

CULTURE AND PROGRESS.

The Difficulty to Americans of the Study of European Politics.

THE most boasted and pictorial of the great mechanical feats of this age has been, we suppose, the Atlantic Cable. We presume the improvement has not been without its advantages, though most of our readers who may ask themselves the question will be a little puzzled to say what they are. We are not now speaking of the private and financial benefits of the work, which may have been considerable, but of its public benefits. We do, no doubt, feel a sense of nearer neighborhood to Europe, and it seems to be an axiom with us that it is better to hear of any public event the day after its occurrence than the week following. We think ourselves happier to know of Thiers' overthrow the hour of its announcement in Paris than a fortnight subsequent. There is, indeed, a certain gentleman in Manitoba who finds he can get on very well on old news, providing it is news to him. There the mail comes but twice a year, and he gets a six months' issue of the *London Times* in a lump. He reads but one a day, however, and thus secures himself the sensation of a morning paper.

But there can be no question that the cable has been a misfortune to persons in this country who wish to study and keep the run of European politics. The reason is that we do not get the first information along with the European comment. A little pellet of news, which may or may not be true, is shot at us from Madrid or from the insurgents at Cartagena, or from amid a group of wild Carlists set down before Logrono. We care not how thoroughly any critic on Spanish affairs may have studied the country, he needs the sympathy and the converse of others who are interested in the same questions. Now in this country, there are not enough people who care for European politics and are informed upon it to quicken his mind by sympathetic contact and a common curiosity. Only the other day we asked a gentleman who has made foreign politics a specialty, and who has excellent facilities for getting at the people in New York best worth knowing, how many persons there were to whom he could go for an intelligent opinion on current matters in France and Spain. He said, "Not one." The editorial articles in the papers are certainly the reverse of luminous. They are evidently written by people who know very little more of such questions than their readers.

In Europe it is different. London is near to Paris and Madrid. The clubs are full of men who run over Andalusia for an August trip. The press has at its command many able writers, conversant with the history of these countries and their present condition, and really interested in their future. Of course, there is a great deal of uncertain, rash and unintelligent writing, but there is also a great deal

of writing which is eager, conscientious and tolerably thorough. The *London Spectator* has had of late a number of exceedingly live and interesting articles upon France and Spain. The effect of such criticisms, and of many others in the better weeklies and dailies, is certainly to stimulate curiosity. Many of the opinions expressed, no doubt, are wrong, but if the opinions are eager and honest, the reader cannot help being awakened and inspired with a desire to know what is going on in the world.

Unfortunately the London and Paris papers do not reach here until they are almost worthless. It looks, therefore, as if the cable is to be the death of all interest in contemporary politics in Europe. Should the day come when our press will have able and thoroughly competent writers upon these questions, we may not need the criticisms of the trained observers of London and Paris. But we can look for no such thing in the immediate future. In the meanwhile it is not well for us to fall into the notion that Europe is entirely "played out."

Could not the morning papers devote a column to giving us the gist of the most important articles in the European journals? It would be necessary to have an exceedingly able and intelligent man on the other side to choose the things best worth transmitting. In the midst of the great flood of wind and words pouring from the trans-Atlantic press there are always some articles which have gist and meaning, which afford nutriment to an inquisitive and studious mind. It would not be best to take the leader in the *Times*, or to transmit the articles which have the most important places in the most important papers. But wherever an idea is expressed, let that be put into as few words as will retain it, and telegraphed for the perusal of Americans. The objection will be that the need of space in a great daily is such that a column cannot be spared. But this is merely equivalent to saying that the politics of Europe are not of sufficient importance to push aside or abbreviate the sensations of the reporters in the highly-wrought descriptions of crime and violence in our morning papers.

The History of the Norman Conquest of England.*

THE great writers who have treated the history of the English nation agree in regarding the Norman Conquest as its main turning-point. When Milton, two hundred years ago, gave to the world his compendious "History of Britain (that part especially now called England)," he brought the work down only to a date six centuries before his own day. Within the narrow limits of a hundred and fifty pages he finds room for little else than a

* *The History of the Norman Conquest of England.* By Edward A. Freeman. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. For Macmillan & Co., New York.

meager record of dates and facts. But his genius could not touch even barren places like these without adorning them. The story abounds in brief, quaint reflections and descriptions, epigrammatic turns, stern censures of corrupt clergy and bad kings, and curious legends, some not over-nice, as that of the luckless baby, Prince Ethelred, "bewraving the font and water while the bishop was baptizing him." As a history, in the later meaning of the word, it is neither instructive nor conclusive.

Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, which was composed at the beginning of this century, and had the benefit of thirty-six years of revision, is quite as deficient as his greater predecessor's in the characteristics required of a work by modern judgment before it can be accepted as a history. Its antiquarian research, philological learning, and pictures of customs and manners among our Saxon ancestors, make it a valuable record. It strings together the successions of events without tracing their connections, leaving no impression of living national growth, avoiding critical judgment among conflicting authorities, and delivering platitudes of reflection in a tame, bald style.

That idea of the life of a nation which the poet must have felt, but would not labor to express, and the antiquarian did not even conceive, is grasped by our author in its fullness. In English character he points out certain ineradicable native traits; in English polity he shows the persistence of principles which shaped its beginning. The religious feeling of England underwent its special development, and her laws and customs grew up in ways peculiar to herself. But his proof is ample that she was insular in position only; far from being disconnected with the rest of the European world, she at all times, though in different degrees, acted upon and was acted upon by it. The life of the English nation is conceived and treated as part of the progress of the world. Viewed from this point, its history ceases to be obscure, because its main facts are generalized, and is no longer dull, since it shows steady though slow evolution.

From the time of the Norman Conquest, the streams of human thought and action which had flowed parallel in Northern and Southern Europe for many centuries without intimately mingling, were brought into one current. Thenceforward the northern insular kingdom became part of one political and religious system; and its laws, its language, polity and faith underwent profound modifications from contact with the southern nations. Not that the change either began with or was completed by the Conquest—but the Conquest was its manifest sign and irresistible impulse. Our author traces the long-silent preparation among the mingled Saxons and Danes in Britain leading to that subjection to the Norman rule, out of which a nobler nationality grew. He regards the process of their passing under alien domination as a marked movement in the world's development, an important step

in the fusing of the Teutonic and Roman, the imperial and ecclesiastical elements into the later system of feudal, Papal Europe. Without connecting it with such a general movement, its effects on England itself, the main subject of his study, cannot be intelligently set forth. For England, far more than a mere political conquest, and less than an enslaving or expelling force, it was a maturing and transforming ascendancy.

Its thorough treatment involves the growth and history of the races that took part in it, both originally of the same stock, and issuing from the same Scandinavian hive. On the one hand, the Northmen became Normans by settlement in Gaul, gaining military skill, religious fervor, and refinement; losing, it may be, in sturdiness and endurance. Of that stock came, in later days, he whom our author eloquently describes as "the gay, the brave, the wise, the relentless and the godless Frederick." On the other hand, the English, blending, by conquest or immigration, the blood of Celts, Jutes, Angles, Saxons and Danes, consolidated by frequent invasions and internal wars, remote from the ecclesiastical influence of the continent, preserved more of its stubborn original character. It retained, too, more of the features of a primitive Teutonic community, under a constitution of democratic nature. It knew nothing of nobles as a caste, though orders existed in the state of earls and ceorls, or esquires and yeomen, with a king more than their equal, yet elected or deposed by the Witan, among whom every freeman had an abstract right to be present. The history of Normandy from its settlement, something incidentally of that of Scandinavia, and every point in English history, needs to be considered, if we would gain a clear view of the meaning and results of the Norman Conquest.

The author lays little stress on the shaping power of climate and configuration of country, which is now so favorite a topic with theorizers on the progress of mankind. He does not even hint what Milton plainly said,—“to speak a truth not often spoken,” in his time at least,—that “the sun which we want ripens wits as well as fruits.” It is in moral and political causes, rather, that he finds an explanation of the diverging courses of development taken in the different homes of the same race by their civil policy, their religious establishments, their laws and language. The chapter on the English constitution follows back to the earliest times and through striking analogies, its persistent democratic element. It concedes to the Wittenagemot, the primitive assembly of all freemen, powers surpassing beyond measure those vested by written law in a modern parliament. Representation being unknown, this assembly gradually shrank, by the necessity of the case, as the kingdom enlarged, into a council of the king's nobles. The progressive changes in the kingly office, and the two-fold character of its holder, as the ruler of his home people and the emperor of other subject kingdoms, afford

material for interesting discussion. The original public ownership of land, from which portions were granted to private individuals by the kings, with the consent of the Witan, forms another important subject of examination. It is briefly shown, as it has been shown more at large in special treatises called forth by the attention which the subject commands through its political bearings at the present day, that State ownership of the soil of the country was the rule among all primitive nations. In this country we have been fortunate in beginning with individual ownership, instead of passing through that process which seems imminent in England, of resumption by the State for the sake of equitable redistribution.

The growth of the Church in England is less elaborately set forth than that of the constitution, as being a branch of the main subject of less importance, and not so easily reduced to principles. Yet, the introduction and fostering of Christianity in Britain, and its gradual triumph over the invading Danes, are clearly indicated. The piety of many of her kings, the liberality of her nobles, the patriotism and wisdom of her bishops, gain due praise. The ecclesiastical settlement of the country by William, after the Conquest was confirmed, is dwelt on at greater length. Accounts of the English sees and of the foundation of various monastic houses find their proper place, and the relation of the controversy over the primacy between Canterbury and York leads to an eulogy on the character of Lanfranc, one of the best-famed among the many churchmen famous in many ways, of early England. Rising to wider considerations, the author eloquently points out how the independence of the church was compromised, and a vast accession to Papal power yielded when William invoked the decision upon his claim to the crown of England, of the Pope—the near predecessor of that Hildebrand, the carpenter's son, who rose to be the mighty Gregory the Seventh.

If the author is acute in demonstrating the events he relates to have been co-ordinated under a grand movement of the world, he is fortunate in selecting two heroic central figures about whom the conflict gathers towards its culmination. All else is preliminary to the last meeting between Harold and William. They represent the opposing systems of civilization and religion, and the story grows more minute, yet more clear and spirited, as it approaches the decisive struggle. His sympathies plainly follow the English prince, while his admiration is higher for William. Both are depicted as marked by high qualities, judgment and foresight fitted for kingly rule, patient ambition, and the skill of great captains; but stained with craft and cruelty. Harold is drawn as the more generous and impetuous; William as the more politic. Those chapters present a subtle study of character which display William's persevering schemes for compassing the English crown, his sagacity in appealing to the preva-

lent feudal and religious prejudices of Europe, and the dexterity that wove a plausible claim out of separate false pretenses. And the story of the marvelous year in which the English king marched nearly the length of his realm to repel the Norwegian invasion gloriously, in September, hastening back to meet, within a month, another invasion in the South, and to fall as gloriously as he had just conquered, is told with all the spirit and color of a romance. Though of secondary interest, the description of the rout of Harold of Norway at Stamfordbridge, near York, is only less vivid and picturesque than that of the stubborn first and last fight with the Norman enemy, at Senlac, better known in history as the battle of Hastings, and in poetry and painting as the battle of the Standard—battles, those of bows and axes, of main personal force, more chivalric than Waterloos won under the smoke of artillery by the disciplined cavalry charge.

Those subordinate figures of princes, warriors, and priests that crowd the pages are touched with force and distinctness. The elaborate parallel between Alfred and the heroes of other modern races may be instructively compared with the compressed sketch that Milton completes by calling him the mirror of princes. Canute's remarkable reign, and the career of grand Earl Godwin, are carefully cleared of the superficial notion that cover them in common story and the pictures of natural scenes and venerable buildings attest the eye of an artist. Such are the descriptions of Battle Abbey, of Westminster, of the town of Dol, of Lincoln, and the field of Val-ès-Dunes, although they are sometimes crowded with allusions that confuse in the attempt to bring within our view too much of both past and future. It would require greater details than our limits permit to do justice to the extraordinary research and critical acumen of our author. An introductory note to each chapter gives the sources from which its materials are drawn, with a careful statement of their relative trustworthiness, and an impartial warning as to their probable bias. This perception of the worth of testimony reaches the keenest dividing edge of acuteness in that part of the work which balances the presumptions and dissects the assertions regarding Harold's famous oath given to William. And we admire the ingenuity that cites and cross-examines that curious historical witness, the tapestry of Bayeux—that work of the needle which may truly or falsely affirm, but cannot insinuate. No other record has come down to us so convincing in its pictured mute exactness—none of so real personal an interest, not even the mummy-casings from the pyramids, nor the ashy molds that restore the living figure for Pompeian explorers. An immense variety of curious lore and thorough discussion is thrown into the form of long appendices to each volume. Many convenient maps and plans illustrate the work, and the only want that mars its completeness is that of an index, furnishing a plainer guide to the particular threads of the his-

tory through the scattered and complex masses of facts and references gathered for its composition.

"The Female Poets of America."*

THE task which Mr. Stoddard has admirably performed, in adding about a fourth to the number of pages already collected by Dr. Griswold as a monument of the genius of American female poets, presents difficulties far greater than those of the original work. The compiler, a quarter of a century ago, did little else than to take what came to his hand. The new editor conscientiously chooses the more severe and delicate labor of careful selection from the copious material furnished by the effusions of a generation in every sense new. From the original volume, extending over a period of more than two centuries, we might infer that very little verse was written in the earlier days by the very few women who wrote at all. It would be ungenerous and only partly true, yet still true in part, to say that the sex was once more sure of its place, and more true to its duties, than it has since become. Whatever the reasons may be,—the discussion of which would lead us very far,—whether they are to be found in the increase of general intelligence, or in that of special restlessness, whether it is the genius of women, hitherto repressed, that insists on being heard, or only their part of modern discontent that wrecks itself in numbers, it is certain that the mob of gentlewomen who rhyme with ease now-a-days, holds a startling proportion to the ranks of silent sisters. The American Pegasus has of late been thoroughly broken to the side-saddle, and usually ambles under it tamely enough.

The mere revision of the former volume demanded watchful exercise of that diligence and that accuracy, always so marked in the work of its present editor. What the labor has been of sifting the immense mass of chaff out of which those few pure grains have been garnered, no one but an editor can understand. To no one else is vouchsafed the fearful vision of pyramids of portfolios asking monthly inspection, and reams of waste paper attesting the censor's wrath and justice. By the side of this garland of the accepted and approved, an anthology of the rejected—may no one be indiscreet enough to cull it!—would complete a curious commentary on the position and wants of women in our republic of letters.

We frankly affirm what the reviser is too modest to intimate, that the few new pages of the book are worth all the rest. In the qualities of force and of finish, he justly says, the living female poets of America surpass all their predecessors, from Mistress Anne Bradstreet down. Even more trying comparisons than this may safely be challenged by

the score of singers who have gained the approval of his severe and correct taste. The selections from their poems here presented, are known and admired in other lands, and they deserve the finer praise of having become dear to their countrymen as household words.

"The Parisians."*

BETWEEN the *France, Social and Literary*, of Sir Henry Bulwer, a generation ago, and his more famous brother's *Parisians* of to-day, the difference seems as wide as if the separate subjects concerned two different nations. Yet the one is really a sequel to the other. The causes and tendencies noted in the earlier book have developed into the conditions portrayed in the later. It is not that the characteristics of the nation have changed, but that sudden and grand events have attended its entrance upon the newest days of modern times. The country is overrun and conquered at the moment when science questions everything, when religion is everywhere in contest, and political power, spreading downward, sinks in dignity as it widens its range. *The Parisians* is designed to illustrate the influence, at such a time, of such modern ideas upon such a community. This can be done only effectively, for the scale of the sketch forbids it being done completely. It is a succession of magic-lantern pictures, highly colored and boldly grouped, without much detail or finish.

The impression produced is vivid, and so truthful that we recognize it, with something of sadness, as an impression of decadence and effeteness. It is the contrast of decline with the springing, soaring, German spirit. It is the spectacle of a civilization without heart or religion, without power, a courage without aim, opposed to the concentrated energy of Teutonic materialism. Each figure in it is a symbol. The young provincial noble, finding his obsolete loyalty useless in the capital, forgets it, but not his better nature, in gay extravagance. The *roué* of a former generation comes back as a conspirator, to use for tools in his pitiless plots the lives and hopes of dreamers turned Communists, who destroy him in their own ruin. The sexagenarian wit and cynic turns with disgust from the caricature of his own mental traits, as the time vulgarises them in the spasmodic, absinthe-sodden genius, who is the latest birth of letters in revolutionary days. Among them all the financier alone stands steady, far-sighted and consistent, representing the dominant force in modern society—wealth ruled by intelligence. The life of the Englishman, who seems doubtful whether to act the spectator or the hero, gives occasion for comparison and judgment among these social elements; and the Italian girl, whom he loves, brings

* *The Female Poets of America*. By Rufus Wilmot Griswold. With additions by R. H. Stoddard. New York: James Miller.

The Parisians. By Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton. New York: Harper Brothers. 1874.