

THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XXIII.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, JANUARY 27, 1904.

No. 14

THE GREAT IN THE LITTLE.

NEWTON saw the motion of the planets in the fall of an apple, and Thoreau the whole human race in the inhabitants of a Massachusetts village. The essential qualities of things may often be seen in the smallest units, better indeed than in the mass or multitude.

The appreciation of this truth clarifies the vision and enables some to know where others have to guess, or can only follow their fellows—the blind leading the blind into the ditch.

The mass of men seem stupefied when occasion demands the consideration of things on any large scale: they become dazed, mystified, helpless, and are easily led or stampeded hither or thither by any glib-tongued self-seeker who knows no more than the rest, but makes them believe that he knows.

Take the trade question. So long as you keep it down to the matter of the trade of one man with another, there is no difficulty, no confusion. The benefit of free exchange is so evident that it is manifest even to the child and the savage. Or take the trade between a town and the farming country that surrounds it. The farmer exchanges his produce for store goods, and both the farmer and the merchant profit by the transaction, and they know that they profit, and why they profit.

Now, suppose that some of the citizens of the town who grow vegetables, keep poultry within the town limits; suppose that some of these men were to try to get the town council to pass a by-law to place a tax of fifty per cent. on eggs and vegetables brought in from the country, where in this whole length and breadth of the country would you find a council so besotted with foolishness as to accede to the demand? These gardeners and poultrymen could not convince the townspeople by any quantity of eloquence that a scheme that was so palpably intended to increase their own profits at the expense of all their fellow-citizens—that this scheme was really designed and fitter to promote the interests of the public.

Trade, then, is beneficial, and is easily seen to be so, and universally admitted to be so when carried on between two individuals or two small groups of individuals. We may now go farther and consider larger groups, and still the benefits of trade are admitted in some cases, as between Ontario and Manitoba, or New York and Minnesota. And just at this point the good sense of Canadians and Americans alike seems to have forsaken them. They are confused by the conception of a greater multitude of transactions, considered along with the entirely unessential fact of differing nationalities and an arbitrary

boundary line, and straightway they allow themselves to be bamboozled and humbugged into all sorts of schemes for restricting trade, schemes which, however, have all one object, and that is to fleece the consumer for the benefit of the local producer.

Again, take the question of patriotism. A large part of the popular conception of patriotism is a blind pride in ourselves and the country we live in, and an equally blind prejudice against other countries and the people who live in them. It is based very largely on a foolish feeling that we are superior in all particulars of importance to any other people, that our modes of speech, our dress, our manners, our ways of doing things are better than theirs, and that, consequently, when any trouble arises between our government and theirs, our government is, of course, entirely in the right, and theirs in the wrong. Such in general is patriotism, and mankind has made the mere pretension of possessing it the highest of virtues.

But to see how absurd a thing this is which usually goes by the name of patriotism, we have only to reduce it to its lowest terms and consider the same feeling narrowed down in relation to the individual. What kind of man would he be, pray, who set himself up as superior in every way to every other man in a community, and who assumed a right to special privileges on that account? Only a drunken man or an insane one would do so, and some drunken men and some lunatics are marked by the possession of this very characteristic. Kipling has recognized the true nature of this kind of patriotism when he warns the British people against becoming "drunk with sight of power," and so breaking out in the "frantic boast and foolish word." "such boastings as the Gentiles use," or as are made by the wild barbarians outside of the pale of civilization and Christianity, whom the poet calls "the lesser breeds without the law," such boastings, indeed, as Kipling thinks, call for the mercy of heaven to forgive us for our foolishness. And yet these very boastings are the basis of most of our patriotic songs and speeches, and even of our patriotic sermons. The Christian patriotism of many persons not one whit higher than the pagan tribalism of their barbaric ancestors.

Examine, again, in the same way some of the elements which go to make up what many persons consider as national greatness. In spite of the teachings of history and of reason, the mass of men are led to believe that the greatness of a nation depends upon the area of its territories and on its volume of trade. Now, a considerable