

SOCIETY IN AMERICA.

PART I.

POLITICS.

“ Those unalterable relations which Providence has ordained that everything should bear to every other. These relations, which are truth itself, the foundation of virtue, and consequently, the only measures of happiness, should be likewise the only measures by which we should direct our reasoning. To these we should conform in good earnest, and not think to force nature, and the whole order of her system, by a compliance with our pride and folly, to conform to our artificial regulations. It is by a conformity to this method we owe the discovery of the few truths we know, and the little liberty and rational happiness we enjoy.” *Burke.*

MR. MADISON remarked to me, that the United States had been “useful in proving things before held impossible.” Of such proofs, he adduced several. Others, which he did not mention, have since occurred to me; and, among them, the pur-

suit of the *à priori* method in forming a constitution:—the *à priori* method, as it is styled by its enemies, though its advocates, with more reason, call it the inductive method. Till the formation of the government of the United States, it had been generally supposed, and it is so still by the majority of the old world, that a sound theory of government can be constructed only out of the experience of man in governments; the experience mankind has had of despotisms, oligarchies, and the mixtures of these with small portions of democracy. But the essential condition of the fidelity of the inductive method is, that all the elements of experience should be included. If, in this particular problem, of the true theory of government, we take all experience of government, and leave out all experience of man, except in his hitherto governing or governed state, we shall never reach a philosophical conclusion. The true application of the inductive method here is to test a theory of government deduced from the principles of human nature, by the results of all governments of which mankind has had experience. No narrower basis will serve for such an induction. Such a method of finding a good theory of government was considered impossible, till the United States “proved” it.

This proof can never be invalidated by anything that can now happen in the United States. It is

common to say “Wait; these are early days. The experiment will fail yet.” The experiment of the particular constitution of the United States may fail; but the great principle which, whether successfully or not, it strives to embody,—the capacity of mankind for self-government,—is established for ever. It has, as Mr. Madison said, proved a thing previously held impossible. If a revolution were to take place to-morrow in the United States, it remains an historical fact that, for half a century, a people has been self-governed; and, till it can be proved that the self-government is the cause of the instability, no revolution, or series of revolutions, can tarnish the lustre, any more than they can impair the soundness of the principle that mankind are capable of self-government. The United States have indeed been useful in proving these two things, before held impossible; the finding a true theory of government, by reasoning from the principles of human nature, as well as from the experience of governments; and the capacity of mankind for self-government.

It seems strange that while politics are unquestionably a branch of moral science, bearing no other relation than to the duty and happiness of man, the great principles of his nature should have been neglected by politicians—with the exception of his love of power and desire of gain,—till a set

of men assembled in the State House at Philadelphia, in the eighteenth century, and there throned a legitimate political philosophy in the place of a deposed king. The *rationale* of all preceding governments had been, “men love power, therefore there must be punishments for rulers who, having already much, would seize more. Men desire gain; therefore there must be punishments for those, rulers or ruled, who would appropriate the gains of others.” The *rationale* of the new and “impossible” government is “that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure those rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”* This last recognizes, over and above what the former admits, the great principles of indefeasible rights; human equality in relation to these; and the obligation of universal justice.

These, then, are the principles which the statesmen in the State House at Philadelphia announced as the soul of their embryonic institutions; and the rule through which they were to work was no less than that golden one which seems to have been, by some unhappy chance, omitted in the bibles of other statesmen—“Do unto others as ye would

* Declaration of Independence.

that they should do unto you.” Perhaps it may be reserved for their country to prove yet one more impossible thing—that men can live by the rule which their Maker has given them to live by. Meanwhile, every true citizen of that country must necessarily be content to have his self-government tried by the test of these principles, to which, by his citizenship, he has become a subscriber. He will scorn all comparisons, instituted as a test of merit, between his own government and those of other countries, which he must necessarily consider as of narrower scope and lower aim. Whether such comparisons be instituted abroad in a spirit of contempt, or at home in a spirit of complacency, he will regard them equally as irrelevant, and proving nothing to the best purposes of true citizens. He will disdain every test but that furnished by the great principles propounded in the State House at Philadelphia; and he will quarrel with no results fairly brought out by such a test, whether they inspire him with shame, or with complacency. In either case, he will be animated by them.

If the politics of a country be really derived from fundamental principles of human nature and morals, the economy, manners, and religion of that country must be designed to harmonise with these principles. The same test must be applicable to all. The inalienable right of all the human race to life,

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, must control the economical, as well as the political arrangements of a people; and the law of universal justice must regulate all social intercourse, and direct all administration of religion.

Politics are morals, all the world over; that is, politics universally implicate the duty and happiness of man. Every branch of morals is, and ought to be considered, a universal concern. Under despotic governments, there is a pretension, more or less sincere, on the part of the rulers, to moral regards; but from these the bulk of the people are, by common consent, cut off. If the bulk of the people saw the truth, that the principles of politics affect them,—are the message of their Maker (as principles are) to them, as well as to their rulers, they would become moral agents in regard to politics, and despotism would be at an end. As it is, they pay their taxes, and go out to war when they are bid, are thankful when they are left unmolested by their government, and sorry or angry when they feel themselves oppressed; and there they end. It is owing to their ignorance of politics being morals—*i. e.* matters of equal concern to all—that this truth is not made manifest in action in every country on the globe that has any government at all.

The same is the case of the unrepresented under

governments which are not called despotic. According to the principles professed by the United States, there is there a rectification of this mighty error—a correction of this grand oversight. In that self-governing nation, all are held to have an equal interest in the principles of its institutions, and to be bound in equal duty to watch their workings. Politics there are universal duty. None are exempted from obligation but the unrepresented; and they, in theory, are none. However various may be the tribes of inhabitants in those States, whatever part of the world may have been their birth-place, or that of their fathers, however broken may be their language, however noble or servile their employments, however exalted or despised their state, all are declared to be bound together by equal political obligation, as firmly as under any other law of personal or social duty. The president, the senator, the governor, may take upon himself some additional responsibility, as the physician and lawyer do in other departments of office; but they are under precisely the same political obligation as the German settler, whose axe echoes through the lonely forest; and the Southern planter, who is occupied with his hospitalities; and the New England merchant, whose thoughts are on the sea; and the Irishman, in his shanty on the canal-bank; and the negro, hoeing cotton in the hot field, or

basking away his sabbath on the shore of the Mississippi. Genius, knowledge, wealth, may in other affairs set a man above his fellows; but not in this. Weakness, ignorance, poverty may exempt a man from other obligations; but not from this. The theory of the government of the United States has grasped and embodied the mighty principle, that politics are morals;—that is, a matter of universal and equal concern. We shall have to see whether this principle is fully acted out.

Implicated with this is the theory, that the majority will be in the right, both as to the choice of principles which are to govern particular cases, and the agents who are to work them. This theory, obviously just as it appears, as long as it is applied to matters of universal and equal concern, cannot be set aside without overthrowing all with which it is involved. We shall have to see, also, whether this principle is effectually carried out.

Implicated with this, again, is the principle that a mutable, or rather elastic form, must be given to every institution. “The majority are in the right.” Such is the theory. Few individuals of this majority can act for longer than two-score years and ten; few for so long. No one can suppose that his successor will think or feel as he does, however strict may be the regard of each to the fundamental principles which are to regulate his citizenship. It is

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absolutely necessary, to secure permanence to the recognition of those principles, that there should be liberty to change the form which contains them. Else, in the endless variety of human views and interests, there is danger lest men, being prohibited from producing a correspondence between the principles they recognise, and the forms they desire, should, because interdicted from outward change, gradually alter the spirit of their government. In such a case, men would be some time in discovering that the fair body of their constitution has become possessed, while they had supposed her inspired: and, to pass over the mischiefs which might happen during the period of her possession, the work of exorcism would be difficult and perilous.

CHAPTER I.

PARTIES.

“ For these are the men that, when they have played their parts, and had their exits, must step out, and give the moral of their scenes, and deliver unto posterity an inventory of their virtues and vices.”

Sir Thomas Browne.

THE first gentleman who greeted me on my arrival in the United States, a few minutes after I had landed, informed me without delay, that I had arrived at an unhappy crisis; that the institutions of the country would be in ruins before my return to England; that the levelling spirit was desolating society; and that the United States were on the verge of a military despotism. This was so very like what I had been accustomed to hear at home, from time to time, since my childhood, that I was not quite so much alarmed as I might