

rather better than we did, and that the height of the great Pyramid had been so arranged that if it was multiplied by a thousand millions we should get this distance more exactly than we could measure it in these degenerate days. With him, to believe in the Pyramid was to believe this, and a great deal more about the civilization which it proved. So, when he asked me whether I believed in the Pyramid, I told him that I did not think I would depend wholly upon the Pyramid for the distance of the sun to be used in astronomy, but should want its indications at least confirmed by modern researches. The hint was sufficient, and I was not further pressed for views on this subject.

He introduced us to Lady Hamilton, widow of the celebrated philosopher, who still held court at Edinburgh. The daughter of the family was in repute as a metaphysician. This was interesting, because I had never before heard of a female metaphysician, although there were several cases of female mathematicians recorded in history. First among them was Donna Maria Agnesi, who wrote one of the best eighteenth-century books on the calculus, and had a special dispensation from the Pope to teach

mathematics at Bologna. We were therefore very glad to accept an invitation from Lady Hamilton to spend an evening with a few of her friends. Her rooms were fairly filled with books, the legacy of one of whom it was said that "not a thought had come down to us through the ages which he had not mastered and made his own." The few guests were mostly university people and philosophers. The most interesting of them was Professor Blackie, the Grecian scholar, who was the liveliest little man of sixty I ever saw; amusing us by singing German songs, and dancing about the room like a sprightly child among its playmates. I talked with Miss Hamilton about Mill, whose Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy was still fresh in men's minds. Of course she did not believe in this book, and said that Mill could not understand her father's philosophy. With all her intellect, she was a fine healthy-looking young lady, and it was a sad surprise, a few years later, to hear of her death. Madame Sophie Kovalevsky afterward appeared on the stage as the first female mathematician of our time, but it may be feared that the woman philosopher died with Miss Hamilton.

Simon Newcomb.

EDWARD BELLAMY.

THE first book of Edward Bellamy's which I read was Dr. Heidenhoff's Process, and I thought it one of the finest feats in the region of romance which I had known. It seemed to me all the greater because the author's imagination wrought in it on the level of average life, and built the fabric of its dream out of common clay. The simple people and their circumstance were treated as if they were persons whose pathetic story he had witnessed himself, and he

was merely telling it. He wove into the texture of their sufferings and their sorrows the magic thread of invention so aptly and skillfully that the reader felt nothing improbable in it. One even felt a sort of moral necessity for it, as if such a clue not only could be, but must be given for their escape. It became not merely probable, but imperative, that there should be some means of extirpating the memory which fixed a sin in lasting remorse, and of thus saving

the soul from the depravity of despair. When it finally appeared that there was no such means, one reader, at least, was inconsolable. Nothing from romance remains to me more poignant than the pang that this plain, sad tale imparted.

The art employed to accomplish its effect was the art which Bellamy had in degree so singular that one might call it supremely his. He does not so much transmute our every-day reality to the substance of romance as make the airy stuff of dreams one in quality with veritable experience. Every one remembers from *Looking Backward* the allegory which figures the pitiless prosperity of the present conditions as a coach drawn by slaves under the lash of those on its top, who have themselves no firm hold upon their places, and sometimes fall, and then, to save themselves from being ground under the wheels, spring to join the slaves at the traces. But it is not this, vivid and terrible as it is, which most wrings the heart; it is that moment of anguish at the close, when Julian West trembles with the nightmare fear that he has been only dreaming of the just and equal future, before he truly wakes and finds that it is real. That is quite as it would happen in life, and the power to make the reader feel this like something he has known himself is the distinctive virtue of that imagination which revived throughout Christendom the faith in a millennium.

A good deal has been said against the material character of the happiness which West's story promises men when they shall begin to do justice, and to share equally in the fruits of the toil which operates life; and I confess that this did not attract me. I should have preferred, if I had been chooser, to have the millennium much simpler, much more independent of modern inventions, modern conveniences, modern facilities. It seemed to me that in an ideal condition (the only condition finally worth having) we should get on without most of these

things, which are but sorry patches on the rags of our outworn civilization, or only toys to amuse our greed and vacancy. Æsthetically, I sympathized with those select spirits who were shocked that nothing better than the futile luxury of their own selfish lives could be imagined for the lives which overwork and underpay had forbidden all pleasures; I acquired considerable merit with myself by asking whether the hope of these formed the highest appeal to human nature. But I overlooked an important condition which the other critics overlooked; I did not reflect that such things were shown as merely added unto those who had first sought the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that they were no longer vicious or even so foolish when they were harmlessly come by. I have since had to own that the joys I thought trivial and sordid did rightly, as they did most strenuously, appeal to the lives hitherto starved of them. In depicting them as the common reward of the common endeavor Edward Bellamy builded better than we knew, whether he knew better or not, and he builded from a thorough sense of that level of humanity which he was destined so potently to influence, — that American level which his book found in every Christian land.

I am not sure whether this sense was ever a full consciousness with him; very possibly it was not; but in any case it was the spring of all his work, from the earliest to the latest. Somehow, whether he *knew* or not, he unerringly *felt* how the average man would feel; and all the webs of fancy that he wove were essentially of one texture through this sympathy. His imagination was intensely democratic, it was inalienably plebeian, even, — that is to say, humane. It did not seek distinction of expression; it never put the simplest and plainest reader to shame by the assumption of those fine-gentleman airs which abash and dishearten more than the mere literary swell can think. He would use a phrase

or a word that was common to vulgarity, if it said what he meant; sometimes he sets one's teeth on edge, in his earlier stories, by his public school diction. But the nobility of the heart is never absent from his work; and he has always the distinction of self-forgetfulness in his art.

I have been interested, in recurring to his earlier work, to note how almost entirely the action passes in the American village atmosphere. It is like the greater part of his own life in this. He was not a man ignorant of other keeping. He was partly educated abroad, and he knew cities both in Europe and in America. He was a lawyer by profession, and he was sometime editor of a daily newspaper in a large town. But I remember how, in one of our meetings, he spoke with distrust and dislike of the environment of cities as unwholesome and distracting, if not demoralizing (very much to the effect of Tolstoy's philosophy in the matter), and in his short stories his types are village types. They are often such when he finds them in the city, but for much the greater part he finds them in the village; and they are always, therefore, distinctively American; for we are village people far more than we are country people or city people. In this as in everything else we are a medium race, and it was in his sense, if not in his knowledge of this fact, that Bellamy wrote so that there is never a word or a look to the reader implying that he and the writer are of a different sort of folk from the people in the story.

Looking Backward, with its material delights, its communized facilities and luxuries, could not appeal to people on lonely farms who scarcely knew of them, or to people in cities who were tired of them, so much as to that immense average of villagers, of small-town-dwellers, who had read much and seen something of them, and desired to have them. This average, whose intelligence forms the prosperity of our literature, and whose

virtue forms the strength of our nation, is the environment which Bellamy rarely travels out of in his airiest romance. He has its curiosity, its principles, its aspirations. He can tell what it wishes to know, what problem will hold it, what situation it can enter into, what mystery will fascinate it, and what noble pain it will bear. It is by far the widest field of American fiction; most of our finest artists work preferably in it, but he works in it to different effect from any other. He takes that life on its mystical side, and deals with types rather than with characters; for it is one of the prime conditions of the romancer that he shall do this. His people are less objectively than subjectively present; their import is greater in what happens to them than in what they are. But he never falsifies them or their circumstance. He ascertains them with a fidelity that seems almost helpless, almost ignorant of different people, different circumstance; you would think at times that he had never known, never seen, any others; but of course this is only the effect of his art.

When it comes to something else, however, it is still with the same fidelity that he keeps to the small-town average, the American average. He does not address himself more intelligently to the mystical side of this average in *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process*, or *Miss Ludington's Sister*, or any of his briefer romances, than to its ethical side in *Equality*. That book disappointed me, to be frank. I thought it artistically inferior to anything else he had done. I thought it was a mistake to have any story at all in it, or not to have vastly more. I felt that it was not enough to clothe the dry bones of its sociology with paper garments out of *Looking Backward*. Except for that one sublime moment when the workers of all sorts cry to the Lords of the Bread to take them and use them at their own price, there was no thrill or throb in the book. But I think now that any believer in its economics may

be well content to let them take their chance with the American average, here and elsewhere, in the form that the author has given them. He felt that average so wittingly that he could not have been wrong in approaching it with all that public school exegesis which wearies such dilettanti as myself.

Our average is practical as well as mystical; it is first the dust of the earth, and then it is a living soul; it likes great questions simply and familiarly presented, before it puts its faith in them and makes its faith a life. It likes to start to heaven from home, and in all this Bellamy was of it, voluntarily and involuntarily. I recall how, when we first met, he told me that he had come to think of our hopeless conditions suddenly, one day, in looking at his own children, and reflecting that he could not place them beyond the chance of want by any industry or forecast or providence; and that the status meant the same impossibility for others which it meant for him. I understood then that I was in the presence of a man too single, too sincere, to pretend that he had begun by thinking of others, and I trusted him the more for his confession of a selfish premise. He never went back to himself in his endeavor, but when he had once felt his power in the world, he dedicated his life to his work. He wore himself out in thinking and feeling about it, with a belief in the good time to come that penetrated his whole being and animated his whole purpose, but apparently with no manner of fanaticism. In fact, no one could see him, or look into his quiet, gentle face, so full of goodness, so full of common sense, without perceiving that he had reasoned to his hope for justice in the frame of things. He was indeed a most practical,

a most American man, without a touch of sentimentalism in his humanity. He believed that some now living should see his dream — the dream of Plato, the dream of the first Christians, the dream of Bacon, the dream of More — come true in a really civilized society; but he had the patience and courage which could support any delay.

These qualities were equal to the suffering and the death which came to him in the midst of his work, and cut him off from writing that *one more book* with which every author hopes to round his career. He suffered greatly, but he bore his suffering greatly; and as for his death, it is told that when, toward the last, those who loved him were loath to leave him at night alone, as he preferred to be left, he asked, "What can happen to me? I can only die."

I am glad that he lived to die at home in Chicopee, — in the village environment by which he interpreted the heart of the American nation, and knew how to move it more than any other American author who has lived. The theory of those who think differently is that he simply moved the popular fancy; and this may suffice to explain the state of some people, but it will not account for the love and honor in which his name is passionately held by the vast average, East and West. His fame is safe with them, and his faith is an animating force concerning whose effect at this time or some other time it would not be wise to prophesy. Whether his ethics will keep his æsthetics in remembrance I do not know; but I am sure that one cannot acquaint one's self with his merely artistic work, and not be sensible that in Edward Bellamy we were rich in a romantic imagination surpassed only by that of Hawthorne.

W. D. Howells.

AT NATURAL BRIDGE, VIRGINIA.

II.

My enjoyment of the country about the Bridge may be said to have begun with my settling down for a more leisurely stay. Hurry and discontent are poor helps to appreciation. That afternoon, the morning having been devoted to ornithological excitements, I strolled over to Mount Jefferson, and spent an hour in the observatory, where a delicious breeze was blowing. The "mountain" proved to be nothing more than a round grassy hilltop, — the highest point in a sheep-pasture, — but it offered, nevertheless, a wide and charming prospect: mountains near and far, a world of green hills, with here and there a level stretch, most restful to the eye, of the James River valley, — the great Valley of Virginia. Up from the surrounding field came the tinkle of sheep-bells, and down in one corner of it young men were slowly gathering, some in wagons, some on horseback, for a game of ball. There was to be a "match" that "evening," I had been told, between the Bridge nine (I am sorry not to remember its name) and the Buena Vistas. It turned out, however, so I learned the next day, that a supposed case of smallpox at Buena Vista had made such an interchange of athletic courtesies inexpedient for the time being, and the Bridge men were obliged to be content with a trial of skill among themselves, for which they chose up ("picked off") after the usual fashion, the two leaders deciding which should have the first choice by the old Yankee test of grasping a bat alternately, hand over hand, till one of them should be able to cover the end of it with his thumb. Such things were pleasant to hear of. I accepted them as of patriotic significance, tokens of national unity. My informant, by the way, was the same man, a young West

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Virginian, who had told me where to look for Washington's initials on the wall of the bridge. My specialties appealed to him in a measure, and he confessed that he wished he were a botanist. He was always very fond of flowers. His side had been victorious in the ball game, he said, in answer to my inquiry. Some of the players must have come from a considerable distance, it seemed to me, as there was no sign of a village or even of a hamlet, so far as I had discovered, anywhere in the neighborhood. The Bridge is not in any township, but simply in Rockbridge County, after a Virginia custom quite foreign to all a New Englander's notions of geographical propriety.

The prospect from Mount Jefferson was beautiful, as I have said, but on my return I happened upon one that pleased me better. I had been down through Cedar Creek ravine, and had taken my own way out, up the right-hand slope through the woods, noting the flowers as I walked, especially the blue-eyed grass and the scarlet catchfly (battlefield pink), a marvelous bit of color, and was following the edge of the cliff toward the hotel, when, finding myself still with time to spare, I sat down to rest and be quiet. By accident I chose a spot where between ragged, homely cedars I looked straight down the glen — over a stretch of the brook far below — to the bridge, through which could be seen wooded hills backed by Thunder Mountain, long and massive, just now mostly in shadow, like the rest of the world, but having its lower slopes touched with an exquisite half-light, which produced a kind of prismatic effect upon the freshly green foliage. It was an enchanting spectacle and a delightful hour. Now my eye settled upon the ravine and the brook, now upon the arch of the bridge, now upon the