

ITES, ISTS, AND —ISMS.

"Masters, spread yourselves," was Nick Bottom's behest to his clownish histrionic associates in Shakespeare's *Midsummer fairy comedy*. If the weaver had addressed himself to mankind in general, and had been universally accepted as a sage, his words could not have had a more completely spreading effect, so far as men's beliefs are concerned, than can be seen around us. Sets, sects, and coteries have multiplied at such a villainous rate that there is probably not one of us who knows exactly what his nearest friend believes, taking him all round, and nine persons out of ten have no precise idea of what they believe themselves. Once upon a time, I suppose, English society might have been roughly divided into Tories and Whigs. Given the fact that a man was a Tory, and you might have marked down on a chart almost all he believed on almost all subjects. Men moved more or less in grooves. But the word has gone forth—"Masters, spread yourselves;" ideas have multiplied, and the race has agglomerated into little spots, like water poured on to a greasy piece of glass. I sat next to a man at lunch at a club not long ago who, in the language of the footlights, "fairly knocked" me with the diversity of his notions, for any one of which I believe he would gladly have died at the stake. He ate little and talked much (from which I do not wish it to be inferred that he drank—far from it,) and, as far as he had time to unburden himself, I found out that he was (1) a Wagnerite, (2) a Theosophist, (3) an Ibsenite, (4) an Impressionist, (5) a Socialist of the Fabian variety, (6) a Vegetarian, (7) a Realist, (8) a Homeopathist, (9) a Darwinian, (10) a Browningite, (11) a dress reformer (he wore Jaeger all over), and (12) a Mrs. Mona Caird-ite. He confessed to all those. I meant to ask him if he had got any more, only, as he persisted in expounding his position on all these momentous themes, it will be seen that my chances were not great. I wanted to ask him whether he believed the earth to be flat, whether he thought Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, and whether (considering Mr. Frederic Harrison's argument anent the Elgin marbles) it would be a moral thing to exhibit the North Pole in the British Museum in the event of its ultimate discovery. On all these subjects, and many much more occult, I believe my friend would have been found to have very decided and well-labelled views.

This reminded me of a story Mr. Henry Irving used to be fond of telling at the expense of my "friend J. L. Toole." J. L. once had an acute advertising mania which manifested itself in manifold ways. He had some little gummed labels prepared, upon which he had printed an advertisement of his theatre and the piece in which he was appearing. These he would surreptitiously stick on the backs of railway carriages, in cabs, and even in the pews in church—when he went to church. One day Irving and Toole had been in the country, and entered an inn for refreshments. When they came out they saw in the inn yard a small crowd of loafers surrounding a man who was lying helplessly drunk. Toole bustled up, pretended he was a physician, knelt down by the "patient," and motioned the crowd to stand at a distance. Then he fumbled about for few minutes, looked consequential, and covered the man's face with a wideawake hat. Then he solemnly arose and said, "Leave him like that for a few minutes and he'll be all right." Irving and Toole hurried away, but they had not got far when they heard a yell. The hat had been removed by the yokels, and the face of the inebriated was found to be smothered with gummed tickets announcing that *Uncle Dick's Darling* was being performed at a certain theatre, "every evening at 8." Do you see how the story is a parable? My club acquaintance with the many beliefs, all ostentatiously labelled, reminded me of Toole's victim, also labelled from chin to crown.

Bottles in druggists' shops, and dogs under the new County Council, ought to be labelled; but I do not understand why grown-up men should need to call themselves -ists and -ites, and go mad about -isms. Why may not one admire the expressiveness of Mr.

Irving's left leg, along with Mr. Oscar Wilde, without being labelled Irvingite? Why should not one be able to appreciate that subtle psychology, the astonishing technique and the splendid dramatic skill of the creator of Nora Helmer and Rebecca West without being labelled "Ibsenite?" Why cannot one think the Swan of Bayreuth the greatest music-dramatist the world has ever seen, without being labelled "Wagnerite?" Man is not a hoarding that he should thus be ruthlessly passed over. I long to grasp the hand of the full-grown intellectual man, well-read, sound-thinking, and of artistic tastes, who has no -isms and boasts no particularly aggressive principles. I would do almost anything for such a man—except become one of his -ites.

The world is full of nostrums of various degrees of nastiness with which quacks of various degrees of stupidity or cupidity are endeavoring to dose a too easily-gullible people. If we swallowed the whole lot, we should be a bit the better. And it is amusing to think that a thousand years ago, and long after that, unless the silly old world grows wiser in the mean time—and there is little hope of that—there will still be liberally-labelled gentlemen (and ladies too, I fear me) all most earnestly persuaded that they are inevitably, infallibly right, and that they with their notions can save the world. Ah me! perhaps after all, as Hazlitt wrote years ago, "The best lesson we can learn from witnessing the folly of mankind is not to irritate ourselves against it."

MR. TATTERSALL and Charles Mathews, the elder, were very intimate, and the great comedian was frequently in the habit of accompanying his friend to Newmarket races, where, on one occasion, Mathews indulged in his well-known taste for mimicry, at the expense of Mr. Tattersall, during a sale of blood stock conducted by the latter.

"The first lot, gentlemen," said Mr. Tattersall, "is a bay filly, by Smolensko," etc.

"The first lot, gentlemen," echoed Mathews, in precisely the same tone of voice, "is a bay filly, by Smolensko."

Mr. Tattersall looked somewhat annoyed, but proceeded—

"What shall we say to begin with?"

"What shall we say to begin with?" replied the inevitable echo.

Still endeavouring to conceal his vexation, Mr. Tattersall inquiringly called out—

"One hundred guineas?"

"One hundred guineas?" bawled out Mathews.

"Thank you, sir!" cried Mr. Tattersall, bringing down the hammer with a bang; "the filly is yours!"

Mathews, we need scarcely add, was somewhat taken aback by his sudden acquisition of "blood stock."

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