

## AMERICANS UNDER CRITICISM.

An Englishman who visits the United States, and is tempted to write critically on the social aspects of America, does, we imagine, a somewhat unwise thing. If a visitor here and there discerns traits, which do not appeal to his sympathies (which are often enough also his prejudices,) or phases of society, manners, or customs which are even uninteresting to him, it would be far better to hold his peace about them. There is no great virtue in an irrepressible itching to make public one's own private and particular ideas in such matters. Moreover, Americans are perhaps a little over-sensitive on these points, although there are cases in which the sensitiveness certainly causes us no surprise. The criticism of Sir Lepel Griffin, for instance, was a production which could scarcely be called anything but offensive. When a man, because, in a short experience of railway travelling, he does not happen to see what he considers pretty women in the trains, jumps in effect to the decision that there is no beauty in the United States, we can come to no conclusion but that his opportunities of observation must have been limited, and his dicta hasty and gratuitously discourteous.

It is curious that a writer of so suave a temperament as the late Matthew Arnold should have been unable to resist the temptation of recording his impressions. His temperament could not indeed permit him anything like the wholesale denunciations of Sir Lepel Griffin, who seems to have sedulously raked up, kept alive, and taken with him, the prejudices of the days of his great-grandfather. Mr. Arnold does not, of course, excite in American criticism the feeling which was evoked by the gross bad taste of Sir Lepel's performance. He is apparently accused chiefly of having found America uninteresting, though we fear (if the Philadelphia *American* reproduces his actual diction) he also used the word "vulgar." We think it quite possible ourselves to find a good deal in the States somewhat uninteresting, but vulgarity in the broad sense of the word is a term, we should think, decidedly inapplicable. Americans are, as a rule, too downright and genuine to be "vulgar." It is a great pity that Mr. Arnold should have left this as one of his latest expressions of opinion.

In a physical encounter, he who strikes first, or gives gross provocation, generally has to shoulder the responsibility of disagreeable, and the rule, of course, applies equally to the bandying of unacceptable opinions. He who replies can scarcely be found much fault with, even if he goes somewhat out of his record in doing so.

This, the Philadelphia *American*, to some extent, does. The *American* is an exceedingly well-written paper, but also strongly Republican, and by no means weakly anti-British. Retort on Englishmen generally for Mr. Arnold's sins, comes therefore not altogether uncongenially to it, and it proceeds to commit itself to two sweeping propositions. Because "we have not easily deterred variations in society, no handles to names, \* \* \* no fixed immutable ranks to look up to or despise, \* \* \* it seems almost impossible for a German not to be a slave, and an Englishman not to be a snob." Now, herein is not only hard measure to the poor Englishman—we cannot go into the German position, though we may have our own ideas on the subject—but a distinct betrayal of want of knowledge. It is like the American superstition that every Englishman clips his "h's" where he ought to aspirate them, and aspirates them where, in fact, they are not. Again, it is like the English superstition that every American speaks through his (or her) nose. It is quite true, on the other hand, that the "h" arrangement is a very distinctive feature of the English lower classes. But, pace the scornful American critic, no man speaks purer English than an English gentleman, no woman purer English than an English lady. America gets the larger mass of the lower classes, and judges accordingly, and America naturally judges summarily on a defect from which she is herself almost absolutely free. But the proposition that "an Englishman who supports the throne and the House of Lords cannot escape being a snob, because, to be in any way consistent, he must truckle to many persons whom he knows to be worthless or worse," betrays a complete ignorance of the great middle-classes of England. These have been fairly enough for general purposes, divided into the upper and lower middle classes. In both alike the salient feature—barring, here and there, the snob innate and inevitable—is a self-respect which has so woven itself into social etiquette that there can be no more conspicuous solecism in good breeding than to unduly "my lord," or "my lady," this or that lady or gentleman, whose precedence of rank may be above one's own. It is fair to presume that the *American* knows nothing of the numerous ancient families who have persistently declined title, but it cannot be unaware of the (so to speak) republican self-assertion which prompted the famous reply of Sir Edward Seymour to William of Orange, when that Prince, perhaps with an idea of compliment, assumed that he was of the family of the Duke of Somerset—"The Duke, sir, is of my family." This, of course, was in itself a bit of the highest family pride, but it is not the pride of mere title. Moreover, the truest and highest English aristocrat is typically, simple, genuine, courteous, and unostentatious. The *American* speaks of the American snob as the most harmless in the world. Truth to say, we hardly know what an American snob is; it must be a scarce production for the reason before given, i.e., that Americans are, as a rule, too genuine and straightforward to be snobs at all.

## PHONETICISM.

Certain of the Collegiate Journals of Nova Scotia are undergoing an acute attack of this disorder—a disorder, be it admitted, which may, like measles, scarlatina, nettle rash, and other inconveniences of childhood, result in purification of the system. The gentlemen who are now directing their conscientious, and, let us again say, far from useless, endeavors to the end of a reform in spelling, are not old enough to remember the charming

aspect of a journal of this specialty, which emerged out of "inner consciousness" into the light of day in England some forty years ago. The *Phonetic News*, the hieroglyphics of which we cannot recall, except that the initial letter, as far as we can remember, was the Greek "phi," and that "News" was spelt "Nûz," was altogether "fearfully and wonderfully" compounded. It enjoyed but a brief existence, although there was manifest in it a decided and far from irrational system. Its portentous appearance caused it to fall flat on the public ear and eye, and the vision of its failure yet warningly hangs on our remembrance. We are believers, however, in reform, yet we are inclined to think that the more guarded and gradual it is, the more permanent it is likely to be. The Spanish language has the advantage of a revising college, whose dicta are authentic, and the result is a remarkable simplification of orthography, one instance of which is the substitution of "f" for "phi," and another is the avoidance of the doubling of consonants. But the Spanish language lends itself to reform with peculiar familiarity.

Long before the idea was discussed with any degree of publicity, there were persons who did a little simplification on their own account by striking out the "u" in nouns which were distinctly Latin, as "horor," which old-fashioned people continued to spell "honour." But we have always felt an instinctive dislike to alterations which obscure derivations, such as the American notion of spelling "theatre"—"theater," "metre"—"meter" etc., which continues to present itself to us as a vulgarity and a barbarism.

We have always looked upon the saving of letters in writing as one of the chief objects in reform, and have, therefore, far more cheerfully acquiesced in "plow" for "plough," though that is somewhat against derivation. It is true, that good dictionaries might always preserve to us the necessary analogues, but we rather demur to the following proposition, which we extract *verbatim et literatim* from the *Dalhousie Gazette*—

"And what are the objections urged against spelling reform? They are insignificant. It used to be objected by ignorant people: 'Why, it would completely spoil the etymology of our language to change its spelling and make it fonetic. How could we ever get back to the origin of our words over such a yawning chasm as that would make?' This objection is quite imaginary. The change would be most decidedly in the interest of etymological research and the only pit is that it was not made long ago."

The Philological Association posits a set of five rules in the first place, and one of twenty-four in addition. The five inculcate the droppings of final e's in such words as *have*, *a* in *health*, etc., and the last double consonants ending *shall*, *cliff*, etc. They substitute *f* for *ph*, and *t* for *ed* in past participles as *lashed*, *impressed*, etc. In the last case *ed* is supposed to have the sound of *t*, an assumption, we think, not altogether correct.

Some of the alterations commended to us in the twenty-four rules are open to question. Thus, to drop *e* from *heart* makes the word the same as that poetically used for a stag, and one of the things which should be, *u* we think, avoided in reform is any multiplication of words having different meanings with the same spelling.

To write *beauty* is undoubtedly to spell her "as she is spoke," but the word is entirely French, and the derivation is obscured, though in that particular case, it is not of much consequence; moreover, *beauty* does not look quite so ugly as some of the other quasi-emendations. And let us here observe a point generally overlooked—that the association of the mind with a word (especially with a name) consists principally in the look of it when written. Take the name of Kate, for instance. There is nothing on earth in the short, harsh sound to recommend it, but every one likes its written appearance. *Sarah* is a house-maid, but *Sara* may be a princess. *Julia* is, in sound both soft and noble, but *J* is a peculiarly ugly letter, and the name looks quite different spelt in the Italian way, *Giulia*.

To drop the *o* from *leopard* vulgarizes and spoils a beautiful word, and destroys the derivation. To drop the *e* from *yeoman*, on the other hand, is of less consequence, or, indeed, of none at all.

To excise the *u* from *guild*, *guest*, *quest*, etc., not only increases words of the same spelling with various meanings, but in some cases, as *quest*, interferes with the soft *g* rule, though that has its exceptions as it is, as in *get*.

To spell *rhyme*—*rime*, is to confuse verse and hoar-frost.

*Cinder* changed to *sinder* does not look so much like Cinderella, but the derivation might as well be Teutonic as Latin.

To drop the *s* in *demesne* would be little more than a return to old spelling, but by the way, we rather demur to Webster's pronunciation of the word.

To drop *c* in *scent* confounds the odor with the participle of *to send*, and to drop the *w* in *whole* is to drop it into a *hole*.

These are only a few remarks suggested in glancing over Mr. Frazee's article in the *Dalhousie Gazette*. They are not intended to depreciate the principle of reform to which we have no dislike. But if we are conservative on any point, it is that of derivations, which we think should never be allowed to be obscured; we know how alluring is the spirit of iconoclasm; we have seen the effects of defective taste in the Revised New Testament; and we only suggest to reformers to quietly pursue their study of their subject till they have eliminated the crudeness of early zeal.

The United States Government have received back from the Chinese Government a large portion of the two hundred and forty thousand dollars, paid as an indemnity for the murder of Chinese subjects in Wyoming Territory. After indemnifying all the heirs of the murdered men, the Chinese Government finding a balance on hand came to the conclusion that it should be returned to the United States. The British Government has not yet received from the United States Government the unexpended millions received on account of the "Alabama" affair. But then the United States is not an ignorant heathen country. It represents the "smartest" men "in all creation, sir."