering over what I have seen of your vast manufacturing and trading establishments, the rush of traffic in your street-cars and elevated railways, your gigantic hotels and Fifth Avenue palaces, I was suddenly reminded of the Italian Republics of the Middle Ages; and recalled the fact that while there was growing up in them great commercial activity, a development of the arts which made them the envy of Europe, and a building of princely mansions which continue to be the admiration of travellers, their people were gradually losing their

freedom.

Do you mean this as a suggestion that we are doing the like?

It seems to me that you are. You retain the forms of freedom; but, so far as I can gather, there has been a considerable loss of the substance. It is true that those who rule you do not do it by means of retainers armed with swords; but they do it through regiments of men armed with voting papers, who obey the word of command as loyally as did the dependants of the old feudal nobles, and who thus enable their leaders to override the general will, and make the community submit to their exactions as effectually as their prototypes of old. It is doubtless true that each of your citizens votes for the candidate he chooses for this or that office, from President downwards; but his hand is guided by an agency behind which leaves him scarcely any choice. "Use your political power as we tell you, or else throw it away," is the alternative offered to the citizen. The political machinery as it is now worked, has little resemblance to that contemplated at the outset of your political life. Manifestly, those who framed your Constitution never dreamed that twenty thousand citizens would go to the poll led by a "boss." America exemplifies at the other end of the social scale, a change analogous to that which has taken place under sundry despotisms. You know that in Japan, before the recent Revolution, the divine ruler, the Mikado, nominally supreme, was practically a puppet in the hands of his chief minister, the Shogun. Here it seems to me that "the sovereign people" is fast becoming a puppet which moves and

speaks as wire-pullers determine.

Then you think that Republican institutions are a failure?

By no means: I imply no such conclusion. Thirty years ago, when often discussing politics with an English friend, and defending Republican institutions, as I always have done and do still, and when he urged against me the ill-working of such institutions over here, I habitually replied that the Americans got their form of government by a happy accident, not by normal progress, and that they would have to go back before they could go forward. What has since happened seems to me to have justified that view; and what I see now, confirms me in it. America is showing, on a larger scale than ever before, that "paper Constitutions" will not work as they are intended to work. The truth, first recognized by Mackintosh, that Constitutions are not made but grow, which is part of the larger truth that societies, throughout their whole organizations, are not made but grow, at once, when accepted, disposes of the notion that you can work as you hope any artificially-devised system of government. It becomes an inference that if your political structure has been manufactured and not grown, it will forthwith begin to grow into something different from that intended—something in harmony with the natures of the citizens, and the conditions under which the society exists. And it evidently has been so with you. Within the forms of your Constitution there has grown up this organization of professional politicians altogether uncontemplated at the outset, which has become in large measure

the ruling power.

But will not education and the diffusion of political knowledge fit men for free institutions?

No. It is essentially a question of character, and only in a secondary degree a question of knowledge. But for the universal delusion about education as a panacea for political evils, this would have been made sufficiently clear by the evidence daily disclosed in your papers. Are not the men who officer and control your Federal, your State, and your Municipal organizations —who manipulate your caucuses and conventions, and run your partisan campaigns—all educated men? And has their education prevented them from engaging in, or permitting, or condoning, the briberies, lobbyings, and other corrupt methods which vitiate the actions of your administrations? Perhaps party newspapers exaggerate these things; but what am I to make of the testimony of your civil service reformers—men of all parties? If I understand the matter aright, they are attacking, as vicious and dangerous, a system which has grown up under the natural spontaneous working of your free institutions—are exposing vices which education has proved powerless to prevent?

Of course, ambitious and unscrupulous men will secure the offices, and education will aid them in their selfish purposes. But would not those purposes be thwarted, and better Government secured, by raising the standard of knowledge among the people at large?

Very little. The current theory is that if the young are taught

what is right, and the reasons why it is right, they will do what is right when they grow up. But considering what religious teachers have been doing these two thousand years, it seems to me that all history is against the conclusion, as much as is the conduct of these well-educated citizens I have referred to; and I do not see why you expect better results among the masses. Personal interests will sway the men in the ranks, as they sway the men above them; and the education which fails to make the last consult public good rather than private good, will fail to make the first do it. The benefits of political purity are so general and remote, and the profit to each individual is so inconspicuous, that the common citizen, educate him as you like, will habitually occupy himself with his personal affairs, and hold it not worth his while to fight against each abuse as soon as it appears. Not lack of information, but lack of certain moral sentiment, is the root of the evil.

You mean that people have not a sufficient sense of public duty?

Well, that is one way of putting it; but there is a more specific way. Probably it will surprise you if I say the American has not, I think, a sufficiently quick sense of his own claims, and, at the same time, as a necessary consequence, not a sufficiently quick sense of the claims of others—for the two traits are organically related. I observe that they tolerate various small interferences and dictations which Englishmen are prone to resist. I am told that the English are remarked on for their tendency to grumble

in such cases; and I have no doubt it is true.

Do you think it worth while for people to make themselves disagreeable by resenting every trifling aggression? We Americans think it involves too much loss of time and temper, and doesn't pay.

Exactly; that is what I mean by character. It is this easy-going readiness to permit small trespasses, because it would be troublesome or profitless or unpopular to oppose them, which leads to the habit of acquiescence in wrong, and the decay of free institutions. Free institutions can be maintained only by citizens, each of whom is instant to oppose every illegitimate act, every assumption of supremacy, every official excess of power, however trivial it may seem. As Hamlet says, there is such a thing as "greatly to find quarrel in a straw," when the straw implies a principle. If, as you say of the American, he pauses to consider whether he can afford the time and trouble—whether it will pay, corruption is sure to creep in. All these lapses from higher to lower forms begin in trifling ways, and it is only by incessant watchfulness that they can be prevented. As one of your early statesmen said—"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." But it is far less against foreign aggressions upon national liberty that this vigilance is required, than against the insidious growth of domestic interferences with personal liberty. In some private administrations which I have been concerned with, I have often insisted that instead of assuming, as people usually do, that things are going right until it is proved that they are going wrong, the

proper course is to assume that they are going wrong until it is proved that they are going right. You will find continually that private corporations, such as joint-stock banking companies, come to grief from not acting on this principle; and what holds of these small and simple private administrations holds still more of the great and complex public administrations. People are taught, and I suppose believe, that the "heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and yet, strangely enough, believing this, they place implicit trust in those they appoint to this or that function. I do not think so ill of human nature; but, on the other hand, I do not think so well of human nature as to believe it will go straight without being watched.

You hinted that while Americans do not assert their own individualities sufficiently in small matters, they, reciprocally, do not sufficiently respect the individualities of others.

Did I? Here, then, comes another of the inconveniences of interviewing. I should have kept this opinion to myself if you had asked me no questions; and now I must either say what I do not think, which I cannot, or I must refuse to answer, which, perhaps, will be taken to mean more than I intend, or I must specify, at the risk of giving offence. As the least evil, I suppose I must do the last. The trait I refer to comes out in various ways, small and great. It is shown by the disrespectful manner in which individuals are dealt with in your journals—the placarding of public men in sensational headings, the dragging of private people and their affairs into print. There seems to be a notion that

the public have a right to intrude on private life as far as they like; and this I take to be a kind of moral trespassing. Then, in a larger way, the trait is seen in this damaging of private property by your elevated railways without making compensation; and it is again seen in the doings of railway autocrats, not only when overriding the rights of shareholders, but in dominating over courts of justice and State governments. The fact is that free institutions can be properly worked only by men, each of whom is jealous of his own rights, and also sympathetically jealous of the rights of others—who will neither himself aggress on his neighbours in small things or great, nor tolerate aggression on them by others. The Republican form of government is the highest form of government; but because of this it requires the highest type of human nature—a type nowhere at present existing. We have not grown up to it; nor have you.

But we thought, Mr. Spencer, you were in favour of free government in the sense of relaxed restraints, and letting men and things very much alone, or what is called *laissez faire*?

That is a persistent misunderstanding of my opponents. Everywhere, along with the reprobation of Government intrusion into various spheres where private activities should be left to themselves, I have contended that in its special sphere, the maintenance of equitable relations among citizens, governmental action should be extended and elaborated.

To return to your various criticisms, must I then understand that you think unfavourably of our future?

No one can form anything more than vague and general conclusions respecting your future. The factors are too numerous, too vast, too far beyond measure in their quantities and intensities. The world has never before seen social phenomena at all comparable with those presented in the United States. A society spreading over enormous tracts, while still preserving its political continuity, is a new thing. This progressive incorporation of vast bodies of immigrants of various bloods, has never occurred on such a scale before. Large empires, composed of different peoples, have, in previous cases, been formed by conquest and annexation. Then your immense *plexus* of railways and telegraphs tends to consolidate this vast aggregate of States in a way that no such aggregate has ever before been consolidated. And there are many minor co-operating causes, unlike those hitherto known. No one can say how it is all going to work out. That there will come hereafter troubles of various kinds, and very grave ones, seems highly probable; but all nations have had, and will have, their troubles. Already you have triumphed over one great trouble, and may reasonably hope to triumph over others. It may, I think, be concluded that, both because of its size and the heterogeneity of its components, the American nation will be a long time in evolving its ultimate form, but that its ultimate form will be high. One great result is, I think, tolerably clear. From biological truths it is to be inferred that the eventual mixture of the allied varieties of the Aryan race forming the population, will produce a finer type of man than has hitherto existed; and

a type of man more plastic, more adaptable, more capable of undergoing the modifications needful for complete social life. I think that whatever difficulties they may have to surmount, and whatever tribulations they may have to pass through, the Americans may reasonably look forward to a time when they will have produced a civilization grander than any the world has known.

## II.—A Speech:

### Delivered on the occasion of a Complimentary Dinner in New York, on November 9, 1882

Mr. President and Gentlemen:—Along with your kindness there comes to me a great unkindness from Fate; for, now that, above all times in my life, I need full command of what powers of speech I possess, disturbed health so threatens to interfere with them that I fear I shall very inadequately express myself. Any failure in my response you must please ascribe, in part at least, to a greatly disordered nervous system. Regarding you as representing Americans at large, I feel that the occasion is one on which arrears of thanks are due. I ought to begin with the time, some two-and-twenty years ago, when my highly valued friend Professor Youmans, making efforts to diffuse my books here, interested on their behalf the Messrs. Appleton, who have

ever treated me so honourably and so handsomely; and I ought to detail from that time onward the various marks and acts of sympathy by which I have been encouraged in a struggle which was for many years disheartening. But, intimating thus briefly my general indebtedness to my numerous friends, most of them unknown, on this side of the Atlantic, I must name more especially the many attentions and proffered hospitalities met with during my late tour, as well as, lastly and chiefly, this marked expression of the sympathies and good wishes which many of you have travelled so far to give, at great cost of that time which is so precious to the American. I believe I may truly say, that the better health which you have so cordially wished me, will be in a measure furthered by the wish; since all pleasurable emotion is conducive to health, and, as you will fully believe, the remembrance of this event will ever continue to be a source of pleasurable emotion, exceeded by few, if any, of my remembrances.

And now that I have thanked you, sincerely though too briefly, I am going to find fault with you. Already, in some remarks drawn from me respecting American affairs and American character, I have passed criticisms, which have been accepted far more good-humouredly than I could have reasonably expected; and it seems strange that I should now propose again to transgress. However, the fault I have to comment upon is one which most will scarcely regard as a fault. It seems to me that in one respect Americans have diverged too widely from

savages, I do not mean to say that they are in general unduly civilized. Throughout large parts of the population, even in long-settled regions, there is no excess of those virtues needed for the maintenance of social harmony. Especially out in the West, men's dealings do not yet betray too much of the "sweetness and light" which we are told distinguish the cultured man from the barbarian. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which my assertion is true. You know that the primitive man lacks power of application. Spurred by hunger, by danger, by revenge, he can exert himself energetically for a time; but his energy is spasmodic. Monotonous daily toil is impossible to him. It is otherwise with the more developed man. The stern discipline of social life has gradually increased the aptitude for persistent industry; until, among us, and still more among you, work has become with many a passion. This contrast of nature has another aspect. The savage thinks only of present satisfactions, and leaves future satisfactions uncared for. Contrariwise, the American, eagerly pursuing a future good, almost ignores what good the passing day offers him; and when the future good is gained, he neglects that while striving for some still remoter good.

What I have seen and heard during my stay among you has forced on me the belief that this slow change from habitual inertness to persistent activity has reached an extreme from which there must begin a counterchange—a reaction. Everywhere I have been struck with the number of faces which told in strong lines of the burdens that had to be borne. I have

been struck, too, with the large proportion of gray-haired men; and inquiries have brought out the fact, that with you the hair commonly begins to turn some ten years earlier than with us. Moreover, in every circle I have met men who had themselves suffered from nervous collapse due to stress of business, or named friends who had either killed themselves by overwork, or had been permanently incapacitated, or had wasted long periods in endeavours to recover health. I do but echo the opinion of all the observant persons I have spoken to, that immense injury is being done by this high-pressure life—the physique is being undermined. That subtle thinker and poet whom you have lately had to mourn, Emerson, says, in his essay on the Gentleman, that the first requisite is that he shall be a good animal. The requisite is a general one—it extends to the man, to the father, to the citizen. We hear a great deal about "the vile body;" and many are encouraged by the phrase to transgress the laws of health. But Nature quietly suppresses those who treat thus disrespectfully one of her highest products, and leaves the world to be peopled by the descendants of those who are not so foolish.

Beyond these immediate mischiefs there are remoter mischiefs. Exclusive devotion to work has the result that amusements cease to please; and, when relaxation becomes imperative, life becomes dreary from lack of its sole interest —the interest in business. The remark current in England that, when the American travels, his aim is to do the greatest amount of sight-seeing in the shortest time, I find current here also: it is

recognized that the satisfaction of getting on devours nearly all other satisfactions. When recently at Niagara, which gave us a whole week's pleasure, I learned from the landlord of the hotel that most Americans come one day and go away the next. Old Froissart, who said of the English of his day that "they take their pleasures sadly after their fashion," would doubtless, if he lived now, say of the Americans that they take their pleasures hurriedly after their fashion. In large measure with us, and still more with you, there is not that abandonment to the moment which is requisite for full enjoyment; and this abandonment is prevented by the ever-present sense of multitudinous responsibilities. So that, beyond the serious physical mischief caused by overwork, there is the further mischief that it destroys what value there would otherwise be in the leisure part of life.

Nor do the evils end here. There is the injury to posterity. Damaged constitutions reappear in children, and entail on them far more of ill than great fortunes yield them of good. When life has been duly rationalized by science, it will be seen that among a man's duties, care of the body is imperative; not only out of regard for personal welfare, but also out of regard for descendants. His constitution will be considered as an entailed estate, which he ought to pass on uninjured, if not improved, to those who follow; and it will be held that millions bequeathed by him will not compensate for feeble health and decreased ability to enjoy life. Once more, there is the injury to fellow-citizens, taking the shape of undue disregard of competitors. I hear that

a great trader among you deliberately endeavoured to crush out every one whose business competed with his own; and manifestly the man who, making himself a slave to accumulation, absorbs an inordinate share of the trade or profession he is engaged in, makes life harder for all others engaged in it, and excludes from it many who might otherwise gain competencies. Thus, besides the egoistic motive, there are two altruistic motives which should deter from this excess in work.

The truth is, there needs a revised ideal of life. Look back through the past, or look abroad through the present, and we find that the ideal of life is variable, and depends on social conditions. Every one knows that to be a successful warrior was the highest aim among all ancient peoples of note, as it is still among many barbarous peoples. When we remember that in the Norseman's heaven the time was to be passed in daily battles, with magical healing of wounds, we see how deeply rooted may become the conception that fighting is man's proper business, and that industry is fit only for slaves and people of low degree. That is to say, when the chronic struggles of races necessitate perpetual wars, there is evolved an ideal of life adapted to the requirements. We have changed all that in modern civilized societies; especially in England, and still more in America. With the decline of militant activity, and the growth of industrial activity, the occupations once disgraceful have become honourable. The duty to work has taken the place of the duty to fight; and in the one case, as in the other, the ideal

of life has become so well established that scarcely any dream of questioning it. Practically, business has been substituted for war as the purpose of existence.

Is this modern ideal to survive throughout the future? I think not. While all other things undergo continuous change, it is impossible that ideals should remain fixed. The ancient ideal was appropriate to the ages of conquest by man over man, and spread of the strongest races. The modern ideal is appropriate to ages in which conquest of the earth and subjection of the powers of Nature to human use, is the predominant need. But hereafter, when both these ends have in the main been achieved, the ideal formed will probably differ considerably from the present one. May we not foresee the nature of the difference? I think we may. Some twenty years ago, a good friend of mine, and a good friend of yours too, though you never saw him, John Stuart Mill, delivered at St. Andrews an inaugural address on the occasion of his appointment to the Lord Rectorship. It contained much to be admired, as did all he wrote. There ran through it, however, the tacit assumption that life is for learning and working. I felt at the time that I should have liked to take up the opposite thesis. I should have liked to contend that life is not for learning, nor is life for working, but learning and working are for life. The primary use of knowledge is for such guidance of conduct under all circumstances as shall make living complete. All other uses of knowledge are secondary. It scarcely needs saying that the primary use of work is that of supplying the materials and aids to

living completely; and that any other uses of work are secondary. But in men's conceptions the secondary has in great measure usurped the place of the primary. The apostle of culture as it is commonly conceived, Mr. Matthew Arnold, makes little or no reference to the fact that the first use of knowledge is the right ordering of all actions; and Mr. Carlyle, who is a good exponent of current ideas about work, insists on its virtues for quite other reasons than that it achieves sustentation. We may trace everywhere in human affairs a tendency to transform the means into the end. All see that the miser does this when, making the accumulation of money his sole satisfaction, he forgets that money is of value only to purchase satisfactions. But it is less commonly seen that the like is true of the work by which the money is accumulated—that industry too, bodily or mental, is but a means; and that it is as irrational to pursue it to the exclusion of that complete living it subserves, as it is for the miser to accumulate money and make no use of it. Hereafter, when this age of active material progress has yielded mankind its benefits, there will, I think, come a better adjustment of labour and enjoyment. Among reasons for thinking this, there is the reason that the process of evolution throughout the organic world at large, brings an increasing surplus of energies that are not absorbed in fulfilling material needs, and points to a still larger surplus for the humanity of the future. And there are other reasons, which I must pass over. In brief, I may say that we have had somewhat too much of "the gospel of work." It is time to

preach the gospel of relaxation.

This is a very unconventional after-dinner speech. Especially it will be thought strange that in returning thanks I should deliver something very much like a homily. But I have thought I could not better convey my thanks than by the expression of a sympathy which issues in a fear. If, as I gather, this intemperance in work affects more especially the Anglo-American part of the population—if there results an undermining of the physique, not only in adults, but also in the young, who, as I learn from your daily journals, are also being injured by overwork—if the ultimate consequence should be a dwindling away of those among you who are the inheritors of free institutions and best adapted to them; then there will come a further difficulty in the working out of that great future which lies before the American nation. To my anxiety on this account you must please ascribe the unusual character of my remarks.

And now I must bid you farewell. When I sail by the *Germanic* on Saturday, I shall bear with me pleasant remembrances of my intercourse with many Americans, joined with regrets that my state of health has prevented me from seeing a larger number.

[A few words may fitly be added respecting the causes of this over-activity in American life—causes which may be identified as having in recent times partially operated among ourselves, and as having wrought kindred, though less marked, effects. It is the more worth while to trace the genesis of this undue absorption of the energies in work, since it well serves to illustrate the

general truth which should be ever present to all legislators and politicians, that the indirect and unforeseen results of any cause affecting a society are frequently, if not habitually, greater and more important than the direct and foreseen results.

This high pressure under which Americans exist, and which is most intense in places like Chicago, where the prosperity and rate of growth are greatest, is seen by many intelligent Americans themselves to be an indirect result of their free institutions and the absence of those class-distinctions and restraints existing in older communities. A society in which the man who dies a millionaire is so often one who commenced life in poverty, and in which (to paraphrase a French saying concerning the soldier) every news-boy carries a president's seal in his bag, is, by consequence, a society in which all are subject to a stress of competition for wealth and honour, greater than can exist in a society whose members are nearly all prevented from rising out of the ranks in which they were born, and have but remote possibilities of acquiring fortunes. In those European societies which have in great measure preserved their old types of structure (as in our own society up to the time when the great development of industrialism began to open ever-multiplying careers for the producing and distributing classes) there is so little chance of overcoming the obstacles to any great rise in position or possessions, that nearly all have to be content with their places: entertaining little or no thought of bettering themselves. A manifest concomitant is that, fulfilling, with such efficiency as a

moderate competition requires, the daily tasks of their respective situations, the majority become habituated to making the best of such pleasures as their lot affords, during whatever leisure they get. But it is otherwise where an immense growth of trade multiplies greatly the chances of success to the enterprising; and still more is it otherwise where class-restrictions are partially removed or wholly absent. Not only are more energy and thought put into the time daily occupied in work, but the leisure comes to be trenched upon, either literally by abridgment, or else by anxieties concerning business. Clearly, the larger the number who, under such conditions, acquire property, or achieve higher positions, or both, the sharper is the spur to the rest. A raised standard of activity establishes itself and goes on rising. Public applause given to the successful, becoming in communities thus circumstanced the most familiar kind of public applause, increases continually the stimulus to action. The struggle grows more and more strenuous, and there comes an increasing dread of failure—a dread of being "left," as the Americans say: a significant word, since it is suggestive of a race in which the harder any one runs, the harder others have to run to keep up with him—a word suggestive of that breathless haste with which each passes from a success gained to the pursuit of a further success. And on contrasting the English of to-day with the English of a century ago, we may see how, in a considerable measure, the like causes have entailed here kindred results.

Even those who are not directly spurred on by this intensified

struggle for wealth and honour, are indirectly spurred on by it. For one of its effects is to raise the standard of living, and eventually to increase the average rate of expenditure for all. Partly for personal enjoyment, but much more for the display which brings admiration, those who acquire fortunes distinguish themselves by luxurious habits. The more numerous they become, the keener becomes the competition for that kind of public attention given to those who make themselves conspicuous by great expenditure. The competition spreads downwards step by step; until, to be "respectable," those having relatively small means feel obliged to spend more on houses, furniture, dress, and food; and are obliged to work the harder to get the requisite larger income. This process of causation is manifest enough among ourselves; and it is still more manifest in America, where the extravagance in style of living is greater than here.

Thus, though it seems beyond doubt that the removal of all political and social barriers, and the giving to each man an unimpeded career, must be purely beneficial; yet there is (at first) a considerable set-off from the benefits. Among those who in older communities have by laborious lives gained distinction, some may be heard privately to confess that "the game is not worth the candle;" and when they hear of others who wish to tread in their steps, shake their heads and say—"If they only knew!" Without accepting in full so pessimistic an estimate of success, we must still say that very generally the cost of

the candle deducts largely from the gain of the game. That which in these exceptional cases holds among ourselves, holds more generally in America. An intensified life, which may be summed up as—great labour, great profit, great expenditure—has for its concomitant a wear and tear which considerably diminishes in one direction the good gained in another. Added together, the daily strain through many hours and the anxieties occupying many other hours—the occupation of consciousness by feelings that are either indifferent or painful, leaving relatively little time for occupation of it by pleasurable feelings—tend to lower its level more than its level is raised by the gratifications of achievement and the accompanying benefits. So that it may, and in many cases does, result that diminished happiness goes along with increased prosperity. Unquestionably, as long as order is fairly maintained, that absence of political and social restraints which gives free scope to the struggles for profit and honour, conduces greatly to material advance of the society—develops the industrial arts, extends and improves the business organizations, augments the wealth; but that it raises the value of individual life, as measured by the average state of its feeling, by no means follows. That it will do so eventually, is certain; but that it does so now seems, to say the least, very doubtful.

The truth is that a society and its members act and react in such wise that while, on the one hand, the nature of the society is determined by the natures of its members; on the other hand, the activities of its members (and presently their natures) are

redetermined by the needs of the society, as these alter: change in either entails change in the other. It is an obvious implication that, to a great extent, the life of a society so sways the wills of its members as to turn them to its ends. That which is manifest during the militant stage, when the social aggregate coerces its units into co-operation for defence, and sacrifices many of their lives for its corporate preservation, holds under another form during the industrial stage, as we at present know it. Though the co-operation of citizens is now voluntary instead of compulsory; yet the social forces impel them to achieve social ends while apparently achieving only their own ends. The man who, carrying out an invention, thinks only of private welfare to be thereby secured, is in far larger measure working for public welfare: instance the contrast between the fortune made by Watt and the wealth which the steam-engine has given to mankind. He who utilizes a new material, improves a method of production, or introduces a better way of carrying on business, and does this for the purpose of distancing competitors, gains for himself little compared with that which he gains for the community by facilitating the lives of all. Either unknowingly or in spite of themselves, Nature leads men by purely personal motives to fulfil her ends: Nature being one of our expressions for the Ultimate Cause of things, and the end, remote when not proximate, being the highest form of human life.

Hence no argument, however cogent, can be expected to produce much effect: only here and there one may be influenced.

As in an actively militant stage of society it is impossible to make many believe that there is any glory preferable to that of killing enemies; so, where rapid material growth is going on, and affords unlimited scope for the energies of all, little can be done by insisting that life has higher uses than work and accumulation. While among the most powerful of feelings continue to be the desire for public applause and dread of public censure—while the anxiety to achieve distinction, now by conquering enemies, now by beating competitors, continues predominant—while the fear of public reprobation affects men more than the fear of divine vengeance (as witness the long survival of duelling in Christian societies); this excess of work which ambition prompts, seems likely to continue with but small qualification. The eagerness for the honour accorded to success, first in war and then in commerce, has been indispensable as a means to peopling the Earth with the higher types of man, and the subjugation of its surface and its forces to human use. Ambition may fitly come to bear a smaller ratio to other motives, when the working out of these needs is approaching completeness; and when also, by consequence, the scope for satisfying ambition is diminishing. Those who draw the obvious corollaries from the doctrine of Evolution—those who believe that the process of modification upon modification which has brought life to its present height must raise it still higher, will anticipate that "the last infirmity of noble minds" will in the distant future slowly decrease. As the sphere for achievement becomes smaller, the

desire for applause will lose that predominance which it now has. A better ideal of life may simultaneously come to prevail. When there is fully recognized the truth that moral beauty is higher than intellectual power—when the wish to be admired is in large measure replaced by the wish to be loved; that strife for distinction which the present phase of civilization shows us will be greatly moderated. Along with other benefits may then come a rational proportioning of work and relaxation; and the relative claims of to-day and to-morrow may be properly balanced.—H. S.]

# UNIVERSITY ELECTIONS

The late election for the University of Cambridge had an ending which may well set many of us a-thinking. That Mr. Raikes should have been chosen by an overwhelming majority rather than Mr. Stuart means a good deal more than a mere party victory and party defeat. Combined with several elections of late years at Oxford, it is enough to make us all turn over in our minds the question of University representation in general. The facts taken altogether look as if those constituencies to which we might naturally look for the return of members of more than average personal eminence were committed, in the choice of their representatives, not only to one particular political party, but to absolute indifference to every claim beyond membership of that particular party. It would be unreasonable to expect a conscientious Conservative to vote for a Liberal candidate; but one might expect any party, in choosing candidates for such constituencies as the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, to put forward its best men. And we cannot, after all, think so ill of the great Conservative party as to believe that the present representatives of Oxford and Cambridge are its best men. We ought indeed not to forget that, whatever Mr. Beresford-Hope has since shown himself, he was brought forward, partly at least, as a man of scholarship and intellectual tastes, and that he received many Liberal votes in the belief that he was less

widely removed from Liberal ideas than another Conservative candidate. This would seem to have been the last trace of an old tradition, the last faint glimmering of the belief that the representative of an University should have something about him specially appropriate to the representation of an University. In Oxford that tradition had, on the Conservative side, given way earlier. Another tradition gave way with it, one which I at least did not regret, the tradition that an University seat should be a seat for life. It sounded degrading when a proposer of Mr. Gladstone stooped to appeal to the doctrine, "ut semel electus semper eligatur." But be that rule wise or foolish, it was on the Conservative side that it was broken down. It gave way to the rule that Mr. Gladstone was always to be opposed, and that it did not matter who could be got to oppose him. Again I cannot believe that the Conservative ranks did not contain better men than the grotesque succession of nobodies by whom Mr. Gladstone was opposed. But in the course of those elections the rule was established at Oxford, and it now seems to be adopted at Cambridge, that anybody will do to be an University member, provided only he is an unflinching supporter of the party which, as recent elections show, still keeps a large majority in both Universities.

Mr. Gladstone was very nearly the ideal University member. I say "very nearly," because to my mind the absolutely ideal state of things would be if the Universities could catch such men as Mr. Gladstone young, and could bring them into Parliament

as their own, before they had been laid hold of by any other constituency. The late jubilee of Mr. Gladstone's political life ought to have been the jubilee of his election, not for Newark but for Oxford. The Universities should choose men who have already shown themselves to be scholars and who bid fair one day to be statesmen. I am not sure about the policy of bringing forward actual University officials. There is sure to be a cry against them, and it is not clear that they are the best choice in themselves. It may be as well however to remember that the example was set, though in rather an amusing shape, by the Conservatives themselves. Dr. Marsham, late Warden of Merton, who was brought forward thirty years ago in opposition to Mr. Gladstone, did not belong to exactly the same class of academical officials as Professor Stuart and Professor H. J. S. Smith; still, as an academical official of some kind, he had something in common with them, as distinguished from either Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Raikes. At the last elections both for Oxford and Cambridge, the Liberal candidate was an actual Professor. Mr. Stuart indeed is much more than a mere professor; he has shown his capacity for practical work of various kinds. But I could not but look on the Oxford choice of 1878 as unlucky. Mr. H. J. S. Smith was brought forward purely on the ground of "distinction," distinction, it would seem, so great that moral right and wrong went for nothing by its side. Just at that moment right and wrong were emphatically weighing in the balance; it was the very crisis of the fate of South-Eastern Europe. But we

were told that Mr. Smith's candidature had "no reference to the Eastern Question;" he was, we were told, supported by men who took opposite views on that matter. That is to say, when the most distinct question of right and wrong that ever was put before any people was at that moment placed before our eyes, we were asked to put away all thought of moral right and moral duty in the presence of the long string of letters after Mr. Smith's name. Better, I should have said, to choose, even for the University, a man who could not read or write, if he had been ready to strive heart and soul for justice and freedom alongside of Mr. Gladstone and the Duke of Argyll. Yet no such hard choice was laid upon us. There was a man standing by, another bearer of the same great Teutonic name, not young indeed in years, but who might have gone fresh to Parliament as the University's own choice, one whom it would have been worth some effort to keep within the bounds of England and of Europe, one who to a list of "distinctions" at least as long as that of the candidate actually chosen, added the noblest distinction of all, that of having been, through a life of varied experiences, the consistent and unflinching champion of moral righteousness. I do not know that Mr. Goldwin Smith would have had a greater chance—perhaps he might have had even less chance—of election than Mr. H. J. S. Smith. But there would have been greater comfort in manly defeat in open strife under such a leader than there could be in a defeat which it had been vainly hoped to escape by a compromise on the great moral question of the moment. The

Oxford Liberals lost, and, I must say, they deserved to lose. It is a great gain for an University candidate to be "distinguished;" but one would think that it would commonly be possible to find a "distinguished" candidate who is at once "distinguished" and something better as well.

Still at Oxford in 1878 Mr. H. J. S. Smith was the accepted candidate of the Liberal party, and in that character he underwent a crushing defeat. It may be, or it may not be, that a candidate of more decided principles would have gained more votes than the actual candidate gained; he certainly would not have gained enough to turn the scale. Mr. Smith was defeated by a candidate who was utterly undistinguished; and who, instead of simply halting, like Mr. Smith, between right and wrong, was definitely committed to the cause of wrong. Mr. Talbot became member for the University on the same principle on which Mr. Gladstone's successive opponents were brought forward, the principle that anybody will do, if only he be a Tory. Any stick is good enough to beat the Liberal dog. When Toryism showed itself in its darkest colours, when it meant the rule of Lord Beaconsfield, and when the rule of Lord Beaconsfield meant, before all things, the strengthening of the power of evil in South-Eastern Europe, a constituency, in which the clerical vote is said to be decisive, preferred, by an overwhelming majority, the candidate who most distinctly represented the bondage of Christian nations under the yoke of the misbeliever. It is quite possible that crowds voted at the Oxford election, as

at other elections, in support of Lord Beaconsfield's ministry, in utter indifference or in utter ignorance as to what support of Lord Beaconsfield's ministry meant. The Conservative party was conventionally supposed to be the Church party; and so men calling themselves Christians, calling themselves clergymen, rushed, with the cry of "Church" in their mouths, to do all that in them lay for the sworn allies of Antichrist.

A constituency which could return a supporter of Lord Beaconsfield in 1878 is hopelessly Tory—hopelessly that is, till a new generation shall have supplanted the existing one. It is Conservative, not in the sense of acting on any intelligible Conservative principle, but in the sense of supporting anything that calls itself Conservative, be its principles what they may. No measure could be less really Conservative, none could more be opposed to the feelings and traditions of a large part of the clergy, than the Public Worship Act. A large part of the clergy grumbled at it; some voted for the Liberals in 1880 on the strength of it; but it did not arouse a discontent so strong or so general as seriously to deprive the so-called Conservative party of clerical support. It was perhaps unreasonable to expect much change in the older class of electors, clerical or lay; but the results of the two elections, of Oxford in 1878 and of Cambridge in 1882, are disappointing in another way. The Universities, and therewith the University constituencies, have largely increased within the last few years. The number of electors at Oxford is far greater than it was in the days of Mr. Gladstone's elections;

at Cambridge the increase must be greater still since any earlier election at which a poll was taken. And it was certainly hoped that the increase would have been altogether favourable to the Liberal side. Among the new electors there was a large lay element, a certain Nonconformist element; even among the clergy a party was known to be growing who had found the way to reconcile strict Churchmanship with Liberal politics, and whose Christianity was not of the kind which is satisfied to walk hand-in-hand with the Turk. In these different ways it was only reasonable to expect that the result of an University election was now likely to be, if not the actual return of a Liberal member, yet at least a poll which should show that the Conservative majority was largely diminished. Instead of this, both at Oxford in 1878 and at Cambridge in 1882 the Conservative candidate comes in by a majority which is simply overwhelming. It must however be remembered that it would be misleading to compare the poll at either of these elections with the polls at any of Mr. Gladstone's contests. The issue was different in the two cases. The elections of 1878 and 1880 were far more distinctly trials between political parties than the several elections in which Mr. Gladstone succeeded or the final one in which he failed. First of all, there is a vast difference between Mr. Gladstone and any other candidate. This difference indeed cuts both ways. The foremost man in the land is at once the best loved and the best hated man in the land. Neither Mr. Smith nor Mr. Stuart nor any other candidate that could be thought of could call forth either the

depth of enthusiasm in his supporters or the depth of antagonism in his opponents which is called forth by every public appearance of Mr. Gladstone. No other man has, in the same measure as he has, won the glory of being the bugbear of cultivated "society" and the object of the reverence and affection of thinking men. But, apart from this, the issues were different. Mr. Smith and Mr. Stuart stood directly as Liberal candidates. Mr. Gladstone, at least in his earlier elections, was still in party nomenclature counted among Conservatives, and he received but little support from professed political Liberals. The constituency was then confined to men who had signed the articles of the Established Church, and the election largely turned on controversies within the Established Church. I venture to think that the High Church party of that day was really a Liberal party, one that had far more in common with the political Liberals than with the political Conservatives. But it is certain that neither the High Churchmen nor the political Liberals would have acknowledged the kindred, and the great mass of Mr. Gladstone's supporters in 1847, in 1852, and even later, would assuredly not have voted for any avowedly Liberal candidate. In his later elections Mr. Gladstone received a distinct Liberal support; still he was also supported by men who would not support a Liberal candidate now. As he came nearer and nearer to the Liberal camp, his majorities forsook him till he was at last rejected for Mr. Hardy. The two elections of the last four years have turned more directly, we may say that they have turned wholly, on ordinary political

issues. Controversies within the Established Church have had little bearing on them. So far as ecclesiastical questions have come in, the strife has been between "Church"—that kind of Church which is pue-fellow to the Mosque—and something which is supposed not to be "Church." These late elections have therefore been far better tests than the old ones of the strictly political feelings of the constituencies. Looked at in that light, they certainly do not prove that the University constituencies are more Conservative now than they were then. They do prove that the Liberal growth, the Liberal reaction, or whatever we are to call it, in the University constituencies since that time has been far less strong than Liberals had hoped that it had been. They do prove that the Conservatism of those constituencies is still of a kind which, both for quantity and quality, has a very ugly look in Liberal eyes.

Thus far we have been looking at Oxford and Cambridge only. But we must not forget that Oxford and Cambridge are not the only Universities in the kingdom. The general results of University elections were set forth a few weeks back in an article in the *Spectator*. They are certainly not comfortable as a whole. We of Oxford and Cambridge may perhaps draw a very poor satisfaction from the thought that we are at least not so bad as Dublin. But then we must feel in the like proportion ashamed when we see how we stand by the side of London. A better comparison than either is with the Universities of Scotland. From a Liberal point of view, they are much better

than Oxford and Cambridge, but still they are not nearly so good as they ought to be. The Liberalism of the Universities of Scotland lags a long way behind the Liberalism of the Scottish people in general. One pair of Universities returns a Liberal, the other a Conservative, in neither case by majorities at all like the Conservative majorities at Oxford and Cambridge. Speaking roughly, in the Scottish Universities the two parties are nearly equally balanced, a very different state of things from what we see in the other constituencies of Scotland. If then in England and Ireland the University constituencies are overwhelmingly Conservative, while in Liberal Scotland they are more Conservative than Liberal, it follows that there is something amiss either about Liberal principles or about University constituencies. And those who believe that Liberal principles are the principles of right reason and that so-called Conservative principles represent something other than right reason, will of course take that horn of the dilemma which throws the blame on the University constituencies. For some reason or other, those constituencies which might be supposed to be more enlightened, more thoughtful and better informed, than any others are those in which the principles which we deem to be those of right reason find least favour. Even in the most Liberal part of the kingdom, the University constituencies are the least Liberal part of the electoral body. The facts are clear; we must grapple with them as we can. There is something in education, in culture, in refinement, or whatever the qualities are which are

supposed to distinguish University electors from the electors of an ordinary county or borough, which makes University electors less inclined to what we hold to be the principles of right reason than the electors of an ordinary county or borough. Education, culture, or whatever it is, clearly has, in political matters, a weak side to it. There is the fact; we must look it in the face.

After all perhaps the fact is not very wonderful. There is no need to infer either that Liberal principles are wrong or that University education is a bad thing. The *Spectator* goes philosophically into the matter. The Universities give—that is, we may suppose, to those who take, only a common degree —only a moderate education, an average education, a little knowledge and a little culture springing from it. And the effect of this little knowledge and little culture is to make those who have it satisfied with the state of things in which they find themselves, and to separate themselves from those who have not even that little knowledge and little culture. "Education," says the *Spectator*, "to the very moderate extent to which a University degree attests it, is a Conservative force, because to that extent at all events it does much more to stimulate the sense of privilege and caste than it does to enlarge the sympathies and to strengthen the sense of justice." That is, it would seem, a pass degree tends to make a man a Tory. It does not at all follow that even the passman's course is mischievous to him on the whole, even if it does him no good politically. For, if it has the effect which the *Spectator* says, the form which that effect takes is, in most

cases, rather to keep a man a Tory than to make him one. And it may none the less do him good in some other ways. But the *Spectator* leaves it at least open to be inferred that a higher degree, or rather the knowledge and consequent culture implied in the higher degree, does, or ought to do, something different even in the political way. And such an inference would probably be borne out by facts. If Lord Carnarvon looks on all passmen as "men of literary eminence and intellectual power," he must be very nearly right in his figures when he says that three-fourths of such men are opposed to Mr. Gladstone. But those who have really profited by their University work may doubt whether passmen as such are entitled to that description. Indeed in the most ideal state of an University, though it might be reasonable to expect its members to be men of intellectual power, it would be unreasonable to expect all of them to be men of literary eminence. If by literary eminence be meant the writing of books, some men of very high intellectual power are men of no literary eminence whatever. Without therefore requiring the University members to be elected wholly by men of literary eminence, we may fairly ask that they may be elected by men of more intellectual power than the mass of the present electors. We should ask for this, even if we thought that Lord Carnarvon was right, if we thought that, the higher the standard of the electors, the safer would be the Tory seats. But it is perhaps only human nature to ask for it the more, if we happen to think that the raising of the standard would have the exactly opposite result.

The evil then, to sum up the result of the *Spectator's* argument, is that the University elections are determined by the votes of the passmen, and that the mass of the passmen are Tories. Now what is the remedy for this evil? One very obvious remedy is always, on such occasions as that which has just happened, whispered perhaps rather than very loudly proclaimed. This is the doctrine that the representation of Universities in Parliament is altogether a mistake, and that it would be well if the Universities were disfranchised by the next Reform Bill. And, if the question could be discussed as a purely abstract one, there is no doubt much to be said, from more grounds than one, against University representation. There is only one ground on which separate University representation can be justified on the common principles on which an English House of Commons is put together. This is the ground that each University is a distinct community from the city or borough in which it is locally placed, something in the same way in which it is held that a city or borough is a distinct community from the county in which it locally stands. The University of Oxford has interests, feelings, a general corporate being, distinct from the city of Oxford, just as the city of Oxford has interests, feelings, a general corporate being, distinct from the county of Oxford. So, if one were maliciously given, one might go on to argue that the choice of a representative made by the borough of Woodstock seems to show that the inhabitants of that borough have something in them which makes them distinct from University, county,

city, or any other known division of mankind. Regarding then these differences, the wisdom of our forefathers has ruled, not that the county of Oxford, the city, the University, and the boroughs of Woodstock and Banbury, should join to elect nine members after the principle of *scrutin de liste*, but that the nine members should be distributed among them according to their local divisions, after the principle of *scrutin d'arrondissement*. On any ground but this local one, a ground which applies to some Universities and not to others, and which seems to have less weight than formerly in those Universities to which it does apply, the University franchise is certainly an anomaly. It must submit to be set down as a fancy franchise. But it is a fancy franchise which has a great weight of precedent in its favour. Besides the original institution of the British Solomon, there is the fact that University representation has been extended at each moment of constitutional change for a century past. It was extended by the Union with Ireland, by the great Reform Bill, and by the legislation of fifteen years back. Each of these changes has added to the number of University members. And each has added to them in a way which more and more forsakes the local ground, and gives to the University franchise more and more the character of a fancy franchise. Dublin has less of local character than Oxford and Cambridge; London has no local character at all. Such a grouping as that of Glasgow and Aberdeen takes away all local character from Scottish University representation. In short, whatever James the First intended, later legislators, down

to our own day, have adopted and confirmed the principle of the fancy franchise as applied to the Universities. There stands the anomaly, with the stamp of repeated re-enactment upon it. Some very strong ground must therefore be found on which to attack it. Liberals may think that there is a very strong ground in the fact that University representation tends to strengthen the Conservative interest, and not only to strengthen it, but to give it a kind of credit, as stamped with the approval of the most highly educated class of electors. But this is a ground which could not be decently brought forward. It would not do to propose the disfranchisement of a particular class of electors merely because they commonly use their franchise in favour of a particular political party. From a party point of view, the representation of the cities of London and Westminster is as great a political evil as the representation of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. But we could not therefore propose the disfranchisement of those cities. The abstract question of University representation may be discussed some time. It may be discussed in our own time on the proposal of a Conservative government or a Conservative opposition. It may be discussed on the proposal of a Liberal government on the day when all University members are Liberals. But the disfranchisement of the Universities could not, for very shame, be proposed by a Liberal government when the answer would at once be made, and made with truth, that the Universities were to be disfranchised simply because most of them return Conservative members.

We may therefore pass by the alternative of disfranchisement as lying beyond the range of practical politics. I use that famous phrase advisedly, because it always means that the question spoken of has already shown that it will be a practical question some day or other. The other choice which is commonly given us is to confine the franchise to residents. After every University election for many years past, and not least after the one which has just taken place, we have always heard the outcry that the real University is swamped by the nominal University, that the body which elects in the name of the University is in no way qualified to speak in the name of the University, and that in point of fact it does not speak the sentiments of those to whom the name of University more properly belongs. Reckonings are made to show that, if the election had depended, not on the large bodies of men who are now entitled to vote, but on much smaller bodies of residents, above all of official residents, professors, tutors, and the like, the result of the election would have been different. If then, it is argued, the Universities are to keep the right of parliamentary representation, the right of voting should be taken away from the mass of those who at present exercise it, and confined to those who really represent the University, to those who are actually engaged on the spot, in the government, the studies, or the teaching of the place.

Now every word of this outcry is true. No one can doubt that the electoral bodies of the Universities, as at present constituted, are quite unfit to represent the Universities, to speak in their

name or to express their wishes or feelings. The franchise, at Oxford and Cambridge, is in the hands of the two largest bodies known to the University constitution, the Convocation of Oxford, the Senate of Cambridge. If we look at the University as a commonwealth of the ancient, the mediæval, or the modern Swiss pattern, the election is in the hands of the *Ekklêsia*, the *Comitia* of Tribes, the *Portmannagemót*, the *Landesgemeinde*, the *Conseil Général*. The franchise is open to all academic citizens who have reached full academic growth, to all who have put on the *toga virilis* as the badge of having taken a complete degree in any faculty. That is to say, it belongs to all doctors and masters who have kept their names on the books. Now, whatever such a body as this may seem in theory, we know what it is in practice. It is not really an academic body. Those who really know anything or care anything about University matters are a small minority. The mass of the University electors are men who are at once non-resident and who have taken nothing more than that common degree which the *Spectator*, quite rightly, holds to be of such small account. They often, we may believe, keep their name on the books simply in order to vote at the University elections.

But what is the remedy? I cannot think that it is to be found in confining the election to residents, at Oxford perhaps to members of Congregation.[1] By such a restriction we should

[1] That is, to all members of Convocation who are either resident or hold University office. This, besides the Chancellor and a few other great personages, lets in a few

undoubtedly get a constituency with a much higher average of literary eminence and intellectual power. We should get a constituency which would far more truly represent the University as a local body. But surely we cannot look on the Universities as purely local bodies. It has always been one of the great characteristics—I venture to think one of the great beauties—of the English Universities that the connexion of the graduate with his University does not come to an end when he ceases to reside, but that the master or doctor keeps all the rights of a master or doctor wherever he may happen to dwell. The resident body has many merits and does much good work; but it has its weaknesses. It is in the nature of things a very changing body; it must change far more from year to year than any other electoral body. And, though the restriction to residents would undoubtedly raise the general character of the constituency, it would get rid of one of its best elements. Surely those who have distinguished themselves in the University, who have worked well for the University, who are continuing in some other shape the studies or the teaching which they have begun in the University, who are in fact carrying the University into other places, are not to be looked on as cut off from the University merely because they have ceased locally to reside in it. Not a few of the best heads and the best professors —I suspect we might say the best of both classes—are those who have not always lived in the University, but who have been called back to it after a period of absence. To the knowledge of local

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professors and examiners who are non-resident.

affairs, which belong to the mere resident, they bring a wider knowledge, a wider experience, which makes them better judges even of local affairs. And can men whom the University thus welcomes after absence be deemed unworthy even to give a vote during the time of absence? One reads a great deal about the real University being swamped by voters running in from London clubs, barristers' chambers, country houses, country parsonages. And no doubt a great many most incompetent voters do come from all those quarters. But some of the most competent come also. The restriction to residents would have disfranchised for ever or for a season most of our greatest scholars, the authors of the greatest works, for the last forty years. Yet surely sad men are the University in the highest sense; they are the men best entitled to speak in its name, whether they are at a given moment locally resident or not. It would surely not be a gain, it would not increase the literary eminence or intellectual power of the constituency, to shut out those men, and to confine everything to a body made up so largely of one element which is too permanent and another which is too fluctuating, of old heads and of young tutors. Then too there is a very reasonable presumption in the human mind, and specially in the English mind, against taking away the rights of any class of men without some very good reason. And in this case there are at least as strong arguments against the restriction as there are for it. I speak only of the simple proposal to confine the election to residents, in Oxford language to transfer it from Convocation to Congregation. There are indeed other plans, to

let Convocation elect one member and Congregation the other —something like the election of the consuls at an early stage of the Roman commonwealth—or to leave the present members as they are, and to give the Universities yet more members to be chosen by Congregation. Now I will not say that these schemes lie without the range of practical politics, because they show no sign of being ever likely to come within it. They may safely be referred to Mr. Thomas Hare.

While therefore I see as strongly as any man the evils of election by Convocation, as Convocation is at present constituted,[2] I cannot think that restriction to Congregation or to residents in any shape is the right remedy for the evil. I venture to think that there is a more excellent way. The remedy that I propose has this advantage, that, though it would practically lessen the numbers of the constituency, and would, gradually at least, get rid of its most incompetent elements, it would not be, in any constitutional sense, a restrictive measure. It would not deprive any recognized class of men of any right. And it would have the further advantage that it would be a change which could be made by the University itself, a change which would not be a mere political change affecting parliamentary elections only, but a real academical reform affecting other matters as well, a reform which would be simply getting rid of a modern abuse and falling

[2] I use Oxford language, as that which I myself best understand; but I believe that, all that I say applies equally to Cambridge also. For "Convocation" one must of course, in Cambridge language, read "Senate."

back on an older and better state of things. It is one of three changes which I have looked for all my life, but towards which, amidst countless academical revolutions, I have never seen the least step taken. I confess that all three have this to be said against them, that they would affect college interests and would give the resident body a good deal of trouble. But this is no argument against the measures themselves; it only shows that it would be hard work to get them passed. Of these three the first and least important is the establishment of an University matriculation examination. (Things change so fast at Oxford that this may have been brought in within the last term or two; but, if so, I have not heard of it.) Secondly, a rational reconstruction of the Schools, so as to have real schools of history and philology—perhaps better still a school of history and philology combined—without regard to worn out and unscientific distinctions of "ancient" and "modern." Thirdly, the change which alone of the three concerns us now, the establishment of some kind of standard for the degree of Master of Arts. Through all the changes of more than thirty years, I have always said, when I have had a chance of saying anything, Give us neither a resident oligarchy nor a non-resident mob. Keep Convocation with its ancient powers, but let Convocation be what it was meant to be. Let the great assembly of masters and doctors go untouched; but let none be made masters or doctors who do not show some fitness to bear those titles. Every degree was meant to be a reality; it was meant, as the word *degree* implies, to mark some kind of proficiency;

a degree which does not mark some kind of proficiency is an absurdity in itself. A degree conferred without any regard to the qualifications of the person receiving it is in fact a fraud; it is giving a testimonial without regard to the truth of the facts which the testimonial states. Now this is glaringly the case with the degree of Master of Arts as at present given. In each faculty there are two stages: the lower degree of bachelor, the higher degree of master or doctor. The lower degree is meant to mark a certain measure of proficiency in the studies of the faculty; the higher degree is meant to mark a higher measure of proficiency, that measure which qualifies a man to become, if he thinks good, a teacher in that faculty. The bachelor's degree is meant to mark that a man has made satisfactory progress in introductory studies; the master's degree is meant, as its name implies, to mark that a man is really a master in some subject. The bachelor's degree in short should be respectable; the master's degree should be honourable. Nowadays we certainly cannot say that the master's degree is honourable; it might be almost too much to say that the bachelor's degree is respectable. I am far from saying that an University education, even for a mere passman, is worthless; I am far from thinking so. But the mere pass degree is very far from implying literary eminence or intellectual power. Eminence indeed is hardly to be looked for at the age when the bachelor's degree is taken; it is only one or two men in a generation who can send out "The Holy Roman Empire" as a prize essay. But the degree does not imply even the promise or likelihood of

eminence or power. The best witness to the degradation of the simple degree is the elaborate and ever-growing system of class-lists, designed to mark what the degree itself ought in some measure to mark. The need of having class-lists is the clearest confession of the very small value of the simple degree by itself. And, whatever may be the value of the bachelor's degree, the value of the master's degree is exactly the same. The master's degree proves no greater knowledge or skill than the bachelor's degree; it proves only that its bearer has lived some more years and has paid some more pounds. It is given, as a matter of course, to every one who has taken the degree of bachelor—never mind after how many plucks—and has reached the standing which is required of a master. The bestowing of two degrees is a mere make-believe; the higher degree proves nothing, beyond mere lapse of time, which is not equally proved by the lower.

Now this surely ought not to be. That the first degree should be next door to worthless, and that the second degree should be worth no more than the first, is surely to make University degrees a mockery, a delusion, and a snare. Men who do not know how little a degree means are apt to be deceived, even in practical matters, by its outward show. Men who see that a degree proves very little, but who do not look much further, are apt most untruly to undervalue the whole system and studies of the University. In common consistency, in common fairness, the degrees should mean what their names imply. The bachelor's degree should prove something, and the

master's degree should prove something more. As I just said, the bachelor's degree should be respectable and the master's degree should be honourable. I should even like to see the bachelor's degree so respectable that we might get rid of the modern device of class-lists; but that is not our question at present. The immediate business is to make the master's degree a real thing, an honest thing, to make it the sign of a higher standard than the bachelor's degree, whether the bachelor's standard be fixed high or low. Let there be some kind of standard, some kind of test. Its particular shape, whether an examination, or a disputation, or the writing of a thesis, or anything else, need not now be discussed. I ask only that there should be a test of proficiency of some kind, and that there should be the widest possible range of subjects in which proficiency may be tested. Let a man have the degree, if he shows himself capable of scholarly or scientific treatment of some branch of some subject, but not otherwise. The bachelor's degree should show a general knowledge of several subjects, which may serve as a ground-work for the minuter knowledge of one. The master's degree should show that that minuter knowledge of some one subject has been gained. The complete degree should show, if not the actual presence, at least the very certain promise, of literary eminence or intellectual power. We should thus get, neither the resident oligarchy nor the non-resident mob; we should have a body of real masters and doctors worthy of the name. Men who had once dealt minutely with some subject of their own choice

would not be likely to throw their books aside for the rest of their days, as the man who has merely got his bachelor's degree by a compulsory smattering often does. We should get a Convocation or Senate fit, not only to elect members of Parliament, but to do the other duties which the constitution of the University lays on its Convocation or Senate. And I cannot help thinking that, if such a change as this had been adopted at the time of the first University Commission, it would have been less needful to cut down the powers of Convocation in the way which, Convocation being left what it is, certainly was needful.

Such a change as I propose would doubtless lessen the numbers of the constituency. Possibly it would not lessen them quite so much as might seem at first sight. A high standard, but a standard attainable with effort, would surely make many qualify themselves who at present do not. Still it would lessen the numbers very considerably, and it would be meant to do so. Yet it would not be a restrictive measure in the same sense in which confining the franchise to Congregation would be a restrictive measure. It would not take away the votes of any class. The franchise would still be the same, exercised by the same body; only that body would be purified and brought back to the character which it was originally meant to bear. The purifying would be gradual. The doctrine of vested interests, that doctrine so dear to the British mind, would of course secure every elector in the possession of his vote as long as he lives and keeps his name on the books. But the ranks of the unqualified would no

longer be yearly reinforced. In course of time we should have a competent body. And the great advantage of this kind of remedy is that it is so distinctly an academical remedy. It would not come as a mere clause in a parliamentary reform bill. It would affect the parliamentary constituency; but it would affect it only as one thing among others. It would be a general improvement in the character of the Great Council of the University, which would make it better qualified to discharge all its duties, that of choosing members of Parliament among them. In the purely political look-out, we may believe that one result of the change would be to make the election of Liberal members for the Universities much more likely. But neither this nor any other purely political result would be the sole and direct object of the change. Even if it did not accomplish this object, it would do good in other ways. If the Universities, under such a system, still chose Conservative members, we should have no right to complain. We should feel that we had been fairly and honourably beaten by adversaries who had a right to speak. It would be an unpleasant result if the real Universities should be proved to be inveterately Tory. But it would be a result less provoking than the present state of things, in which Tory members are chosen for the Universities by men who have no call to speak in the name of the Universities at all.

*Edward A. Freeman.*

# HAMLET: A NEW READING

There is a sense in which the stage alone can give the full significance to a dramatic poem, just as a lyric finds its full interpretation in music; but we prefer that a song of Goethe or Shelley should wait for its music, and in the meantime suggest its own aërial accompaniment, rather than be vulgarized in the setting. And even when set for the voice by a master, although there is a gain in as far as the charm is brought home to the senses, yet there is a loss in proportion to the beauty of the song; for if it is delicate the finer spiritual grace departs, and if it is ardent the passion is liable to scream, and, above all, there is a vague but appreciable loss of identity; so that on the whole we please ourselves best with the literary form. There is the same balance of gain and loss in the relation of the drama to the stage. The gain is in proportion to the excellence of the acting, and the loss in proportion to the beauty o£ the play. It is well then that, as the lyric poem no longer demands the lyre, the poetical drama has become, though more recently, independent of the stage. Each has its own perspective of life, its own idea of Nature, its own brilliancy, its own dulness, and finally its own public; and notwithstanding the objections of some critics, it will soon be admitted that a work may be strictly and intrinsically dramatic, and yet only fit for the study—that is, for ideal representation. For there is a theatre in every imagination, where we produce the

old masterpiece in its simplicity and dignity, and where the new work appears and is followed in plot and action, and conflict of feeling, and play of character, and rhythm of part with part, if not with as keen an excitement, at least with as fair a judgment, as if we were criticizing the actors, not the piece. And were all theatres closed, the drama—whether as the free and spontaneous outflow of observation, fancy, and humour, or as the intense reflection of the movement of life in its animation of joy and pain—would remain one of the most natural and captivating forms in which the creative impulse of the poet can work. When we look at its variety and flexibility of structure—from the lyrical tragedy of Æschylus to a "Proverbe" of De Musset; at its diversity of spirit—from the exuberance of a comedy of Aristophanes and the caprice of an Elizabethan mask to the serenity of "Comus" and Tasso, and the terror of "Agamemnon" and "Macbeth;" at its range of expression—from, the full-toned Greek and English Iambic to the plain but sparkling prose of Molière, and from that again to the intricate harmonies of Calderon, Goethe, and Shelley; with its use of all voices, from vociferous mob to melodious daughters of Ocean, and its command of all colour, from the gloom of Medea to the splendour of Marlowe's Helen, —it is a small matter to remember the connection of work or author with the stage—how long they held it, how soon they were dispossessed, how and at what intervals and with what uncertain footing they returned. We do not accept them because they were popular in their day, and we do not reject them because they are

not suitable to ours. They have lost no vivacity or strength or grace by their exclusion from the stage and their exile to literature —to that permanent theatre for which the poet, freely using any and every form of dramatic expression, should now work.

> "There is the playhouse now, there you must sit....
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our king."

The relevancy of these remarks, as an introduction to a study of one of Shakespeare's plays, will presently appear.

# I

Shakespeare, although a master of theatrical effect, is often found working rather away from it than toward it, and at a meaning and beauty beyond the limits of stage expression. This is because he is more dramatist than playwright, and will always produce and complete his work in its ideal integrity, even if, in so doing, he outruns the sympathy of his audience. This disposition may be traced not only in the plays it has banished from the stage, including such a masterpiece as "Antony and Cleopatra," but in those that are universally popular, such as "The Merchant of Venice," where the fifth Act, although it closes and harmonizes the drama as a work of art with perfect grace, is but a tame conclusion to the theatrical piece; and in the scenes that furnish us with the delicate and finished study of Antonio, we find the audience intent on the situation and the poet on the character; for we no more expect to see the true Antonio on the stage than to see the true moonlight shimmering on the trees in Belmont Park. But sometimes the play will transcend the limits of stage expression by being too purely and perfectly dramatic, as in "Lear." For not only is it, as Lamb points out,[3] impossible for the actor to give the convulsions of the father's grief, and yet preserve the dignity of

[3] "To see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting."—*Lamb's Essays.*

the king, but the sustained intensity of passion fatigues both voice and ear when they should be most impressive and impressed. Had Shakespeare written with a view to stage effect, he would not in the first two acts have stretched the voice through all the tones and intervals of passion, and then demand more thrilling intonations and louder outcries to meet and match the tumult of the storm. This greatest of all tragedies is written beyond the compass of the human voice, and can only be fully represented on that ideal stage, where, instead of hoarse lament and husky indignation, we hear each of us the tones that most impress and affect us, and can command the true degrees of feeling in their illimitable scale.

But in "Hamlet" the inadequacy of the stage is of another kind. It leads to a general displacement of motive, and change of focus, the hero's character being obscured in the attempt to make it effective. And for this to some extent the stage itself, as a place of popular entertainment, and not the actor, is at fault. Some such ambiguity as this seems, indeed, only natural, when we recall the circumstances attending the composition of the play.

By common consent of the best authorities, "Hamlet" represents the work of many years. I make no conjectures, but content myself with Mr. Dowden's statement of the case: —"Over 'Hamlet,' as over 'Romeo and Juliet,' it is supposed that Shakespeare laboured long and carefully. Like 'Romeo and Juliet,' the play exists in two forms, and there is reason to believe that in the earlier form, in each instance, we possess an imperfect

report of Shakespeare's first treatment of his theme,"[4] We know also that Shakespeare had before him, at least as early as 1589, an old play in which "a ghost cried dismally like an oyster wife, 'Hamlet! Revenge!'" and Shakespeare worked upon this until from what was probably a rather sorry melodrama he produced the most intellectual play that keeps the stage. And the very sensational character of the piece enabled him to steal into it the results of long and deep meditation without hazard to its popularity. He seems to have withdrawn Hamlet from time to time for a special study, and then to have restored and readjusted the hero to the play, touching and modulating, here and there, character and incident in harmony with the new expression. In this way a new direction and significance would be given to the plot, but in a latent and unobtrusive way, so as not to weaken the popular interest. This leads to the ambiguity of which I have spoken. The new thought is often not earnestly but ironically related to the old material, and the spiritual hero seems almost to stand apart from the rude framework of the still highly sensational theatrical piece. This has given rise to a rather favourite saying with the Germans, that Hamlet is a modern. Hamlet seems to step forth from an antiquated time,—with its priestly bigotry, its duels for a province, its heavy-headed revels, its barbarous code of revenge, and its ghostly visitations to enforce it,—to meet and converse with a riper age. But this is because Hamlet belongs wholly and intimately to the

[4] "Shakspere: His Mind and Art," p. 96.

poet, while the other characters, though informed with new and original expression, are left in close relation, to the old plot.

Such being the ambiguity resulting from this continued spiritualization of the play, the actor would instinctively endeavour to remove it, and to bring the hero in closer relation with the main action of the stage piece. Hamlet must not be too disengaged; he must not be too ironical. A few omissions, a fit of misplaced fury, a too emphatic accent, a too effective attitude, with what is called a bold grasp of character, and Shakespeare's latest and finest work on the hero is obliterated.

Now, the great actors who have personated Hamlet have done much, and the thrilling treatment of the ghost-story has done more, to stamp upon the minds of learned and unlearned alike the impression that *the great event of Hamlet's life is the command to kill his uncle*. As he does not do this, and as he is given to much meditation and much discussion, it is assumed that he thinks and talks in order to avoid acting. And then the word "irresolution" leaps forth, and all is explained. This curious assumption, that all the pains taken by Shakespeare on the work and its hero has no other object but to illustrate this theme —a command to kill and a delayed obedience—pervades the criticism even of those who consider the intellectual element the great attraction of the play. And yet, when you ask what is the dramatic situation out of which this speculative matter arises, the German and English critics alike reply in chorus, "Irresolution." Each one has his particular shade of it, and

finds something not quite satisfactory in the interpretations of others. Goethe's finished portrait of Hamlet as the amiable and accomplished young prince, too weak to support the burden of a great action, did not recommend itself either to Schlegel or Coleridge, who take the mental rather than the moral disposition to task. Schlegel, with some asperity, speaks of "a calculating consideration that cripples the power of action;" and Coleridge, with more subtlety, applies Hamlet's antithesis of thought and resolution to the elucidation of his own character, concluding that Hamlet "procrastinates from thought." Gervinus, while following Schlegel as to "the bent of Hamlet's mind to reflect upon the nature and consequences of his deed, and by this means to paralyze his active powers," adds to this defect a deplorable conscientiousness, which unfits Hamlet for the great duty of revenge. And Mr. Dowden, while most ably collating these various kinds and degrees of irresolution, concludes that Hamlet is "disqualified for action by his excess of the reflective faculty." Mr. Swinburne alone resolutely protests against this doctrine. He speaks of "the indomitable and ineradicable fallacy of criticism which would find the key-note of Hamlet's character in the quality of irresolution."[5] And he considers that Shakespeare purposely introduces the episode of the expedition to England to exhibit "the instant and almost unscrupulous resolution of Hamlet's character in time of practical need." I gladly welcome this instructive remark, which, although Mr. Swinburne calls it

[5] "A Study of Shakespeare," p. 166.

"the voice of one crying in the wilderness," is more likely to gain me a patient hearing than any arguments I can use. But before I propose my own reading, I will, as I have given the genesis or natural history of this theory of irresolution, compare it with the general features of Hamlet's mental condition throughout the play.

If Hamlet "procrastinates from thought," if "the burden of the action is too heavy for him to bear," if "by a calculating consideration he exhausts all possible issues of the action," it should at least be continually present to his mind. We should look for the delineation of a soul harassed and haunted by one idea; torn by the conflict between conscience and filial obedience; or balancing advantage and peril in an agony of suspense and vacillation; forecasting consequence and result to himself and others; and so absorbed in this terrible secret as to exclude all other interests. We have two studies of such a state of irresolution, in Macbeth and Brutus. Of Macbeth it may truly be said that he has an action upon his mind the burden of which is too heavy for him to bear. It is constantly before him; he is shaken with it, possessed by it, to such a degree that

> "function
> Is smother'd in surmise; and nothing is
> But what is not."

Now "he will proceed no further in this business," and now "he is settled and bound up to it," and in one long perturbed

soliloquy stands before us the very picture of that irresolution which "procrastinates from thought." Brutus thus describes his own suspense:—

> "Between the action of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The genius, and the mortal instruments,
> Are then in council: and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection."

But what is the general course and scope of Hamlet's utterance, whether to himself or others? We find musings and broodings on the possibility of escape from so vile a world alternating with cool and keen analysis, polished criticism, and petulant wit; we find a pervading ironical bitterness, rising at times to fierce invective, and even to the frenzy of passion when his mother is the theme, relapsing again to trance-like meditations on the depravity of the world, the littleness of man and the nullity of appearance; and when his mind does revert to this "great action," this "dread command," which is supposed to haunt it, and to keep it in a whirl of doubt and irresolution, it is because it is forcibly recalled to it, because some incident startles him to recollection, proves to him that he has forgotten it, and he turns upon himself with surprise and indignation: Why is it this thing remains to do? Am I a coward! Do I lack gall? Is it

"bestial oblivion?" or is it

> "some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event?"

On this text, so often quoted in support of the orthodox "irresolution" theory, I will content myself at present with the remark, thats surely no one before or after Hamlet ever accounted for his non-performance of a duty by the double explanation that he had either entirely forgotten it or had been thinking too much about it.

Looking then at the general features of Hamlet's talk, it is plain that to make this command to revenge the clue to his mental condition, is to make him utter a great deal of desultory talk without dramatic point or pertinence; for if, except when surprised by the actors' tears or by the gallant bearing of the troops of Fortinbras, he wholly forgets it, what does he remember? What is the secret motive of this prolonged criticism of the world which "charms all within its magic circle?"

The true centre will be found, I think, by substituting the word "preoccupation" for the word "irresolution." And the "preoccupation" is found by antedating the crisis of Hamlet's career from the revelation of the ghost to the marriage of his mother, and the persistent mental and moral condition thus induced. Start from this, as a fixed point, and a dramatic situation is gained in which every stroke of satire, every curiosity of logic,

every strain of melancholy; is appropriate and pertinent to the action.

In order to measure the full effect of this strange event, we must bring before us the Hamlet of the earlier time, before his father's death, and for this we have abundant material in the play.

# II

Hamlet was an enthusiast. His love for his father was not an ordinary filial affection, it was a hero-worship. He was to him the type of sovereignty—

> "The front of Jove himself;
> An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;"

a link between earth and heaven—

> "A combination, and a form, indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal,
> To give the world assurance of a man."

To Hamlet, this "assurance of a man" was the great reality which made other things real, which gave meaning to life, and substance to the world. That his love for his mother was equally intense, is clearly discernible in the inverted characters of his rage and grief. In her he reverenced wifehood and womanhood. He sees the rose on

> "the fair forehead of an innocent love."

And of his mother we are told—

"The queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks."

But this enthusiasm was connected with a habit of thought that was rather critical than sentimental. Hamlet had a shrewd judgment, a lively and caustic wit, an exacting standard, and a turn for satire. He was fond of question and debate, an enemy to all illusion, impatient of dulness,[typo for dullness?] and not indisposed to alarm and bewilder it; and he had brought with him from Wittenberg a philosophy half stoical and half transcendental, with whose eccentricities he would torment the wisdom of the Court. He looked upon the machinery of power as part of the comedy of life, and would be more amused than impressed by the equipage of office, its chains and titles, the frowns of authority, and the smiles of imaginary greatness. He therefore of all men needed a personal centre in which faith and affection could unite to give seriousness and dignity to life; and this he had found from his childhood in the sovereign virtues of the King and Queen. So that his criticism in these earlier days was but the fastidiousness of love, that disparages all other excellence in comparison with its own ideal; his philosophy was a disallowance of all other reality; and his negations only defined and brightened his faith. Doubt, question and speculation, mystery and anomaly, the illusions of sense, the instability of natures, all that was irrational in life, with its certainties of logic and hazards of chance, all that was unproven

in religion, dubious in received opinion, obscure in the destiny of man, were but glimpses of a larger unity, vistas of truth unexplored.

Hamlet's thinking is always marked by that quality of penetration into and through the thoughts of others, that is called free-thinking. The discovery, as he moved in the spiritual world of established ideas and settled doctrines, apparently immovable, that they were of the same stuff as his own thoughts—were pliant and yielding, and could be readily unwoven by the logic that wove them, would tempt him to move and displace, and build and construct, until he might have a collection of opinions large enough to be termed a philosophy. But it would be gathered rather in the joy of intellectual activity, realizing its own energy, and ravelling up to its own form the woof of other minds, than with any practical bearing on life. All this was a work in another sphere—

> "of no allowance to his bosom's truth."

The light of a sovereign manhood and womanhood was reflected on the world around him, and afar on the world of thought–their greatness reconciled all the contradictions of life. And in pure submission to their control all the various activities of his versatile nature, its irony and its earnestness, its shrewdness and its fancy, its piety and its free-thinking, harmonized like sweet bells not yet jangled or untuned. He lived at peace with

all, in fellowship with all; he could rally Polonius without malice, and mimic Osric without contempt.

It is plain that Hamlet looked forward to a life of activity under his father's guidance. He was no dreamer—we hear of "the great love the general gender bear him," and the people are not fond of dreamers. In truth, the Germans have had too much their own way with Hamlet, and have read into him something of their own laboriousness and phlegm. But Hamlet was more of a poet than a professor. He had the temperament of a man of genius—impatient, animated, eager, swift to feel, to like or dislike, praise or resent—with a character of rapidity in all his actions, and even in his meditation, of which he is conscious when he says, "as swift as meditation." He did not live apart as a student, but in public as a prince—

> "the observed of all observers;"

he was of a free, open, unsuspicious temper—

> "remiss,
> Most generous and free from all contriving."

He was fond of all martial exercises and expert in the use of the sword. He was a soldier first, a scholar afterwards; a soldier in his alacrity to fight

> "Until his eyelids would no longer wag;"

a soldier even to

> "The glass of fashion, and the mould of form;"

and, above all, a soldier in his sensibility on the point of honour, one who would think it well

> "Greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
> When honour is at stake."

And Fortinbras, type of the man of action, recognized in him a kindred spirit—

> "Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have proved most royally;"

while Hamlet eyed Fortinbras with the envious longing of one who had missed his career. What must have been the felicity of life to such a man, whose vivacity no stress of calamity, no accumulation of sorrow could tame, whose enthusiasm embraced Nature, art, and literature, and whose delight was always fresh and new, "in this excellent canopy the air, in this brave o'erhanging firmament,"' and in the spectacle of man "so excellent in faculty, in form and moving so express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like

a god?"

Without a warning the blow fell. His father was suddenly struck down; and while he was indulging a grief, poignant and profound indeed, but natural, wholesome, manly, his uncle usurped the crown. This second blow would be acutely felt, but it would rather rouse than prostrate his energies. There is no passion in Hamlet when there has been no love. And he had always held his uncle in slight esteem—foreboded something from his smiling insincerity. He never mentions him without an expression of contempt, hardly acknowledges him as king; he is a thing—of nothing—a farcical monarch—"a peacock"—and, in this particular act, no dread usurper, but a "cut-purse of the realm." Whether he designed to wait or was prepared to strike, his future was still intact, his energy unimpaired. His mother remained to him, now doubly dear and doubly great, and with her the tradition of the past. She was, as he gathered from her silence, like himself, retired from the world, absorbed in grief; but he was assured of her constancy and truth. Even the kind of distance between them in age and sex, in mind and character, was no barrier to this sympathetic relation. She was there with the expectation that makes heroism possible; she was there to watch, if not to further his enterprise, and to give it lustre with her praise. We are often quite unconscious of the commanding influence exerted on our life by those who are least in contact with it. To be cognizant of one steadfast and stainless soul is to have encouragement in difficulty and support in pain. The

mere knowledge of its existence is a light within the mind, and a secret incentive to the best action. Though silent and apart, it is the witness of what is great, and our life is always seeking to rise within its sphere; while, by a secret transference—for souls are not retentive of their own goodness—our standards of living and thinking are maintained at their highest level, like water fed by a distant spring. All this and infinitely more than this was the Queen his mother to Hamlet. It is impossible, therefore, to measure the effect upon him of her marriage with his uncle. The shock of it is ever fresh throughout the play. In the third Act the whole frame of nature is still aghast at it:—

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.