

was based on the assumption that the best way to prevent fraud in trade is to give creditors full control over their insolvent debtors. It is one more illustration—unfortunately there are too many—of the mistaken application of the fundamental principles of political economy.

As the whole number of bankruptcies has doubled, and as, at the same time, those on creditors' petitions have decreased, it follows that the liquidations by arrangement and the compositions have more than doubled. The reason of this is, as we have just seen, that creditors will not take the trouble or do not deem it expedient in the great majority of cases to institute proceedings, and that these are conducted solely in the interest of the defaulting debtors and of the class of solicitors and accountants who devote themselves to this peculiar kind of business. The debtor puts himself in the hands of one of these gentlemen, who undertakes to see him through. The latter canvasses the creditors, expatiates upon the cost of litigation, persuades them that an amicable arrangement is the best, and obtains a sufficient number of proxies to control the meeting of creditors, which is duly called, often at the most inconvenient place that can be chosen. He then appoints himself trustee, and does as he pleases with the estate. There is no supervision, no power of control, no auditing of accounts even. It is not surprising, then, that compositions are seldom effected, and are growing rarer and rarer, when liquidation is likely to be profitable to the canvasser. If he were to allow of a composition, he would get nothing for his pains. And it is equally little surprising that the liquidations should yield results disappointing to the creditors. Accordingly we find last year that "out of 4,010 compounding debtors 1,911, or nearly one-half, paid compositions not exceeding 2s. 6d., and probably not averaging 1s. 6d. in the pound, or about one-fourteenth part of the amount they owed their creditors while only four in every hundred offered to pay more than half of their debts." And the vast increase in the compositions has been precisely in the worst classes. In fact, those in which not more than a shilling in the pound was paid have increased in the nine years over 900 per cent. But the liquidations by arrangement, as was to have been expected, show far greater abuses even than the compositions. In the case of these what was paid at least went to the creditors, for the reason, as we have already observed, that it was not worth the while of agents to trouble with such small transactions; but the liquidations they were able to manipulate for their own benefit. Accordingly we are told that "nearly half the liquidating debtors gave up nothing more than enough to defray the expenses of carrying a resolution allowing them to liquidate."

We have said that the increase in the number of bankruptcies has been exclusively in the compositions and liquidations; but it has been much greater in the latter than in the former, and for the reason stated above. If anything more were needed to prove that the state of the law is the prime cause of the mischief, it may be found in the fact that "in some of the largest commercial centres, as London, Birmingham, Manchester, &c., the number of insolvencies increased very rapidly through the years of highest prosperity to a practical maximum in the years 1872 or 1873, with no further average increase through the worst years to the year 1878." Before we close, there is one other point to which it is desirable to direct attention. We refer to the unchecked control now allowed to trustees over the funds which they receive. The Comptroller in Bankruptcy estimates that the balances actually at the disposal of trustees cannot be much less than five millions. The interest on this enormous fund is lost both to the creditors and to the public, and, what is much more serious, there is no guarantee for the security of the funds themselves. "So long as the amount of a trustee's business continues it is impossible to know how his affairs stand; he may go on from year to year making payments on account of older matters from funds received on account of new matters, and it may be feared that they would not be able, if called upon, to produce the amount of funds for which they are accountable." This surely is a state of affairs which ought not to be allowed to continue. To establish an audit of these accounts ought not to be beyond the ability of Parliament, even at the fag end of a session.—*Saturday Review*.

### MANNERS.

Next to our murder cases, of which we have a plentiful crop on hand, the great question of the day appears to be, How to behave ourselves? With reference to the great Hats off! controversy, I would merely remind those interested that there is at this present time a remarkably well-bred and highly-trained monkey in the city, who accompanies a street organ; he is the very *beau ideal* of what a monkey should be, and is such an expert in this branch of deportment that he may be regarded as a safe exemplar, and will prove a complete connecting link.

I have been set thinking about this question of manners, and have been struck with the number of books—Guides to Etiquette, they are usually called—which have been issued, and some of which it may be worth while to glance at. Manners are the small change of society. They are little in themselves, but exceedingly useful in social intercourse, and also of good in representing something of greater value. All of us have shining virtues and exemplary qualities known to ourselves and to our intimates; at all events, if the latter

are not aware of them, it is their own fault, since we generally spare no pains to impress the fact upon them. But in mixed society half the people are unknown to the other half, and the merits of all must be taken pretty much upon trust. It is impossible that all should be introduced in detail with a specification of their family claims, their social position, and the value of their property. Thus it happens that just as a very wealthy man cannot carry his wealth about with him to show everybody and convince them of its reality, so even very great and very good people must often endure the mortification of being confounded with the common herd. A man may have a million at his fare, whereas all the small change necessary for that purpose would have been sufficient to satisfy all the requirements of the moment. And in order to meet a like state of things, society has adopted the small and useful currency which we call "Manners." These are hardly of any intrinsic value, but the possession of them indicates a great deal. It is accepted as evidence of something behind, of a bulk of social position of which these are the samples, the convenient "change" always ready to hand.

As to the Guide-books which I have spoken of, the first thing that strikes you about most of them is, what a mannerless set of people they are supposed to lick into shape. Who are the folks who want to be told that they ought not to put their knives into their mouths, or to eat with a loud, snorting noise like horses, or to scuffle their feet under the table—or on it? I suppose they exist, and if they do, they certainly will be all the more pleasant in company from correcting these habits. In fact, if they are ever to make any figure in society, they *must* do so. They may have done everything,—made money, got property, or achieved fame; but it is not of the slightest help unless they are provided with the small change of "manners," fresh from the mint of Fashion, and with the true social ring about them.

The next question is, Who makes the manners by which society is regulated? For the most part, I suppose they resemble Topsy, in that they have "growed." Some have "growed" out of natural courtesy, dictated by good feeling; some out of mere convenience, and others out of sheer surprise. In all civilized society, it is inevitable that deference and attention should be paid to women, and a natural instinct would dictate how this should be done. The same instinct would enable one to show courtesy to others, and to endeavour to be agreeable. This is plain sailing; but there is much beyond this, and it is when you come to the strict laws and stern behests of "the best society" upon the veriest trifles that the novice finds himself utterly at fault, and betrays his poverty—so far as breeding goes. Instinct is utterly at fault here. There is no why nor wherefore for half that is done. They seem matters of indifference, which carry neither praise for doing nor censure for omitting. And yet the ignorance of them, which may overtake the best—nay, the most gifted and the most gentle natures in the world, carries with it a kind of faultiness and imperfection. With the proper knowledge the fool may be at his ease, and without it the wise man is often put to shame.

It would be a mistake to suppose that all the trivialities which constitute manners are based on caprice alone. Some have a very solid foundation in convenience and sound sense. There are sound reasons for most of the complicated rules for leaving cards, for making calls, and for dinner-table etiquette. The card has come to play a very important part in society. It often does duty for the person whose name it bears, and saves an immense deal of trouble and awful waste of time by being judiciously "left." To show all that it involves it is only necessary to mention that in one of those said books on etiquette over twenty pages are devoted to the mysteries of leaving cards. This is, in fact, an art, and one that becomes more and more difficult every day. As to dinners, parties and receptions—anything ranking above Sam Weller's "leg of mutton swarry"—the details to be mastered constitute a liberal education. To the superficial these details often appear silly; but as they are adopted to save trouble, to avoid offence, to promote enjoyment, to put everybody at their ease, and to ensure the success of social meetings, even their triviality rises into importance.

There are, however, some points about "manners" which are not only trivial but silly. It is comforting to think that in these absurd trifles the French go much further than we do. With them it is an offence to open a table-napkin beyond certain folds, and it must be laid across the knee in an arbitrary fashion. But these are among the caprices which are adopted as "manners." I suppose all nations have them, and that, if we only knew it, there is a polite and a vulgar way of feeding on whale's blubber and eating dirt pies. But though there is no reason in many things which are "right," it is well to know how to practice them. You cannot argue them out in every company; the best plan is to learn what is expected of you, and to accept it with unquestioning acquiescence. One of the guide-books says: "They cannot be violated with impunity. Good society is by no means tender-hearted or merciful; it revenges itself most pitilessly on the poor victim who through ignorance or carelessness infringes any of its laws." The very fact that these laws rest in great measure on no better foundation than caprice gives them an authority above all other laws. They *must* be obeyed, *because* they *must* be obeyed. This is the whole sum of the matter; and when we remember that the bulk of