

Educational.

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Characteristics of the present Age, and the duties of the Educated Classes as suggested by them:

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Continued.

If we compare the state of society now with that of 50, a 100, or 200 years ago, it is impossible to say in what department the most improvement has been made, in science or art, in the intellectual life or religious spirit of society. Equally difficult is it to say, what part of society the high or low or what portion of the world, the civilized or barbarous, has advanced the most. If, for instance, brutal and turbulent laboring classes have given place to orderly and intelligent artisans, an insolent and debauched gentry has been succeeded by a refined philanthropic nobility; and if the England of to-day is inconceivably unlike the England of the past, the distant portions of the world, over which she has held her sway or exerted her influence, have been more revolutionized than herself; of which we need only point to India as an illustration. This is a point to which I am desirous of giving special prominence—The expansive character of the civilization of the present age. Channing saw and indicated this feature of our age, and if perceptible in his day how much more manifest is ours? The barriers, ignorance and bigotry, cowardice and exclusiveness set up, the spirit of the age has thrown down. In all our discoveries, inventions, and improvements, whether ministering to man's wants or enjoyments, there is a tendency to spread themselves abroad and to make themselves the common property of every class and nation. There is not an advantage that belongs to our civilization unmarked by this characteristic of expansiveness. It is seen in the prevailing religious spirit. The Church no longer means the clergy, but the people. The right to teach is the conceded prerogative of all who have the ability and can find an audience. The possession of religious truth, by any individual, communion, or nation, is admitted to impose the duty of imparting it to the destitute; hence the efforts made to permeate every portion of society with direct religious instruction, and to send the missionary of the cross to every people under the whole heaven. It is seen in commerce. Monopolies belong to the past. The advantages of free trade as demonstrated by the experience of Great Britain are too palpable for other nations not to see and wish to enjoy them. Hence protectionist theories are being abandoned, and the shackles of commerce created by restrictive tariffs removed. It is seen in education. No country within the pale of civilization is now willing to remain disgraced by the presence of masses of its population for whose instruction no adequate provision is made. Not many years ago the condition of England in this respect was most discreditable; but so rapid has been the improvement that to day it is said the difficulty is no longer to provide schools for the children, but to bring the children to the schools. It is seen in Literature. Once the learned and men of genius addressed themselves to a small and select class. Their folios were for the shelves of the philosopher; their tomes for the purchase of the wealthy. Now men of the most profound learning and brilliant genius, such as Herschell, Macaulay, Carlyle, Mill, and Dickens, contribute their ablest productions to periodicals read by scores of thousands. It is seen in Art. The modern Hogarth, instead of issuing at wide intervals expensive prints, supplied weekly for twenty-four years pencillings to a comic paper whose name is a household word with millions. The artist who in former times would have painted frescoes in the palaces of kings, or hung his pictures in the galleries of nobles now illustrates shilling magazines with the creations of his genius, and displays his most finished works in exhibitions rendered remunerative by the patronage of the common people. And if this expansiveness manifests itself in connection with those features of civilization common to this and past ages, much more strikingly is it shown in those peculiar to our day. Whoever invented the steam engine it is now the common property of the whole world, and it would be impossible to say what class is the most benefited by its application to locomotion, the poor to whom it has made travelling possible, or the rich to whom it has made it convenient. The Electric Telegraph courts the patronage of all people and nations. The photographer hangs in his show-case the faithful representation of Bridget, Mc-Slaughter alongside that of the finest lady in the land. While the delicately nurtured may only wish great care to relieve their pangs by the use of chloroform, in the hospitals to which the laboring poor of large cities are taken, it is freely used to prevent indescribable suffering. The illustrations in fact of the tendency of all that marks modern civilization to diffuse itself into universal expansion, are endless. There is only one more to which I shall refer. It is in connection with the tendency of ideas, thoughts, to spread themselves over the whole world. The English Commissioners to China a few years ago, on their journey crossed the desert by railways and omnibus precisely like those they had last seen in London and when at the end of it were astonished to find that the Imperial officials, who had been appointed to negotiate with them, were familiar with the names of Cobden and Bright, and could quote recent debates in Parliament. They had taken measures to procure supplies of English papers, and to have them translated. The proverb has been that one half the world does not know how the other lives; the great wonder of to-day is, that through the ramifications of steam communication, the vast amount of travelling, the sending newspaper correspondents to every part of the earth, of permanent or temporary interest, the flashing of intelligence over the wires and the cheapness of newspapers, each half of the world is beginning to know what the other thinks, and both to have much knowledge and many opinions in common.

2. A TENDENCY TO REMOVE ALL UNJUST ADVANTAGES AND ARTIFICIAL DISTINCTIONS.

"We call life a journey," says Sydney Smith, "but how variously is that journey performed. There are those who come forth girt and shod to walk on velvet laws and smooth terraces, where every gale is arrested and every beam is tempered. There are others who walk on the Alpine paths of life, against driving misery and through stormy sorrows; over sharp afflictions; walk, with bare feet and naked breast, jaded, mangled, chilled." Perhaps to some extent so it must be and will be. But society is disposed to try that question, and there is a marked disposition and tendency to find out what common vantage ground belongs to all, and to remove as far as practicable all the depressing influences and injurious distinctions which create obstacles in the way of its enjoyment to a large portion of the community. Such obstacles exist on every hand. Not only as the instruments of oppression employed by the wealthy and well-born towards the poor and lonely, but by man towards woman. Society is beginning to see that its best interests will be most effectually promoted by its offering to all its members, the most encouragements and the fewest hindrances to advancement; and that woman, equally with man, should enjoy the right to learn, to speak, to write, to work as God has given her ability, and to receive equal and just reward for what she accomplishes. De Toqueville says, that, during the last 700 years there has been scarcely any great event which has not tended to equalise the conditions of life. He refers as proof to the Crusades, the wars between England and France and their own civil conflicts, which each and all impoverished the nobility and compelled them to divide and diminish by sale their immense estates. This and the growth of commerce created a middle class. The invention of firearms equalised the noble and serf upon the field of battle. The discovery of America, the invention of printing, the teachings of Protestantism, the French Revolution, cheap literature, Postal arrangements, and the discovery of Californian and Australian Gold fields have all had the same equalising tendency. The gradual removal of artificial distinctions and the development of the equality of conditions of life is therefore a providential fact and possesses all the characteristics of a divine decree. It is universal and durable. It constantly eludes all human interference and all events as well as men are contributing to its progress.

3. DIMINISHED DEPENDENCE UPON BRUTE FORCE.

Most of the great things accomplished in former times owed their performance to a small amount of mind directing a large amount of brute force. So ancient empires were founded and governed, battles fought, victories won, cities built and monuments erected. Machinery has taken the place of bodily labor in doing the largest part of the work now done in the world. All the men and women on earth have not sufficient muscular power to do the work performed in England alone by steam engines. The history of almost every production of the day, from a pocket watch to an iron clad ship of war, is machinery made its respective parts and human hands put them together. If this were a mere addition to the brute force of mankind it would be less important in an intellectual and moral point of view. But it is a substitution of machinery for muscular power. Hence the latter will be less and less in demand, and of course of proportionally diminished value. The class of unskilled laborers, valuable only for their powerful muscles, and marked by animalism and coarseness, like the English peasants and pit workers, will disappear, and already an entirely new order of workers is arising. I may well say arising, for surely the diminished dependence upon brute force is a voice saying to the lower orders of society, "come up hither and do work more fitted to the powers God has given you." The farm-laborer accustomed to the use of the steam plough, drilling, mowing, and thrashing machines, is a very different being from his predecessor, the stolid clod-hopper. A modern gun is a machine, to the use of which the artilleryman has to be educated. Hence the observable intelligence of that department of the service. The use of machinery, as a clever writer has recently shown, has also a twofold moral effect. It diminishes the temptation to display passionate feeling a thing very common in connection with labor performed by mere muscular power. It is not only useless but exceedingly dangerous to manifest anger in the use of most machines; and further employment in connection with them teaches dependence upon law, and habits of method calculation and order. When it is remembered how various callings will stamp their impress upon those engaged in them, is it not reasonable to suppose that the vast use of machinery, throughout the civilized world, is producing upon millions, powerful, if yet only dimly perceptible, effects.

4. THE TENDENCY TO ASSOCIATION.

There is no feature of modern times more marked than the tendency to combine, to associate forces, means, or numbers for attaining any given object. Almost every thing is done by means of companies or societies. Railways, breakwaters, and Great Easterns are built, Atlantic cables laid down, every art and science cultivated, opinions advocated or opposed, reforms accomplished and the small and great operations of Benevolence and Christian enterprise effected, by combinations of men and means for the purpose. While this renders possible the accomplishment of some of the grandest achievements or projects of human invention, and creates warmth, earnestness, and enterprise, it is not an unmitigated advantage. Men combine for evil as well as good and unitedly will advocate or participate in wrong doing, that separately they would countenance. Besides this combination has a tendency to destroy individual independence, to lead men to think in the mass and to reduce society to a dead level.

5. IMPROVED MORALS.

There are few questions relating to the present age more important than the enquiry, What is its moral aspect, as compared with the past? Concerning the reply which

should be given to that enquiry there is no little diversity of opinion. Some no doubt take too hopeful a view of the moral condition of society; but there are others who go as far in the opposite extreme and paint the social morality of the day in the darkest colors. How any one acquainted at all with history can take this view I am at a loss to imagine. Morality no doubt is at a low enough ebb in modern society, but when and where was it better? My own conviction is, that wherever the English language is spoken and English civilisation prevails; morality ranks higher than in any other country, or at any previous epoch. There are no better tests of the morality of any country or any age than its amusements and literature. An examination of either of these will support the conclusion I have stated. The brutal sports that are still popular entertainments on the continent of Europe, and which are the same as, or similar to, those once common in England, are now indietable offences both there and on this continent. The respectable British or American workman would scorn to give his countenance to amusements that were extensively patronised by the nobility and gentry of the last century. The favorite recreations of his class are no longer bear and bull baiting and pugilistic encounters, but railway and steamboat excursions, the art gallery, industrial exhibitions and excellent music by the best composers and artists. Statistics which can be relied upon prove, that whatever may be the vicious and debasing indulgences of many, these, in the great centres of population are by far the most popular of the amusements, of those who have money to spend and time to devote to recreation, both in Great Britain and America. In this connection it would be improper to omit the revival of athletic sports, both innocent and healthful, which are daily growing in popularity with all classes, and are worthy of encouragement, not only for their physical benefits, but as tending to cultivate manliness, kindly feeling, mutual respect and self-government. In speaking of the moral tone of our literature there are two comparisons which may be made—with that of the past and with that of other nations. Sir Walter Scott relates that he borrowed from an old lady some novels which he knew had been the most popular reading of the time of her youth. He declares that they were so immoral he could not finish their perusal, but returned them half read. Yet they had been the avowed and favorite reading of the Clarissas and Pamelas of the preceding generation. No gentleman of the present day would permit such books to enter his house. In comparing English with Foreign popular reading almost as great a contrast is seen. By English, I wish to be understood as intending, works in the English language, whether published in Great Britain or America, and forming, as so many do, part of the current literature of both. Admirers of Goethe may find in his "Wilhelm Mäster," the most widely read of all his works, wonderful mysteries and lofty teachings that others cannot see in it; but this every one who reads it must see in it, reading impartially. If Dickens or Thackeray, Hawthorne or Irving, had introduced into any of his fictions one scene as licentious as scores which the great German depicts he would not only have blasted his reputation with his countrymen and women, but have found it impossible to induce any first class English or American publishing house to issue his work. Of French novels I need say nothing. But let us for a moment place the past volumes of the London Punch and Parisian Charivari side by side, and see what light they throw upon the respective morals of the two nations. The two periodicals are precisely similar in general character and object. Both are intended to present in a ridiculous aspect, and correct, by the force of ridicule, the faults and follies of the age in every department of life, Political, Social and Domestic. Each has numbered among its contributors men of genius, and been illustrated by the pencil of the ablest caricaturist which his nation has yet produced. Both are immensely popular, are exhibited in the shop windows, are special favourites in the family, and quoted in every circle. But what a difference the two indicate in national morality and taste. There is not a number of Punch which a clergyman might not with propriety lay upon the bed of a convalescent, as an innocent and beneficial relief to the tedium of the sick chamber. There is not a number of its Parisian rival that a Christian father could permit his wife and daughters to see. Its best picture would probably be representative of the comic aspect of a married woman's intrigue with her paramour, successfully concealed or awkwardly exposed; her own child being the agent in either case. Its best joke, a witicism at which French ladies and gentlemen may laugh together, but which if a lady should not understand a gentleman must not explain to her. Surely this is not one of the things which they do better in France. I would here wish to correct a widely prevalent and mistaken impression regarding our popular literature. Namely, that it is largely composed of that which is pernicious rather than beneficial. I have frequently heard it said both on the platform and in the pulpit, that bad books were more extensively read than good ones, and that infidel and immoral publications have a circulation that a better class of periodicals cannot attain. This I am happy to say is not true but the facts are precisely the reverse. My authority is Baine, and I quote from a work which has been twice recently enlarged by the London Quarterly Review for its trustworthy character. It gives the following statistics. In 1864 the periodicals issued in London were as follows:

Table with 2 columns: Category and Circulation. Includes Religious, scientific, and literary Magazines (185,900), Temperance (293,000), Useful and entertaining (537,000), Magazines of a higher class (244,000), Highly embellished and costly serials (353,000), Total monthly (6,609,000), Religious (285,000), Useful and moral (734,000), Containing novels (1,653,000), Romances (195,000), Total (6,094,961), Free thinking literature (5,000), Immoral and impure (9,000).