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PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CIVILIZATION.

The following extracts from an interesting article in the last number of the North British Review—the well known organ of evangelical Protestantism—on "British and Continental Characteristics," form an appropriate comment upon the text—"but having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content."—1 Tim. vi. 8; and they are not unworthy the serious consideration of our friends who are so fond of vaunting the excellence of Protestant civilization, Protestant intelligence, and Protestant morality. They may perhaps arise with the conviction expressed by the Protestant Reviewer—"that these glimpses into Continental life and character—in which it has a marked superiority to our own—incline us to a certain uncomfortable misgiving that some of our aims, and exertions may be sadly misdirected, and that we may, oftener than we deem, be sailing on a wrong track":—

The extremes of character in civilized man are to be found in the Asiatic and the American,—the silent, dignified, placid, and stagnant Mussulman,—and the striving, pushing, restless, and progressive Yankee. Between these extremes lie the easy and joyous Celt, generally contented with the passing hour, but often contented with too little; the stationary and phlegmatic German of the south, cautious and unassuming, frugal and complacent; the Norwegian, whose life in most things resembles that of his Teutonic brethren; the Swiss, who approximate nearer to ourselves; and finally the British, only a few degrees less ambitious, insatiable, unresting, and discontented than their western offspring. In the appendix to the second part of Layard's Nineveh, there is a letter from a Turkish Cadi, so thoroughly Oriental in its spirit, so exactly portraying those peculiar features of character in which the East differs from the West, and so amusingly astonishing to men accustomed to look upon exertion, the acquisition of knowledge, and the progress of wealth as the great ends of existence, that we cannot do better than quote it. The traveller had astonished the weak mind of his Mussulman friend, by applying to him for some statistical information regarding the city and province in which he had dwelt so long as a man in authority. The Turk replied with this dignified and affectionate rebuke:—

"My illustrious friend, and joy of my liver! The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of the inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules, and another stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire into it.

"Oh, my soul! oh my lamb! seek not after the things which concern thee not. Thou camest unto us, and we welcomed thee: go in peace.

"Of a truth, thou has spoken many words; and there is no harm done, for the speaker is one and the listener is another. After the fashion of thy people thou hast wandered from one place to another until thou art happy and content in none. We (praise be to God) were born here, and never desire to quit it. Is it possible, then, that the idea of a general intercourse between mankind should make any impression on our understanding? God forbid!

"Listen, oh my son! There is no wisdom equal unto the belief in God. He created the world; and shall we liken ourselves to Him in seeking to penetrate the mysteries of his creation? Shall we say, Behold this star spinneth round that star, and this other star with a tail cometh and goeth in so many years! Let it go! He from whose hand it came will direct and guide it.

"But thou wilt say unto me, stand aside, oh man, for I am more learned than thou art, and have seen more things. If thou thinkest that thou art in this respect better than I am, thou art welcome. I praise God that I seek not that which I require not. Thou art learned in the things I care not for; and as for that which thou hast seen, I defile it. Will much knowledge create thee a double stomach, or wilt thou seek Paradise with thine eyes?

"Oh my friend! If thou wilt be happy, say, There is no God but God! Do no evil, and thus wilt thou fear neither man nor death; for surely thine hour will come.

"The meek in spirit (El Fakir.)

"MAUM ALI YADE."

But apart from these extreme cases of content

where content ought not to be, it is impossible to become acquainted with those instances of rational and well-founded satisfaction with a most moderate and limited present, of which continental life offers us so many examples, without feeling, or at least suspecting, that, as compared with our hurried and turmoiling existence, our neighbors have chosen the better part. Look at Norway, for example, which has attained, as nearly as possible, to that "stationary state" which most economists regard with dread, aversion, and a feeling akin to shame. There the inhabitants may be said to form one vast middle class; there is no great wealth, no absolute destitution; peasants and proprietors live on together, generation after generation, on the same land, and much in the same style as their forefathers; fuel and food, though simple are both abundant; the men till the soil and fell the timber; the women manufacture at home the clothing they need; each man's life, whether he be farmer, laborer, or artisan, is pretty much cut out for him by circumstances and custom; as he grows up, he steps into the vacant niche in the community which was waiting for him, (or if not vacant he waits for it,) without any thought of exchanging it for a different one, or struggling out of it into one higher; there is much comfort but little luxury—much cheerfulness, perhaps too much conviviality; there is general equality and general content.

In Auvergne, we find a state of society almost precisely similar. There the peasants are nearly all proprietors, and often rich, for they spend little and cultivate well. The hoardings, when spent at all, are spent in land; every thing is made at home sometimes literally nothing is bought except the drugs to dye their wool; they live simply but plentifully; and generation succeeds generations in the same industrious and monotonous content. Wars and revolutions pass over their country; but they scarcely hear of them, and never feel them. In Switzerland, too, especially in the Cantons of Berne and Zurich, we find much of the same primitive, unvarying, and enjoyable existence, though here the curse of "indebtedness," which seems inseparable from the law of equal succession, often sheds a perpetual gloom over the life of the peasant proprietor. But when he has escaped this evil, and has found the small estate which sufficed to his ancestors suffice for him also, and when his younger brothers have gone to foreign countries, to seek or make their fortunes,—the Swiss farmer has always appeared to us to enjoy one of the happiest of human lots. Educated, industrious, pious, and patriotic, the citizen of a free state small enough for him to feel an appreciable unit among its inhabitants,—in a situation which nourishes no ambition that he may not readily gratify, and yet exempts him from those gloomy cares and forebodings as to the future, which wear away the lives and sadden the domestic circle of thousands among the Americans and English,—there is much in his existence which we may well envy, and not a little which, perhaps, we might emulate.

In Germany, especially in central and southern Germany, we find a numerous class in middle life—to which we have no analogon in England—who possess an assured but a moderate competence at which they are certain to arrive in time. They have not, as in England, when they have chosen their profession, and undergone their education, to plunge into the hot strife and race of competition, and take their chance of obtaining a maintenance or a prize by overcoming and distancing their rivals. We are not now expressing any opinion as to the advisability of such a system of leading strings; we only call attention to one of its effects—which is the exemption of a large proportion of the middle and educated classes from harassing anxieties about their future or that of their children, and the consequent diffusion of a sort of quiet happiness and somewhat pathetic content of which here we have no conception. These men of scanty but of certain expectations enjoy the present in a respectable and often most worthy manner; they are educated, and have a moderate amount of intellectual and more of aesthetic taste; they love social pleasures, and have ample leisure for them; unless singularly gifted, they know they must remain in the humble sphere in which their route is traced for them; they have no grandeur to hope for, and no destitution to fear; ils ont de quoi vivre, as the expression is, and in order to be thoroughly happy need only to cut down their desires to the level of their means. Their life is a quietly flowing stream, somewhat languid, perhaps, with many bright flowers growing on its banks, which they have leisure both to admire and to cull; they do perhaps little for their generation, but they lead a not undignified, and assuredly not an unenjoyed or morose existence; they may cultivate all the amenities, and affections, and many even of the elegancies of the domestic circle, and if their minds are well trained and furnished, they may add to these the pleasures of calm and contem-

plative literary habits. Yet their income is of an amount which (after making full allowance for the different cost of living in the two countries) with us would be considered as utterly inadequate to furnish means for a happy or comfortable life, and to be content with which would be held to argue deplorable want of energy and enterprise.

In France, too,—though long years of change and convulsion have diffused a longing discontent and restlessness through the urban population, which as yet is fever only and not energy,—there still remain many in moderate and humble circumstances, professional men, commis and subordinate employés, who, on a pittance which would be considered as grinding poverty in England, contrive not only to support life, but to embellish it and enjoy it. They make the best of what they have, instead of anxiously striving to increase it. They "cut their coat according to their cloth." They are not tormented by the desire to imitate or to equal those to whom fortune has been more bountiful. They are contented to enjoy, while their analogues in England would be fretfully laboring to acquire. They are not as we are, for ever haunted by something in the distance to be obtained or to be escaped. They do not, like us, immolate the possessed present on the shrine of an uncertain future. They do not pull down their house to build their monument. They perform cheerfully and faithfully their humble and, perhaps, uninteresting functions, and devote the rest of their time to simple, social, unambitious enjoyments. There are others again, who finding themselves at their entrance into life in possession of moderate competence—a small patrimonial inheritance—deliberately pause to decide on their career. On the one side lie the possibilities of wealth, the gauds of distinction, the gratification of commercial or political success, to be purchased by harassing and irritating strife, by earlocking cares, by severe and unremitting toil. On the other lie the charms of a life of unassuming ease, of quiet nights and unanxious days, of the free enjoyment of the present hour—something of a butterfly existence, in short. Nine Yankees out of ten would choose the former; nine Frenchmen out of ten will prefer the latter. We do not here intend to pronounce which is right; but it is hard to persuade ourselves that all the wisdom—all the true estimate of the objects and the worth of life—lies with the man who decides for the thornier and rougher path.

Now let us cast a glance at the contrasted tone of English and American social existence: we may class them together, for the main difference is, that in America, our state of struggle is even more universal, and carried on under more favorable prospects of success. And we have a few who cling to the "even tenor" of existence as the preferable state: in our exaggerated and caricaturing descendants, scarcely any such are to be found. Now, we are no advocates for a life of inaction and repose. Activity is better than stagnation; exertion in pursuit of any object, is better than an existence with no object at all. We know well that out of dissatisfaction with our present condition, have arisen all our successful conquests of higher and more desirable conditions; that to the restless energy and aspiring temper of the Anglo-Saxon, may be traced a large proportion of the material progress, and not a little of the intellectual progress of the world; that civilization, if it does not consist in perpetual advance, at least owes its origin and present perfection to perpetual endeavor. But we cannot permit ourselves to regard the struggle to be rich as worthy of admiration for itself. We cannot bring ourselves to regard the gallant and persevering energy which is devoted to "getting on in life, as consecrated to a high aim. We cannot persuade ourselves at once, and without inquiry, as many do, to pronounce the life that enjoys, as ipso facto and per se, meaner than the life that toils. We mourn over energies wasted by misdirection, as much as over energies suffered to lie dormant and die out. The man who strives for a clear duty or a noble prize is beyond question a higher and worthier being than the man who glides through life in happy and innocent tranquillity: but we are by no means so sure that the man, who, having a competence, spends years, and strength, and spirits, and temper, in striving for a fortune, has made a wiser or a better choice than the man who, having a competence, sits down thankfully and contentedly to enjoy it with his family and friends.

It is indeed a sad spectacle, that of so vast a proportion of the national energy still devoted to mere material acquisition, still laboring in a field in which such ample harvests have been already gained, still pushing on in a direction where there is little left to win,—while so many social problems remain still unsolved, so many grievous wounds still unhealed, so many noble paths still untraversed or unexplored. We still press madly forward in the race, though the goal can present us with no new attractions; we still

struggle "to get on," though we have got far enough to command all the substantial acquisitions and enjoyments of a worthy life; we still persist in striving and toiling for added wealth, which can purchase for us no added happiness, and in the hot competition we push aside or trample down many who really need what we only desire. It is true that as matters are now arranged in England, and in the state of fierce competition in which we live, and move, and have our being, this devotion of the whole man to this work seems indispensable to success—it is one of our most grievous social evils that it should be so; but it is owing very much to the very instinctive and pertinacious strife "to get on," which we complain of—a strife not indeed objectless, but continued long after the original object has been obtained. For if our mode of life were simpler, if our standard of the needed or the fitting were more rational and less luxurious, if our notion of a "competence" were more real and less conventional, and if we were more disposed to stay our hand when that competence was gained,—this competition would become far less severe and oppressive; men might possibly have to work nearly as hard in their several callings, but they would work for fewer years, and the earlier retirement of the successful would make more frequent openings for the needy and the striving.

The second point in which it appears to us that continental life has greatly the advantage over our own, is in the aspect which poverty assumes. Rarely in France and Germany does it sink so low as with us. Far more seldom does it reach the form of destitution. Scarcely ever does it descend to squalor. Many causes combine to produce this enviable difference; sometimes it is purchased at a price which we are not prepared to pay; but of the fact of the difference there can, we believe, be no question. We all know how incessantly of late years our sympathies have been aroused, and our feelings shocked and pained by pictures of the awful depths to which misery descends in the courts and alleys of our great metropolis, as well as of Edinburgh and Glasgow; of human beings living by hundreds in dens filthier than styes, and more pestiferous than plague hospitals; of men, women, and children huddled together in dirt, disorder, and promiscuity like that of the lower animals; of girls delicately bred, toiling day and night for wages utterly inadequate to the barest maintenance; of deaths from absolute starvation. We are not prepared to indorse the heart-rending and sickening delineations of Mayhew, Kingsley, and Dickens, in all their details, but neither are we able to withhold our assent to their rough and general fidelity. They are too far confirmed by the cold official statements of blue books for that. Poverty, then, in Great Britain assumes many and frequent forms of aggravated wretchedness and squalor, which change its character from a condition of privation to one of positive infliction, which make life a burden, a malady, and a curse. In France and Germany, we believe we are warranted in stating, these abysses of misery are never found—or only as anomalous and most astounding exceptions. We never hear of them in Vienna. We believe they could not exist there. There is nothing like them in Munich, Dresden, or Berlin. Sir Francis Head and Lord Ashley put themselves in the hands of an experienced resident in Paris with a request that they might be taken to the very worst haunts and dwellings of the lowest portion of the population, and this is the testimony Sir F. Head gives:—

"I must own it was my impression, and I believe was that of Lord Ashley, that the poverty we had come to witness bore no comparison whatever to that recklessness of personal appearance, that abject wretchedness, that squalid misery, which—dressed in the cast-off tattered garments of our wealthy classes, and in clothes perforated with holes not to be seen among the most savage tribes—Ireland annually pours out upon England, and which, in the crowded courts and alleys of London I have so often visited, produce among our own people, as it were, by infection which no moral remedy has yet been able to cure, scenes not only revolting as well as discreditable to human nature, but which are to be witnessed in no other portion, civilized or uncivilized, on the globe. In another locality, La Petite Pologne, we found the general condition of the poorer classes in no way worse than those we had just left. On entering a large house, four stories high, running round a small square hollow court, we ascertained that it contained rather more than 500 lodgers, usually grouped together in families or little communities. In this barrack or warren, the rooms, paved with bricks, were about fifteen feet long, ten feet broad, and eight feet high. We found them generally speaking, clean and well ventilated; but the charge for each chamber unfurnished was six francs a month. In the most miserable district in the west end of Paris, we also failed to meet with