

England eBook

England by Charles Dudley Warner

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ENGLAND

By Charles Dudley Warner

England has played a part in modern history altogether out of proportion to its size. The whole of Great Britain, including Ireland, has only eleven thousand more square miles than Italy; and England and Wales alone are not half so large as Italy. England alone is about the size of North Carolina. It is, as Franklin, in 1763, wrote to Mary Stevenson in London, "that petty island which, compared to America, is but a stepping-stone in a brook, scarce enough of it above water to keep one's shoes dry."

A considerable portion of it is under water, or water-soaked a good part of the year, and I suppose it has more acres for breeding frogs than any other northern land, except Holland. Old Harrison says that the North Britons when overcome by hunger used to creep into the marshes till the water was up to their chins and there remain a long time, "onlie to qualifie the heats of their stomachs by violence, which otherwise would have wrought and beene readie to oppresse them for hunger and want of sustinance." It lies so far north—the latitude of Labrador—that the winters are long and the climate inhospitable. It would be severely cold if the Gulf Stream did not make it always damp and curtain it with clouds. In some parts the soil is heavy with water, in others it is only a thin stratum above the chalk; in fact, agricultural production could scarcely be said to exist there until fortunes made in India and in other foreign adventure enabled the owners of the land to pile it knee-deep with fertilizers from Peru and elsewhere. Thanks to accumulated wealth and the Gulf Stream, its turf is green and soft; figs, which will not mature with us north of the capes of Virginia, ripen in sheltered nooks in Oxford, and the large and unfrequent strawberry sometimes appears upon the dinner-table in such profusion that the guests can indulge in one apiece.

Yet this small, originally infertile island has been for two centuries, and is today, the most vital influence on the globe. Cast your eye over the world upon her possessions, insular and continental, into any one of which, almost, England might be dropped, with slight disturbance, as you would transfer a hanging garden. For any parallel to her power and possessions you must go back to ancient Rome. Egypt under Thotmes and Seti overran the then known world and took tribute of it; but it was a temporary wave of conquest and not an assimilation. Rome sent her laws and her roads to the end of the earth, and made an empire of it; but it was an empire of barbarians largely, of dynasties rather than of peoples. The dynasties fought, the dynasties submitted, and the dynasties paid the tribute. The modern "people" did not exist. One battle decided the fate of half the world—it might be lost or won for a woman's eyes; the flight of a chieftain might settle the fate of a province; a campaign might determine the allegiance of half Asia. There was but one compact, disciplined, law-ordered nation, and that had its seat on the Tiber.

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Under what different circumstances did England win her position! Before she came to the front, Venice controlled, and almost monopolized, the trade of the Orient. When she entered upon her career Spain was almost omnipotent in Europe, and was in possession of more than half the Western world; and besides Spain, England had, wherever she went, to contend for a foothold with Portugal, skilled in trade and adventure; and with Holland, rich, and powerful on the sea. That is to say, she met everywhere civilizations old and technically her superior. Of the ruling powers, she was the least in arts and arms. If you will take time to fill out this picture, you will have some conception of the marvelous achievements of England, say since the abdication of the Emperor Charles V.

This little island is today the centre of the wealth, of the solid civilization, of the world. I will not say of art, of music, of the lighter social graces that make life agreeable; but I will say of the moral forces that make progress possible and worth while. Of this island the centre is London; of London the heart is "the City," and in the City you can put your finger on one spot where the pulse of the world is distinctly felt to beat. The Moslem regards the Kaaba at Mecca as the centre of the universe; but that is only a theological phrase. The centre of the world is the Bank of England in Leadenhall Street. There is not an occurrence, not a conquest or a defeat, a revolution, a panic, a famine, an abundance, not a change in value of money or material, no depression or stoppage in trade, no recovery, no political, and scarcely any great religious movement—say the civil deposition of the Pope or the Wahhabee revival in Arabia and India—that does not report itself instantly at this sensitive spot. Other capitals feel a local influence; this feels all the local influences. Put your ear at the door of the Bank or the Stock Exchange near by, and you hear the roar of the world.

But this is not all, nor the most striking thing, nor the greatest contrast to the empires of Rome and of Spain. The civilization that has gone forth from England is a self-sustaining one, vital to grow where it is planted, in vast communities, in an order that does not depend, as that of the Roman world did, upon edicts and legions from the capital. And it must be remembered that if the land empire of England is not so vast as that of Rome, England has for two centuries been mistress of the seas, with all the consequences of that opportunity—consequences to trade beyond computation. And we must add to all this that an intellectual and moral power has been put forth from England clear round the globe, and felt beyond the limits of the English tongue.

How is it that England has attained this supremacy—a supremacy in vain disputed on land and on sea by France, but now threatened by an equipped and disciplined Germany, by an unformed Colossus—a Slav and Tartar conglomerate; and perhaps by one of her own children, the United States? I will mention some of the things that have determined England's extraordinary career; and they will help us to consider her prospects. I name:

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I. The Race. It is a mixed race, but with certain dominant qualities, which we call, loosely, Teutonic; certainly the most aggressive, tough, and vigorous people the world has seen. It does not shrink from any climate, from any exposure, from any geographic condition; yet its choice of migration and of residence has mainly been on the grass belt of the globe, where soil and moisture produce good turf, where a changing and unequal climate, with extremes of heat and cold, calls out the physical resources, stimulates invention, and requires an aggressive and defensive attitude of mind and body. The early history of this people is marked by two things:

(1) Town and village organizations, nurseries of law, order, and self-dependence, nuclei of power, capable of indefinite expansion, leading directly to a free and a strong government, the breeders of civil liberty.

(2) Individualism in religion, Protestantism in the widest sense: I mean by this, cultivation of the individual conscience as against authority. This trait was as marked in this sturdy people in Catholic England as it is in Protestant England. It is in the blood. England never did submit to Rome, not even as France did, though the Gallic Church held out well. Take the struggle of Henry II. and the hierarchy. Read the fight with prerogative all along. The English Church never could submit. It is a shallow reading of history to attribute the final break with Rome to the unbridled passion of Henry VIII.; that was an occasion only: if it had not been that, it would have been something else.

Here we have the two necessary traits in the character of a great people: the love and the habit of civil liberty and religious conviction and independence. Allied to these is another trait—truthfulness. To speak the truth in word and action, to the verge of bluntness and offense—and with more relish sometimes because it is individually obnoxious and unlovely—is an English trait, clearly to be traced in the character of this people, notwithstanding the equivocations of Elizabethan diplomacy, the proverbial lying of English shopkeepers, and the fraudulent adulteration of English manufactures. Not to lie is perhaps as much a matter of insular pride as of morals; to lie is unbecoming an Englishman. When Captain Burnaby was on his way to Khiva he would tolerate no Oriental exaggeration of his army rank, although a higher title would have smoothed his way and added to his consideration. An English official who was a captive at Bokhara (or Khiva) was offered his life by the Khan if he would abjure the Christian faith and say he was a Moslem; but he preferred death rather than the advantage of a temporary equivocation. I do not suppose that he was a specially pious man at home or that he was a martyr to religious principle, but for the moment Christianity stood for England and English honor and civilization. I can believe that a rough English sailor, who had not used a sacred name, except in vain, since he said his prayer at his mother's knee, accepted death under like circumstances rather than say he was not a Christian.

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The next determining cause in England's career is:

II. The insular position. Poor as the island was, this was the opportunity. See what came of it:

(1) Maritime opportunity. The irregular coastlines, the bays and harbors, the near islands and mainlands invited to the sea. The nation became, per force, sailors—as the ancient Greeks were and the modern Greeks are: adventurers, discoverers—hardy, ambitious, seeking food from the sea and wealth from every side.

(2) Their position protected them. What they got they could keep; wealth could accumulate. Invasion was difficult and practically impossible to their neighbors. And yet they were in the bustling world, close to the continent, commanding the most important of the navigable seas. The wealth of Holland was on the one hand, the wealth of France on the other. They held the keys.

(3) The insular position and their free institutions invited refugees from all the Continent, artisans and skilled laborers of all kinds. Hence, the beginning of their great industries, which made England rich in proportion as her authority and chance of trade expanded over distant islands and continents. But this would not have been possible without the third advantage which I shall mention, and that is:

III. Coal. England's power and wealth rested upon her coal-beds. In this bounty nature was more liberal to the tight little island than to any other spot in Western Europe, and England took early advantage of it. To be sure, her coal-field is small compared with that of the United States—an area of only 11,900 square miles to our 192,000. But Germany has only 1,770; Belgium, 510; France, 2,086; and Russia only in her expansion of territory leads Europe in this respect, and has now 30,000 square miles of coal-beds. But see the use England makes of this material: in 1877, she took out of the ground 134,179,968 tons. The United States the same year took out 50,000,000 tons; Germany, 48,000,000; France, 16,000,000; Belgium, 14,000,000. This tells the story of the heavy industries.

We have considered as elements of national greatness the race itself, the favorable position, and the material to work with. I need not enlarge upon the might and the possessions of England, nor the general beneficence of her occupation wherever she has established fort, factory, or colony. With her flag go much injustice, domineering, and cruelty; but, on the whole, the best elements of civilization.

The intellectual domination of England has been as striking as the physical. It is stamped upon all her colonies; it has by no means disappeared in the United States. For more than fifty years after our independence we imported our intellectual food—with the exception of politics, and theology in certain forms—and largely our ethical guidance

from England. We read English books, or imitations of the English way of looking at things; we even accepted

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the English caricatures of our own life as genuine—notably in the case of the so-called typical Yankee. It is only recently that our writers have begun to describe our own life as it is, and that readers begin to feel that our society may be as interesting in print as that English society which they have been all their lives accustomed to read about. The reading-books of children in schools were filled with English essays, stories, English views of life; it was the English heroines over whose woes the girls wept; it was of the English heroes that the boys declaimed. I do not know how much the imagination has to do in shaping the national character, but for half a century English writers, by poems and novels, controlled the imagination of this country. The principal reading then, as now—and perhaps more than now—was fiction, and nearly all of this England supplied. We took in with it, it will be noticed, not only the romance and gilding of chivalry and legitimacy, such as Scott gives us, but constant instruction in a society of ranks and degrees, orders of nobility and commonalty, a fixed social status, a well-ordered, and often attractive, permanent social inequality, a state of life and relations based upon lingering feudal conditions and prejudices. The background of all English fiction is monarchical; however liberal it may be, it must be projected upon the existing order of things. We have not been examining these foreign social conditions with that simple curiosity which leads us to look into the social life of Russia as it is depicted in Russian novels; we have, on the contrary, absorbed them generation after generation as part of our intellectual development, so that the novels and the other English literature must have had a vast influence in molding our mental character, in shaping our thinking upon the political as well as the social constitution of states.

For a long time the one American counteraction, almost the only, to this English influence was the newspaper, which has always kept alive and diffused a distinctly American spirit—not always lovely or modest, but national. The establishment of periodicals which could afford to pay for fiction written about our society and from the American point of view has had a great effect on our literary emancipation. The wise men whom we elect to make our laws—and who represent us intellectually and morally a good deal better than we sometimes like to admit—have always gone upon the theory, with regard to the reading for the American people, that the chief requisite of it was cheapness, with no regard to its character so far as it is a shaper of notions about government and social life. What educating influence English fiction was having upon American life they have not inquired, so long as it was furnished cheap, and its authors were cheated out of any copyright on it.

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At the North, thanks to a free press and periodicals, to a dozen reform agitations, and to the intellectual stir generally accompanying industries and commerce, we have been developing an immense intellectual activity, a portion of which has found expression in fiction, in poetry, in essays, that are instinct with American life and aspiration; so that now for over thirty years, in the field of literature, we have had a vigorous offset to the English intellectual domination of which I spoke. How far this has in the past molded American thought and sentiment, in what degree it should be held responsible for the infidelity in regard to our "American experiment," I will not undertake to say. The South furnishes a very interesting illustration in this connection. When the civil war broke down the barriers of intellectual non-intercourse behind which the South had ensconced itself, it was found to be in a colonial condition. Its libraries were English libraries, mostly composed of old English literature. Its literary growth stopped with the reign of George III. Its latest news was the Spectator and the Tatler. The social order it covered was that of monarchical England, undisturbed by the fiery philippics of Byron or Shelley or the radicalism of a manufacturing age. Its chivalry was an imitation of the antiquated age of lords and ladies, and tournaments, and buckram courtesies, when men were as touchy to fight, at the lift of an eyelid or the drop of the glove, as Brian de Bois-Guilbert, and as ready for a drinking-bout as Christopher North. The intellectual stir of the North, with its disorganizing radicalism, was rigorously excluded, and with it all the new life pouring out of its presses. The South was tied to a republic, but it was not republican, either in its politics or its social order. It was, in its mental constitution, in its prejudices, in its tastes, exactly what you would expect a people to be, excluded from the circulation of free ideas by its system of slavery, and fed on the English literature of a century ago. I dare say that a majority of its reading public, at any time, would have preferred a monarchical system and a hierarchy of rank.

To return to England. I have said that English domination usually carries the best elements of civilization. Yet it must be owned that England has pursued her magnificent career in a policy often insolent and brutal, and generally selfish. Scarcely any considerations have stood in the way of her trade and profit. I will not dwell upon her opium culture in India, which is a proximate cause of famine in district after district, nor upon her forcing the drug upon China—a policy disgraceful to a Christian queen and people. We have only just got rid of slavery, sustained so long by Biblical and official sanction, and may not yet set up as critics. But I will refer to a case with which all are familiar—England's treatment of her American colonies. In 1760 and onward, when Franklin, the agent of the colonies of

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Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, was cooling his heels in lords' waiting-rooms in London, America was treated exactly as Ireland was—that is, discriminated against in every way; not allowed to manufacture; not permitted to trade with other nations, except under the most vexatious restrictions; and the effort was continued to make her a mere agricultural producer and a dependent. All that England cared for us was that we should be a market for her manufactures. This same selfishness has been the keynote of her policy down to the present day, except as the force of circumstances has modified it. Steadily pursued, it has contributed largely to make England the monetary and industrial master of the world.

With this outline I pass to her present condition and outlook. The dictatorial and selfish policy has been forced to give way somewhat in regard to the colonies. The spirit of the age and the strength of the colonies forbid its exercise; they cannot be held by the old policy. Australia boldly adopts a protective tariff, and her parliament is only nominally controlled by the crown. Canada exacts duties on English goods, and England cannot help herself. Even with these concessions, can England keep her great colonies? They are still loyal in word. They still affect English manners and English speech, and draw their intellectual supplies from England. On the prospect of a war with Russia they nearly all offered volunteers. But everybody knows that allegiance is on the condition of local autonomy. If united Canada asks to go, she will go. So with Australia. It may be safely predicted that England will never fight again to hold the sovereignty of her new-world possessions against their present occupants. And, in the judgment of many good observers, a dissolution of the empire, so far as the Western colonies are concerned, is inevitable, unless Great Britain, adopting the plan urged by Franklin, becomes an imperial federation, with parliaments distinct and independent, the crown the only bond of union—the crown, and not the English parliament, being the titular and actual sovereign. Sovereign power over America in the parliament Franklin never would admit. His idea was that all the inhabitants of the empire must be citizens, not some of them subjects ruled by the home citizens. The two great political parties of England are really formed on lines constructed after the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. The Tories had been long in power. They had made many changes and popular concessions, but they resisted parliamentary reform. The great Whig lords, who had tried to govern England without the people and in opposition to the crown in the days of George III., had learned to seek popular support. The Reform Bill, which was ultimately forced through by popular pressure and threat of civil war, abolished the rotten boroughs, gave representation to the large manufacturing towns and increased representation to the counties, and

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the suffrage to all men who had 'paid ten pounds a year rent in boroughs, or in the counties owned land worth ten pounds a year or paid fifty pounds rent. The immediate result of this was to put power into the hands of the middle classes and to give the lower classes high hopes, so that, in 1839, the Chartist movement began, one demand of which was universal suffrage. The old party names of Whig and Tory had been dropped and the two parties had assumed their present appellations of Conservatives and Liberals. Both parties had, however, learned that there was no rest for any ruling party except a popular basis, and the Conservative party had the good sense to strengthen itself in 1867 by carrying through Mr. Disraeli's bill, which gave the franchise in boroughs to all householders paying rates, and in counties to all occupiers of property rated at fifteen pounds a year. This broadening of the suffrage places the power irrevocably in the hands of the people, against whose judgment neither crown nor ministry can venture on any important step.

In general terms it may be said that of these two great parties the Conservative wishes to preserve existing institutions, and latterly has leaned to the prerogatives of the crown, and the Liberal is inclined to progress and reform, and to respond to changes demanded by the people. Both parties, however, like parties elsewhere, propose and oppose measures and movements, and accept or reject policies, simply to get office or keep office. The Conservative party of late years, principally because it has the simple task of holding back, has been better able to define its lines and preserve a compact organization. The Liberals, with a multitude of reformatory projects, have, of course, a less homogeneous organization, and for some years have been without well-defined issues. The Conservative aristocracy seemed to form a secure alliance with the farmers and the great agricultural interests, and at the same time to have a strong hold upon the lower classes. In what his opponents called his "policy of adventure," Lord Beaconsfield had the support of the lower populace. The Liberal party is an incongruous host. On one wing are the Whig lords and great landowners, who cannot be expected to take kindly to a land reform that would reform them out of territorial power; and on the other wing are the Radicals, who would abolish the present land system and the crown itself, and institute the rule of a democracy. Between these two is the great body of the middle class, a considerable portion of the educated and university trained, the majorities of the manufacturing towns, and perhaps, we may say, generally the Nonconformists. There are some curious analogies in these two parties to our own parties before the war. It is, perhaps, not fanciful to suppose that the Conservative lords resemble our own aristocratic leaders of democracy, who contrived to keep near the people and had affiliations that secured them the vote of the least educated portion of the voters; while the great Liberal lords are not unlike our old aristocratic Whigs, of the cotton order, who have either little sympathy with the people or little faculty of showing it. It is a curious fact that during our civil war respect for authority gained us as much sympathy from the Conservatives, as love for freedom (hampered by the greed of trade and rivalry in manufactures) gained us from the Liberals.

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To return to the question of empire. The bulk of the Conservative party would hold the colonies if possible, and pursue an imperial policy; while certainly a large portion of the Liberals—not all, by any means—would let the colonies go, and, with the Manchester school, hope to hold England's place by free-trade and active competition. The imperial policy may be said to have two branches, in regard to which parties will not sharply divide: one is the relations to be held towards the Western colonies, and the other in the policy to be pursued in the East in reference to India and to the development of the Indian empire, and also the policy of aggression and subjection in South Africa.

An imperial policy does not necessarily imply such vagaries as the forcible detention of the forcibly annexed Boer republic. But everybody sees that the time is near when England must say definitely as to the imperial policy generally whether it will pursue it or abandon it. And it may be remarked in passing that the Gladstone government, thus far, though pursuing this policy more moderately than the Beaconsfield government, shows no intention of abandoning it. Almost everybody admits that if it is abandoned England must sink to the position of a third-rate power like Holland. For what does abandonment mean? It means to have no weight, except that of moral example, in Continental affairs: to relinquish her advantages in the Mediterranean; to let Turkey be absorbed by Russia; to become so weak in India as to risk rebellion of all the provinces, and probable attack from Russia and her Central Asian allies. But this is not all. Lost control in Asia is lost trade; this is evident in every foot of control Russia has gained in the Caucasus, about the Caspian Sea, in Persia. There Russian manufactures supplant the English; and so in another quarter: in order to enjoy the vast opening trade of Africa, England must be on hand with an exhibition of power. We might show by a hundred examples that the imperial idea in England does not rest on pride alone, on national glory altogether, though that is a large element in it, but on trade instincts. "Trade follows the flag" is a well-known motto; and that means that the lines of commerce follow the limits of empire.

Take India as an illustration. Why should England care to keep India? In the last forty years the total revenue from India, set down up to 1880 as L 1,517,000,000, has been L 53,000,000 less than the expenditure. It varies with the years, and occasionally the balance is favorable, as in 1879, when the expenditure was L 63,400,000 and the revenue was L 64,400,000. But to offset this average deficit the very profitable trade of India, which is mostly in British hands, swells the national wealth; and this trade would not be so largely in British hands if the flag were away.

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But this is not the only value of India. Grasp on India is part of the vast Oriental network of English trade and commerce, the carrying trade, the supply of cotton and iron goods. This largely depends upon English prestige in the Orient, and to lose India is to lose the grip. On practically the same string with India are Egypt, Central Africa, and the Euphrates valley. A vast empire of trade opens out. To sink the imperial policy is to shut this vision. With Russia pressing on one side and America competing on the other, England cannot afford to lose her military lines, her control of the sea, her prestige.

Again, India offers to the young and the adventurous a career, military, civil, or commercial. This is of great weight—great social weight. One of the chief wants of England today is careers and professions for her sons. The population of the United Kingdom in 1876 was estimated at near thirty-four millions; in the last few decades the decennial increase had been considerably over two millions; at that rate the population in 1900 would be near forty millions. How can they live in their narrow limits? They must emigrate, go for good, or seek employment and means of wealth in some such vast field as India. Take away India now, and you cut off the career of hundreds of thousands of young Englishmen, and the hope of tens of thousands of households.

There is another aspect of the case which it would be unfair to ignore. Opportunity is the measure of a nation's responsibility. I have no doubt that Mr. Thomas Hughes spoke for a very respectable portion of Christian England, in 1861, when he wrote Mr. James Russell Lowell, in a prefatory note to "Tom Brown at Oxford," these words:

"The great tasks of the world are only laid on the strongest shoulders. We, who have India to guide and train, who have for our task the educating of her wretched people into free men, who feel that the work cannot be shifted from ourselves, and must be done as God would have it done, at the peril of England's own life, can and do feel for you."

It is safe, we think, to say that if the British Empire is to be dissolved, disintegration cannot be permitted to begin at home. Ireland has always been a thorn in the side of England. And the policy towards it could not have been much worse, either to impress it with a respect for authority or to win it by conciliation; it has been a strange mixture of untimely concession and untimely cruelty. The problem, in fact, has physical and race elements that make it almost insolvable. A water-logged country, of which nothing can surely be predicted but the uncertainty of its harvests, inhabited by a people of most peculiar mental constitution, alien in race, temperament, and religion, having scarcely one point of sympathy with the English. But geography settles some things in this world, and the act of union that bound Ireland to the United Kingdom in 1800 was as much a necessity of the situation as the

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act of union that obliterated the boundary line between Scotland and England in 1707. The Irish parliament was confessedly a failure, and it is scarcely within the possibilities that the experiment will be tried again. Irish independence, so far as English consent is concerned, and until England's power is utterly broken, is a dream. Great changes will doubtless be made in the tenure and transfer of land, and these changes will react upon England to the ultimate abasement of the landed aristocracy; but this equalization of conditions would work no consent to separation. The undeniable growth of the democratic spirit in England can no more be relied on to bring it about, when we remember what renewed executive vigor and cohesion existed with the Commonwealth and the fiery foreign policy of the first republic of France. For three years past we have seen the British Empire in peril on all sides, with the addition of depression and incipient rebellion at home, but her horizon is not as dark as it was in 1780, when, with a failing cause in America, England had the whole of Europe against her.

In any estimate of the prospects of England we must take into account the recent marked changes in the social condition. Mr. Escott has an instructive chapter on this in his excellent book on England. He notices that the English character is losing its insularity, is more accessible to foreign influences, and is adopting foreign, especially French, modes of living. Country life is losing its charm; domestic life is changed; people live in "flats" more and more, and the idea of home is not what it was; marriage is not exactly what it was; the increased free and independent relations of the sexes are somewhat demoralizing; women are a little intoxicated with their newly-acquired freedom; social scandals are more frequent. It should be said, however, that perhaps the present perils are due not to the new system, but to the fact that it is new; when the novelty is worn off the peril may cease.

Mr. Escott notices primogeniture as one of the stable and, curious enough, one of the democratic institutions of society. It is owing to primogeniture that while there is a nobility in England there is no noblesse. If titles and lands went to all the children there would be the multitudinous noblesse of the Continent. Now, by primogeniture, enough is retained for a small nobility, but all the younger sons must go into the world and make a living. The three respectable professions no longer offer sufficient inducement, and they crowd more and more into trade. Thus the middle class is constantly recruited from the upper. Besides, the upper is all the time recruited from the wealthy middle; the union of aristocracy and plutocracy may be said to be complete. But merit makes its way continually from even the lower ranks upward, in the professions, in the army, the law, the church, in letters, in trade, and, what Mr. Escott does not mention, in the reformed civil service, newly opened

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to the humblest lad in the land. Thus there is constant movement up and down in social England, approaching, except in the traditional nobility, the freedom of movement in our own country. This is all wholesome and sound. Even the nobility itself, driven by ennui, or a loss of former political control, or by the necessity of more money to support inherited estates, goes into business, into journalism, writes books, enters the professions.

What are the symptoms of decay in England? Unless the accumulation of wealth is a symptom of decay, I do not see many. I look at the people themselves. It seems to me that never in their history were they more full of vigor. See what travelers, explorers, adventurers they are. See what sportsmen, in every part of the globe, how much they endure, and how hale and jolly they are—women as well as men. The race, certainly, has not decayed. And look at letters. It may be said that this is not the age of pure literature—and I'm sure I hope the English patent for producing machine novels will not be infringed—but the English language was never before written so vigorously, so clearly, and to such purpose. And this is shown even in the excessive refinement and elaboration of trifles, the minutia of reflection, the keenness of analysis, the unrelenting pursuit of every social topic into subtleties untouched by the older essayists. And there is still more vigor, without affectation, in scientific investigation, in the daily conquests made in the realm of social economy, the best methods of living and getting the most out of life. Art also keeps pace with luxury, and shows abundant life and promise for the future.

I believe, from these and other considerations, that this vigorous people will find a way out of its present embarrassment, and a way out without retreating. For myself, I like to see the English sort of civilization spreading over the world rather than the Russian or the French. I hope England will hang on to the East, and not give it over to the havoc of squabbling tribes, with a dozen religions and five hundred dialects, or to the military despotism of an empire whose morality is only matched by the superstition of its religion.

The relations of England and the United States are naturally of the first interest to us. Our love and our hatred have always been that of true relatives. For three-quarters of a century our 'amour propre' was constantly kept raw by the most supercilious patronage. During the past decade, when the quality of England's regard has become more and more a matter of indifference to us, we have been the subject of a more intelligent curiosity, of increased respect, accompanied with a sincere desire to understand us. In the diplomatic scale Washington still ranks below the Sublime Porte, but this anomaly is due to tradition, and does not represent England's real estimate of the status of the republic. There is, and must be, a good deal of selfishness mingled in our friendship—patriotism

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itself being a form of selfishness—but our ideas of civilization so nearly coincide, and we have so many common aspirations for humanity that we must draw nearer together, notwithstanding old grudges and present differences in social structure. Our intercourse is likely to be closer, our business relations will become more inseparable. I can conceive of nothing so lamentable for the progress of the world as a quarrel between these two English-speaking peoples.

But, in one respect, we are likely to diverge. I refer to literature; in that, assimilation is neither probable nor desirable. We were brought up on the literature of England; our first efforts were imitations of it; we were criticised—we criticised ourselves on its standards. We compared every new aspirant in letters to some English writer. We were patted on the back if we resembled the English models; we were stared at or sneered at if we did not. When we began to produce something that was the product of our own soil and our own social conditions, it was still judged by the old standards, or, if it was too original for that, it was only accepted because it was curious or bizarre, interesting for its oddity. The criticism that we received for our best was evidently founded on such indifference or toleration that it was galling. At first we were surprised; then we were grieved; then we were indignant. We have long ago ceased to be either surprised, grieved, or indignant at anything the English critics say of us. We have recovered our balance. We know that since Gulliver there has been no piece of original humor produced in England equal to “Knickerbocker’s New York”; that not in this century has any English writer equaled the wit and satire of the “Biglow Papers.” We used to be irritated at what we called the snobbishness of English critics of a certain school; we are so no longer, for we see that its criticism is only the result of ignorance—simply of inability to understand.

And we the more readily pardon it, because of the inability we have to understand English conditions, and the English dialect, which has more and more diverged from the language as it was at the time of the separation. We have so constantly read English literature, and kept ourselves so well informed of their social life, as it is exhibited in novels and essays, that we are not so much in the dark with regard to them as they are with regard to us; still we are more and more bothered by the insular dialect. I do not propose to criticise it; it is our misfortune, perhaps our fault, that we do not understand it; and I only refer to it to say that we should not be too hard on the Saturday Review critic when he is complaining of the American dialect in the English that Mr. Howells writes. How can the Englishman be expected to come into sympathy with the fiction that has New England for its subject—from Hawthorne’s down to that of our present novelists—when he is ignorant of the whole background on which it is cast; when all the social conditions are an enigma to him; when, if he has, historically, some conception of Puritan society, he cannot have a glimmer of comprehension of the subtle modifications and changes it has undergone in a century? When he visits America and sees it, it is a

puzzle to him. How, then, can he be expected to comprehend it when it is depicted to the life in books?

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No, we must expect a continual divergence in our literatures. And it is best that there should be. There can be no development of a nation's literature worth anything that is not on its own lines, out of its own native materials. We must not expect that the English will understand that literature that expresses our national life, character, conditions, any better than they understand that of the French or of the Germans. And, on our part, the day has come when we receive their literary efforts with the same respectful desire to be pleased with them that we have to like their dress and their speech.