

We strike here an ugly feature of the party system. Why do practical politicians shrink so much from dealing with large questions? Simply because they know that unfair means will be tried to embarrass them in carrying such measures through. To bring forward some large measure of legislation is to deploy in the open before an entrenched enemy. The theoretical justification of a parliamentary Opposition is that the acts and measures of every Government require criticism. True, but criticism does not imply deliberate misconstruction and misrepresentation. What should we think of a literary critic who, sitting down to the examination of a book, professedly allowed himself to be dominated by a desire to create as much odium as possible in the mind of the public against the writer? And yet we all know that this is precisely the line an Opposition in Parliament and in the press usually takes in regard to the measures of the Government of the day. The thing is done by each side in turn, so that it is difficult for either side to feel any very genuine indignation when their own methods are retorted on them. What a common thing it is to see this or that casual and really harmless remark of some public man converted by party malice into a studied insult to some sect or class in the community! What a ready recourse there is to charges of want of patriotism! What sad use has been made in more than one emergency of the appeal to national and religious prejudice!

It is impossible to associate much with politicians without being struck by their extraordinary and, as it seems to me, morbid sensitiveness to what they call public opinion. What they are really afraid of is less public opinion than public silliness. If the public only knew how little common sense they are credited with by the very men who, on the hustings, load them with every kind of flattery, they would feel far from complimented. The common idea among politicians is that the people can be stampeded by a word, a phrase, some unguarded expression or trifling act which in any way touches, or might be so misinterpreted and twisted as to appear to touch, a popular prejudice. It is, of course, taken for granted, and rightly as things go, that opponents will do their utmost to make mischief out of the word, phrase or act; but where is that confidence in the superior judgment and sterling common sense of the masses of the people of which we hear so much on certain occasions? Can the voters be at once so wise as we are told, and also so strongly resemble a herd of buffaloes with their snouts in the air ready for a whirlwind dash at the faintest scent of danger? I do not readily reconcile the two conceptions.

There was a politician once, a true man of the people, who did not believe in the buffalo herd theory. That man was Abraham Lincoln. Of him James Russell Lowell, in his celebrated essay, has said: "This was a true Democrat, who grounded himself on the assumption that a democracy can think. 'Come, let us reason together about this matter,' has been the tone of all his addresses to the people. . . . He put himself on a level with those he addressed, not by going down to them, but only by taking for granted that they had brains, and would come up