

“Well, then, of what real use can it be?”

“Surely,” I said, “if you know the errors of the scale, you can make as correct measurements with it, as if its graduations were accurately marked. Now, as I write exclusively for my own countrymen, who are quite familiar with the topics just discussed between us, they will thus have some means of estimating the degree of reliance due to my observations and descriptions, when applied to the correspondent circumstances in your country.

“The value of any accounts brought home by a traveller, it appears to me, must always be modified, in the estimation of his readers, by their acquaintance with his habits of thinking on subjects current amongst themselves. Without some such knowledge of the writer’s mind, it is impossible they can enter correctly into his views; so that, unless they have some such clew, the risk is, they may often entirely misapprehend him. It is on this account, probably, that private journals, however carelessly written, afford more vivid and more substantially accurate pictures of foreign scenes, manners, and customs, than the most elaborate statements printed afterwards. The readers of the manuscript are so familiar with the writer, that they know exactly what weight to give to his expressions; and thence, by making due allowance for his habits of observation, they discover what has been the light in which he has viewed the things he describes.

“I am also more anxious on this occasion to prevent misconceptions respecting the particular matters you and I have been discussing this morning, than I should have been, had I never published before on any such subjects. This visit to North America has changed so many of the views I formerly took of political matters, especially with respect to Republics, that I feel it due to such important subjects to leave no ambiguity respecting them, as far as my opinions are concerned. Possibly the value of such opinions may be diminished by their want of stability; but I hope, at all events, that their inconsistency will be received as one proof of their sincerity.”

“At all events,” said my American friend, “although I fear no foreigner can ever understand our character, or appreciate the value of our institutions, I trust you at least will admit that we are a great nation; that we are treading close on the heels of the Mother Country; and that we are making gigantic strides in the way of every kind of improvement!”

I remained silent, not knowing well how to reply to such an appeal.