

II. Social Aims

“ When the old world is sterile
And the ages are effete,
He will from wrecks and sediment
The fairer world complete.
He forbids to despair;
His cheeks mantle with mirth;
And the unimagined good of men
Is yearning at the birth.

“ I have heard my master say that a man cannot fully exhaust the abilities of his nature.” — CONFUCIUS.

Who does not delight in fine manners? Their charm cannot be predicted or overstated. ‘T is perpetual promise of more than can be fulfilled. It is music and sculpture and picture to many who do not pretend to appreciation of those arts. It is even true that grace is more beautiful than beauty. Yet how impossible to overcome the obstacle of an unlucky temperament, and acquire good manners, unless by living with the well-bred from the start; and this makes the value of wise forethought to give ourselves and our children as much as possible the habit of cultivated society.

‘T is an inestimable hint that I owe to a few persons of fine manners, that they make behavior the very first sign of force,—behavior, and not performance, or talent, or, much less, wealth. Whilst almost everybody has a supplicating eye turned on events and things and other persons, a few natures are central and forever unfold, and these alone charm us. He whose word or deed you cannot predict, who answers you without any supplication in his eye, who draws his determination from within, and draws it instantly,—that man rules.

The staple figure in novels is the man of aplomb, who sits, among the young aspirants and desperates, quite sure and compact, and, never sharing their affections or debilities, hurls his word like a bullet when occasion requires, knows his way, and carries his points. They may scream or applaud, he is never engaged or heated. Napoleon is the type of this class in modern history; Byron’s heroes in poetry. But we, for the most part, are all drawn into the charivari; we chide, lament, cavil, and recriminate.

I think Hans Andersen’s story of the cobweb cloth woven so fine that it was invisible,—woven for the king’s garment, — must mean manners, which do really clothe a princely nature. Such a one can well go in a blanket, if he would. In the gymnasium or on the sea-beach his superiority does not leave him. But he who has not this fine garment of behavior is studious of dress, and then not less of house and furniture and pictures and gardens, in all which he hopes to lie perdu, and not be exposed.

“Manners are stronger than laws.” Their vast convenience I must always admire. The perfect defence and isolation which they effect makes an insuperable protection. Though the person so clothed wrestle with you, or swim with you, lodge in the same chamber, eat at the same table, he is yet a thousand miles off, and can at any moment finish with you. Manners seem to say, You are you, and I am I. In the most delicate natures, fine temperament and culture build this impassable wall. Balzac finely said “Kings themselves cannot force the exquisite politeness of distance to capitulate, hid behind its shield of bronze.”

Nature values manners. See how she has prepared for them. Who teaches manners of majesty, of frankness, of grace, of humility, – who but the adoring aunts and cousins that surround a young child? The babe meets such courting and flattery as only kings receive when adult; and, trying experiments, and at perfect leisure with these posture-masters and flatterers all day, he throws himself into all the attitudes that correspond to theirs. Are they humble? he is composed. Are they eager? he is nonchalant. Are they encroaching? he is dignified and inexorable. And this scene is daily repeated in hovels as well as in high houses.

Nature is the best posture-master. An awkward man is graceful when asleep, or when bard at work, or agreeably amused. The attitudes of children are gentle, persuasive, royal, in their games and in their house-talk and in the street, before they have learned to cringe. ‘T is impossible but thought disposes the limbs and the walk, and is masterly or secondary. No art can contravene it, or conceal it. Give me a thought, and my hands and legs and voice and face will all go right. And we are awkward for want of thought. The inspiration is scanty, and does not arrive at the extremities.

It is a commonplace of romances to show the ungainly manners of the pedant who has lived too long in college. Intellectual men pass for vulgar, and are timid and heavy with the elegant. But, if the elegant are also intellectual, instantly the hesitating scholar is inspired, transformed, and exhibits the best style of manners. An intellectual man, though of feeble spirit, is instantly reinforced by being put into the company of scholars, and, to the surprise of everybody, becomes a lawgiver. We think a man unable and desponding. It is only that he is misplaced. Put him with new companions, and they will find in him excellent qualities, unsuspected accomplishments, and the joy of life. ‘T is a great point in a gallery, how you hang pictures; and not less in society, how you seat your party. The circumstance of circumstance is timing and placing. When a man meets his accurate mate, society begins, and life is delicious.

What happiness they give, – what ties they form! Whilst one man by his manners pins me to the wall, with another I walk among the stars. One man can, by his voice, lead the cheer of a regiment another will have no following. Nature made us all intelligent of these signs, for our safety and our happiness. Whilst certain faces are illumined with intelligence, decorated with invitation, others are marked with warnings certain voices are hoarse and truculent sometimes they even bark. There is the same difference between heavy and genial manners as between the perceptions of octogenarians and those of young girls who see everything in the twinkling of an eye.

Manners are the revealers of secrets, the betrayers of any disproportion or want of symmetry in mind and character. It is the law of our constitution that every change in our experience instantly indicates itself on our countenance and carriage, as the lapse of time tells itself on the face of a clock. We may be too obtuse to read it, but the record is there. Some men may be obtuse to read it, but some men are not obtuse and do read it. In Borrow’s “Lavengro,” the gypsy instantly detects, by his companion’s

face and behavior, that some good fortune has be-fallen him, and that he has money. We say, in these days, that credit is to be abolished in trade: is it? When a stranger comes to buy goods of you, do you not look in his face and answer according to what you read there ? Credit is to be abolished ?

Can't you abolish faces and character, of which credit is the reflection ? As long as men are born babes they will live on credit for the first fourteen or eighteen years of their life. Every innocent man has in his countenance a promise to pay, and hence credit. Less credit will there be ? You are mistaken. There will always be more and more. Character must be trusted; and, just in proportion to the morality of a people, will be the expansion of the credit system.

There is even a little rule of prudence for the young experimenter which Dr. Franklin omitted to set down, yet which the youth may find useful,—Do not go to ask your debtor the payment of a debt on the day when you have no other resource. He will learn by your air and tone how it is with you, and will treat you as a beggar. But work and starve a little longer. Wait till your affairs go better, and you have other means at hand; you will then ask in a different tone, and he will treat your claim with entire respect.

Now, we all wish to be graceful, and do justice to ourselves by our manners; but youth in America is wont to be poor and hurried, not at ease, or not in society where high behavior could be taught. But the sentiment of honor and the wish to serve make all our pains superfluous. Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy. Self-command is the main elegance. “Keep cool, and you command everybody,” said St. Just and the wily old Talleyrand would still say, *Surtout, messieurs, pas de zele*,—“Above all, gentlemen, no heat.”

Why have you statues in your hall, but to teach you that, when the door-bell rings, you shall sit like them. “Eat at your table as you would eat at the table of the king,” said Confucius. It is an excellent custom of the Quakers, if only for a school of manners, – the silent prayer before meals. It has the effect to stop mirth, and introduce a moment of reflection. After the pause, all resume their usual intercourse from a vantage-ground. What a check to the violent manners which sometimes come to the table, – of wrath, and whining, and heat in trifles !

‘T is a rule of manners to avoid exaggeration. A lady loses as soon as she admires too easily and too much. In man or woman, the face and the person lose power when they are on the strain to express admiration. A man makes his inferiors his superiors by heat. Why need you, who are not a gossip, talk as a gossip, and tell eagerly what the neighbors or the journals say? State your opinion without apology. The attitude is the main point, assuring your companion that, come good news or come bad, you remain in good heart and good mind, which is the best news you can possibly communicate. Self-control is the rule. You have in you there a noisy, sensual savage which you are to keep down, and turn all his strength to beauty. For example, what a seneschal and detective is laughter! It seems to require several generations of education to train a squeaking or a shouting habit out of a man. Sometimes, when in almost all expressions the Choctaw and the slave have been worked out of him, a coarse nature still betrays itself in his contemptible squeals of joy. It is necessary for the purification of drawing-rooms, that these entertaining explosions should be under strict control. Lord Chesterfield had early made this discovery, for he says, “I am sure that since I had the use of my reason, no human being has ever heard me laugh.” I know that there go two to this game, and, in the presence of certain formidable wits, savage nature must sometimes rush out in some disorder.

To pass to an allied topic, one word or two in regard to dress, in which our civilization instantly shows itself. No nation is dressed with more good sense than ours. And everybody sees certain moral benefit in it. When the young European emigrant, after a summer's labor, puts on for the first time a new coat, he puts on much more. His good and becoming clothes put him on thinking that he must behave like people who are so dressed and silently and steadily his behavior mends. But quite another class of our own youth, I should remind, of dress in general, that some people need it, and others need it not. Thus a king or a general does not need a fine coat, and a commanding person may save himself all solicitude on that point. There are always slovens in State Street or Wall Street, who are not less considered. If a man have manners and talent he may dress roughly and carelessly. It is only when mind and character slumber that the dress can be seen. If the intellect were always awake, and every noble sentiment, the man might go in huckaback or mats, and his dress would be admired and imitated. Remember George Herbert's maxim, "This coat with my discretion will be brave." If, however, a man has not firm nerves, and has keen sensibility, it is perhaps a wise economy to go to a good shop and dress himself irreproachably. He can then dismiss all care from his mind, and may easily find that performance an addition of confidence, a fortification that turns the scale in social encounters, and allows him to go gayly into conversations where else he had been dry and embarrassed. I am not ignorant, – I have heard with admiring submission the experience of the lady who declared "that the sense of being perfectly well-dressed gives a feeling of inward tranquillity which religion is powerless to bestow."

Thus much for manners but we are not content with pantomime; we say this is only for the eyes. We want real relations of the mind and the heart; we want friendship; we want knowledge; we want virtue; a more inward existence to read the history of each other. Welfare requires one or two companions of intelligence, probity, and grace, to wear out life with, – persons with whom we can speak a few reasonable words every day, by whom we can measure ourselves, and who shall hold us fast to good sense and virtue and these we are always in search of. He must be inestimable to us to whom we can say what we cannot say to ourselves. Yet now and then we say things to our mates, or hear things from them, which seem to put it out of the power of the parties to be strangers again. "Either death or a friend," is a Persian proverb. I suppose I give the experience of many when I give my own. A few times in my life it has happened to me to meet persons of so good a nature and so good breeding, that every topic was open and discussed without possibility of offence, – persons who could not be shocked. One of my friends said in speaking of certain associates, "There is not one of them but I can offend at any moment." But to the company I am now considering, were no terrors, no vulgarity. All topics were broached, – life, love, marriage, sex, hatred, suicide, magic, theism, art, poetry, religion, myself, thyself, all selves, and whatever else, with a security and vivacity which belonged to the nobility of the parties and to their brave truth. The life of these persons was conducted in the same calm and affirmative manner as their discourse. Life with them was an experiment continually varied, full of results, full of grandeur, and by no means the hot and hurried business which passes in the world. The delight in good company, in pure, brilliant, social atmosphere the incomparable satisfaction of a society in which everything can be safely said, in which every member returns a true echo, in which a wise freedom, an ideal republic of sense, simplicity, knowledge, and thorough good-meaning abide, – doubles the value of life. It is this that justifies to each the jealousy with which the doors are kept. Do not look sourly at the set or the club which does not choose you. Every highly organized person knows the value of the social barriers, since the best society has often been spoiled to him by the intrusion of bad companions. He of all men would keep the right of choice sacred, and feel that the exclusions are in the interest of the admissions, though they happen at this moment to thwart his wishes.

The hunger for company is keen, but it must be discriminating, and must be economized. 'T is a defect in our manners that they have not yet reached the prescribing a limit to visits. That every well-dressed lady or gentleman should be at liberty to exceed ten minutes in his or her call on serious people, shows a civilization still rude. A universal etiquette should fix an iron limit after which a moment should not be allowed without explicit leave granted on request of either the giver or receiver of the visit. There is inconvenience in such strictness, but vast inconvenience in the want of it. To trespass on a public servant is to trespass on a nation's time. Yet presidents of the United States are afflicted by rude Western and Southern gossips (I hope it is only by them), until the gossip's immeasurable legs are tired of sitting; then he strides out and the nation is relieved.

It is very certain that sincere and happy conversation doubles our powers; that, in the effort to unfold our thought to a friend, we make it clearer to ourselves, and surround it with illustrations that help and delight us. It may happen that each hears from the other a better wisdom than any one else will ever hear from either. But these ties are taken care of by Providence to each of us. A wise man once said to me that "all whom he knew, met"—meaning that he need not take pains to introduce the persons whom he valued to each other: they were sure to be drawn together as by gravitation. The soul of a man must be the servant of another. The true friend must have an attraction to whatever virtue is in us. Our chief want in life, — is it not somebody who can make us do what we can? And we are easily great with the loved and honored associate. We come out of our eggshell existence and see the great dome arching over us; see the zenith above and the nadir under us.

Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense. You are to be missionary and carrier of all that is good and noble. Virtues speak to virtues, vices to vices, — each to their own kind in the people with whom we deal. If you are suspiciously and dryly on your guard, so is he or she. If you rise to frankness and generosity, they will respect it now or later.

In this art of conversation, Woman, if not the queen and victor, is the lawgiver. If every one recalled his experiences, he might find the best in the speech of superior women, — which was better than song, and carried ingenuity, character, wise counsel, and affection, as easily as the wit with which it was adorned. They are not only wise themselves, they make us wise. No one can be a master in conversation who has not learned much from women; their presence and inspiration are essential to its success. Steele said of his mistress, that "to have loved her was a liberal education." Shenstone gave no bad account of this influence in his description of the French woman: "There is a quality in which no woman in the world can compete with her, — it is the power of intellectual irritation. She will draw wit out of a fool. She strikes with such address the chords of self-love, that she gives unexpected vigor and agility to fancy, and electrifies a body that appeared non-electric." Coleridge esteems cultivated women as the depositaries and guardians of "English undefiled"; and Luther commends that accomplishment of "pure German speech" of his wife.

Madame de Stael, by the unanimous consent of all who knew her, was the most extraordinary converser that was known in her time, and it was a time full of eminent men and women; she knew all distinguished persons in letters or society, in England, Germany, and Italy, as well as in France, though she said, with characteristic nationality, "Conversation, like talent, exists only in France." Madame de Stael valued nothing but conversation. When they showed her the beautiful Lake Lemman, she exclaimed, "O for the gutter of the Rue de Bac!" the street in Paris in which her house stood. And she said one day, seriously, to M. Mole, "If it were not for respect to human opinions, I would not open my window to see the Bay of Naples for the first time, whilst I would go five hundred leagues to talk

with a man of genius whom I had not seen.” Ste. Beuve tells us of the privileged circle at Coppet, that, after making an excursion one day, the party returned in two coaches from Chambery to Aix, on the way to Coppet. The first coach had many rueful accidents to relate, – a terrific thunder-storm, shocking roads, and danger and gloom to the whole company. The party in the second coach, on arriving, heard this story with surprise; —of thunder-storm, of steeps, of mud, of danger, they knew nothing; no, they had forgotten earth, and breathed a purer air: such a conversation between Madame de Stael and Madame Recamier and Benjamin Constant and Schlegel! they were all in a state of delight. The intoxication of the conversation had made them insensible to all notice of weather or rough roads. Madame de Tesse said, “If I were Queen, I should command Madame de Stael to talk to me every day.” Conversation fills all gaps, supplies all deficiencies. What a good trait is that recorded of Madame de Maintenon, that, during dinner, the servant slipped to her side, ” Please, madame, one anecdote more, for there is no roast to-day.”

Politics, war, party, luxury, avarice, fashion, are all asses, with loaded panniers to serve the kitchen of Intellect, the king. There is nothing that does not pass into lever or weapon.

And yet there are trials enough of nerve and character, brave choices enough of taking the part of truth and of the oppressed against the oppressor, in privatest circles. A right speech is not well to be distinguished from action. Courage to ask questions courage to expose our ignorance. The great gain is, not to shine, not to conquer your companion, – then you learn nothing but conceit, – but to find a companion who knows what you do not; to tilt with him and be overthrown, horse and foot, with utter destruction of all your logic and learning. There is a defeat that is useful. Then you can see the real and the counterfeit, and will never accept the counterfeit again. You will adopt the art of war that has defeated you. You will ride to battle horsed on the very logic which you found irresistible. You will accept the fertile truth, instead of the solemn customary lie.

Let nature bear the expense. The attitude, the tone, is all. Let our eyes not look away, but meet. Let us not look east and west for materials of conversation, but rest in presence and unity. A just feeling will fast enough supply fuel for discourse, if speaking be more grateful than silence. When people come to see us, we foolishly prattle, lest we be inhospitable. But things said for conversation are chalk eggs. Don't say things. What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary. A lady of my acquaintance said, ” I don't care so much for what they say as I do for what makes them say it.”

The main point is to throw yourself on the truth, and say with Newton, ” There 's no contending against facts.” When Molyneux fancied that the observations of the nutation of the earth's axis destroyed Newton's theory of gravitation, he tried to break it softly to Sir Isaac, who only answered, ” It may be so; there 's no arguing against facts and experiments.”

But there are people who cannot be cultivated, – people on whom speech makes no impression, swainish, morose people, who must be kept down and quieted as you would those who are a little tipsy others, who are not only swainish, but are prompt to take oath that swainishness is the only culture; and though their odd wit may have some salt for you, your friends would not relish it. Bolt these out. And I have seen a man of genius who made me think that if other men were like him co-operation were impossible. Must we always talk for victory, and never once for truth, for comfort, and joy ? Here is centrality and penetration, strong understanding, and the higher gifts, the insight of the real, or from the real; and the moral rectitude which belongs to it but all this and all his resources of

wit and invention are lost to me in every experiment that I make to hold intercourse with his mind; always some weary, captious paradox to fight you with, and the time and temper wasted. And beware of jokes; too much temperance cannot be used: inestimable for sauce, but corrupting for food: we go away hollow and ashamed. As soon as the company give in to this enjoyment, we shall have no Olympus. True wit never made us laugh. Mahomet seems to have borrowed by anticipation of several centuries a leaf from the mind of Swedenborg, when he wrote in the Koran:—

“On the day of resurrection, those who have indulged in ridicule will be called to the door of Paradise, and have it shut in their faces when they reach it. Again, on their turning back, they will be called to another door, and again, on reaching it, will see it closed against them; and so on, ad infinitum, without end.”

Shun the negative side. Never worry people with your contritions, nor with dismal views of politics or society. Never name sickness; even if you could trust yourself on that perilous topic, beware of unmuzzling a valetudinarian, who will soon give you your fill of it.

The law of the table is Beauty,—a respect to the common soul of all the guests. Everything is unseasonable which is private to two or three or any portion of the company. Tact never violates for a moment this law; never intrudes the orders of the house, the vices of the absent, or a tariff of expenses, or professional privacies; as we say, we never ” talk shop ” before company. Lovers abstain from caresses, and haters from insults, whilst they sit in one parlor with common friends.

Stay at home in your mind. Don't recite other people's opinions. See how it lies there in you and if there is no counsel, offer none. What we want is, not your activity or interference with your mind, but your content to be a vehicle of the simple truth. The way to have large occasional views, as in a political or social crisis, is to have large habitual views. When men consult you, it is not that they wish you to stand tiptoe, and pump your brains, but to apply your habitual view, your wisdom, to the present question, forbearing all pedantries, and the very name of argument; for in good conversation parties don't speak to the words, but to the meanings of each other.

Manners first, then conversation. Later, we see that, as life was not in manners, so it is not in talk. Manners are external; talk is occasional: these require certain material conditions, human labor for food, clothes, house, tools, and, in short, plenty and ease,—since only so can certain finer and finest powers appear and expand. In a whole nation of Hottentots there shall not be one valuable man,—valuable out of his tribe. In every million of Europeans or of Americans there shall be thousands who would be valuable on any spot on the globe.

The consideration the rich possess in all societies is not without meaning or right. It is the approval given by the human understanding to the act of creating value by knowledge and labor. It is the sense of every human being, that man should have this dominion of nature, should arm himself with tools, and force the elements to drudge for him and give him power. Every one must seek to secure his independence; but he need not be rich. The old Confucius in China admitted the benefit, but stated the limitation “If the search for riches were sure to be successful, though I should become a groom with whip in hand to get them, I will do so. As the search may not be successful, I will follow after that which I love.” There is in America a general conviction in the minds of all mature men, that every

young man of good faculty and good habits can by perseverance attain to an adequate estate; if he have a turn for business, and a quick eye for the opportunities which are always offering for investment, he can come to wealth, and in such good season as to enjoy as well as transmit it.

Every human society wants to be officered by a best class, who shall be masters instructed in all the great arts of life shall be wise, temperate, brave, public men, adorned with dignity and accomplishments. Every country wishes this, and each has taken its own method to secure such service to the state. In Europe, ancient and modern, it has been attempted to secure the existence of a superior class by hereditary nobility, with estates transmitted by primogeniture and entail. But in the last age, this system has been on its trial and the verdict of mankind is pretty nearly pronounced. That method secured permanence of families, firmness of customs, a certain external culture and good taste; gratified the ear with preserving historic names: but the heroic father did not surely have heroic sons, and still less surely heroic grandsons; wealth and ease corrupted the race.

In America, the necessity of clearing the forest, laying out town and street, and building every house and barn and fence, then church and town-house, exhausted such means as the Pilgrims brought, and made the whole population poor; and the like necessity is still found in each new settlement in the Territories. These needs gave their character to the public debates in every village and State. I have been often impressed at our country town-meetings with the accumulated virility, in each village, of five or six or eight or ten men, who speak so well, and so easily handle the affairs of the town. I often hear the business of a little town (with which I am most familiar) discussed with a clearness and thoroughness, and with a generosity, too, that would have satisfied me had it been one of the larger capitals. I am sure each one of my readers has a parallel experience. And every one knows that in every town or city is always to be found a certain number of public-spirited men, who perform, unpaid, a great amount of hard work in the interest of the churches, of schools, of public grounds, works of taste and refinement. And as in civil duties, so in social power and duties. Our gentlemen of the old school, that is, of the school of Washington, Adams, and Hamilton, were bred after English types, and that style of breeding furnished fine examples in the last generation; but, though some of us have seen such I doubt they are all gone. But nature is not poorer to-day. With all our haste, and slipshod ways, and flippant self-assertion, I have seen examples of new grace and power in address that honor the country. It was my fortune not long ago, with my eyes directed on this subject, to fall in with an American to be proud of. I said never was such force, good meaning, good sense, good action, combined with such domestic lovely behavior, such modesty and persistent preference for others. Wherever he moved he was the benefactor. It is of course that he should ride well, shoot well, sail well, keep house well, administer affairs well, but he was the best talker, also, in the company: what with a perpetual practical wisdom, with an eye always to the working of the thing, what with the multitude and distinction of his facts (and one detected continually that he had a hand in everything that has been done), and in the temperance with which he parried all offence, and opened the eyes of the person he talked with without contradicting him. Yet I said to myself, How little this man suspects, with his sympathy for men and his respect for lettered and scientific people, that he is not likely, in any company, to meet a man superior to himself. And I think this is a good country, that can bear such a creature as he is.

The young men in America at this moment take little thought of what men in England are thinking or doing. That is the point which decides the welfare of a people; which, way does it look? If to any other people, it is not well with them. If occupied in its own affairs and thoughts and men, with a heat which excludes almost the notice of any other people, – as the Jews, the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, the Arabians, the French, the English, at their best times have done, – they are sublime; and

we know that in this abstraction they are executing excellent work. Amidst the calamities which war has brought on our country this one benefit has accrued, – that our eyes are withdrawn from England, withdrawn from France, and look homeward. We have come to feel that “by ourselves our safety must be bought”; to know the vast resources of the continent, the good-will that is in the people, their conviction of the great moral advantages of freedom, social equality, education, and religious culture, and their determination to hold these fast, and, by them, to hold fast the country and penetrate every square mile of it with this American civilization.

The consolation and happy moment of life, atoning for all short-comings, is sentiment; a flame of affection or delight in the heart, burning up suddenly for its object,—as the love of the mother for her child; of the child for its mate; of the youth for his friend; of the scholar for his pursuit; of the boy for sea-life, or for painting, or in the passion for his country; or in the tender-hearted philanthropist to spend and be spent for some romantic charity, as Howard for the prisoner, or John Brown for the slave. No matter what the object is, so it be good, this flame of desire makes life sweet and tolerable. It reinforces the heart that feels it, makes all its acts and words gracious and interesting. Now society in towns is infested by persons who, seeing that the sentiments please, counterfeit the expression of them. These we call sentimentalists, – talkers who mistake the description for the thing, saying for having. They have, they tell you, an intense love of nature; poetry, – O, they adore poetry, and roses, and the moon, and the cavalry regiment, and the governor; they love liberty, “dear liberty” they worship virtue, “dear virtue!” Yes, they adopt whatever merit is in good repute, and almost make it hateful with their praise. The warmer their expressions, the colder we feel; we shiver with cold. A little experience acquaints us with the unconvertibility of the sentimentalist, the soul that is lost by mimicking soul. Cure the drunkard, heal the insane, mollify the homicide, civilize the Pawnee, but what lessons can be devised for the debauchee of sentiment? Was ever one converted? The innocence and ignorance of the patient is the first difficulty: he believes his disease is blooming health. A rough realist, or a phalanx of realists, would be prescribed; but that is like proposing to mend your bad road with diamonds. Then poverty, famine, war, imprisonment, might be tried. Another cure would be to fight fire with fire, to match a sentimentalist with a sentimentalist. I think each might begin to suspect that something was wrong.

Would we codify the laws that should reign in households, and whose daily transgression annoys and mortifies us, and degrades our household life, we must learn to adorn every day with sacrifices. Good manners are made up of petty sacrifices. Temperance, courage, love, are made up of the same jewels. Listen to every prompting of honor. “As soon as sacrifice becomes a duty and necessity to the man, I see no limit to the horizon which opens before me.”

Of course those people, and no others, interest us who believe in their thought, who are absorbed, if you please to say so, in their own dream. They only can give the key and leading to better society: those who delight in each other only because both delight in the eternal laws; who forgive nothing to each other; who, by their joy and homage to these, are made incapable of conceit, which destroys almost all the fine wits. Any other affection between men than this geometric one of relation to the same thing, is a mere mush of materialism.

These are the bases of civil and polite society; namely, manners, conversation, lucrative labor, and public action, whether political, or in the leading of social institutions. We have much to regret, much to mend, in our society; but I believe that with all liberal and hopeful men there is a firm faith in the beneficent results which we really enjoy; that intelligence, manly enterprise, good education, virtuous life, and elegant manners have been and are found here, and, we hope, in the next generation will still more abound.

Revision #1

Created 2019-04-18 15:58:08 UTC by Textpedia

Updated 2019-04-18 15:58:24 UTC by Textpedia