

of exaggerated incomes socially second class." In other words, which may be as nearly those of Mr. Depew as the words here quoted from the newspaper report, New York is a hundred years behind London in civilization, and is of the ignorance of that capital in the days when genius or achievement was not accounted good company, and had to be explicitly affirmed the best. Mr. Depew seems not only to declare the fact, but to be sensible of a growing resentment in the distinguished elements left out in the cold.

Whether this is so it would be hard to say, but there can be no doubt of the amiability of Mr. Depew's wish at once to better exclusive society and to soothe the malcontents by persuading our mistaken millionaires to open the doors now barred against the best company. It is surely from no desire to burlesque a matter which has some seriousness in it that the Easy Chair confesses the sense of a certain complexity in a situation apparently so simple. At first glance it appears—not so much to Mr. Depew as to the less judicial observer—that the multi-millionaire bars his door against genius or achievement out of stupid vanity or pure insolence, or the joy of snubbing his betters. Such a view of the situation has possibly occurred to every distinguished man and, still more, every distinguished woman in New York whom the Four Hundred have failed to ask to their dinners and dances, or even their teas, or large receptions.

To the wounded pride of modest merit there might be no other explanation, and yet there is more than one that might be suggested. In the first place, we may reasonably suppose that some multi-millionaires, at least, are exclusive through ignorance rather than vanity or insolence. They probably do not know, poor things, who our distinguished people really are, and if they meant to invite them, must inform themselves not only of their validity, but their existence, by means of their secretaries or type-writers, or perhaps their housekeepers, who might be prejudiced, or disqualified through want of taste for the delicate work. In certain cases, no millionaire, however rich or

new, could fail. He or she—more probably she than he—could not help knowing a great actor, or diva, or divine, or portrait-painter, by reputation; but when it came to an author, or, still worse, a scientist, her trouble would begin. Very likely she would invite some one in these sorts whose name was loathing on the lips of his instructed brethren; who might indeed be of notoriety, but was of no real distinction. She could not well ask every one of his calling in order to avoid such a blunder, for that also would be an offence, and no honor; but if she happened to hit upon the very man or woman of all others who could add grace and lustre to her function by his or her just celebrity and unchallengeable genius, still another perplexity would arise. She would have necessarily invited society people of her own sort to meet her distinguished guest, and the distinguished guest might be so bored as to refuse ever to come again.

## II

It is by no means a new discovery which Mr. Depew has made in regard to our plutocratic society, though the fact does not impugn his originality in proclaiming it. The present tenant of the Easy Chair remembers hearing his famous predecessor, who so wished all manner of men and women well, and was always trying to make life more interesting and edifying, tell of a certain experience of his, apropos of the very situation which Mr. Depew regrets. This presented itself so deplorably to the eminent humanist that he took counsel with a certain Great Lady, a lady really great enough to imagine his motive and aim, for the amelioration of exclusive society by an infusion of the best company. If the memory of the witness serves him rightly, the humanist provided the Great Lady with a list of delightful as well as distinguished people, whom, as one of the most delightful and distinguished among them, though yet a man of society, he was in the habit of meeting on their own ground, on those lofty levels where they did their high thinking and possibly joking; and the Great Lady asked them to her house. They came; but they did not come again; and she was thereafter shut up to her fellow-

millionaires, and the best company kept itself to itself, as far as she knew.

The fact could be variously explained; but it may be sufficiently accounted for upon the theory that genius, as we may largely call the best company, hated the trouble of the forms by which fashionable society exists. Very often, in the process of achievement, it had forgotten them, and sometimes it had never known them. In either case, if the person of genius was a man, he shrank from the memory of the bother which that evening in fashionable society had been, and would not go a second time; if a woman, she had learned that she had not the clothes for it. The reader may think this is attributing such a slight of social privilege to rather a low cause, but we are not sure that a lower one yet cannot be alleged. We are reluctant to cast discredit upon intelligent achievement, but we have sometimes feared that in exclusive society it must miss the recognition, the appreciation, not to say the flattery, which it meets in the best company. It *is* pleasant to be known and valued for what one has done; it is pleasant to be honored for it; and in fashionable society people of the best company can only be a passing show and a momentary wonder. Fashion has not read their books with the authors in mind, or seen their pictures to remember their fine points, or heard of their inventions to understand them; and the brilliant lights wander lonely and lost in the gilded salons which they are not aware of illuminating.

Fashion is not flattering, and worse than this, for persons of the best company, it is within its own bounds democratic, and apt to be indifferent to distinctions which are the life of the best company. As a general thing nobody in our exclusive society has done anything worth mention, except make money, which is now so very common that one cannot turn to look at a single millionaire in the street, much less one of many in a drawing-room. Exclusive society conceives with difficulty of a person who has done something, and is not able to take him in that way. Only some one else who has done something is capable of this, and so the "representative of intelligent achievement" comes home

bruised from the varnished contact of that not really unkindly indifference, and vows to go no more.

Something better might be said of the refusal of the best company to mingle with exclusive society, as that it has not the time, and cannot give its precious leisure to the functions which form the business rather than the pleasure of such society. All this, we are aware, has an effect of arrogance which it were a pity should be left with the reader, since the real meaning is that the "representatives of intellectual achievement" do not regard society as the main affair of life, but as the relaxation and rest from that affair. This may or may not be their misconception. The more numerous representatives of unintelligent non-achievement may have quite as good a right to say what society is, but they ought to be warned that if they do unbar their doors to the best company, it will not and cannot enter upon the present cumbrous conditions. It is not merely that one puts one's body into evening dress; that is a simple matter, and one does it even in the best company; but that in going into good society one must put one's soul into evening dress, and one's thoughts and opinions. Certain rigors of convention rule out naturalness and simplicity; you cannot be yourself, and who else can you be? The spectacle is that of an insipid drama played by amateurs; an adaptation of an English drama; and genius is not amused, or rested, or in any wise repaid for its outlay of time and money.

For it does cost money, and the representatives of intelligent achievement have commonly not so much money as the poorest of the millionaires who, in his comparative destitution, might consent to open his doors to them. They have often so much less that they can never hope to repay the hospitality shown them. The notion of that would be quite grotesque both to host and guest, and the guest must remain with the stamp of inferiority which such insolvency gives.

### III

It is impossible not to sympathize with the generous rage of such a spirit as Mr. Depew, who sees how poor our

rich society is, and thinks he sees how it might be bettered. But it is also impossible not to feel the fatuity of his aspiration for a different state of things under the actual conditions. The conditions are economical and financial. Money not only rules in our exclusive society, but among people of no society whatever, and the best company cuts no figure in the popular imagination, because it cannot render itself objective in splendid houses, carriages, and clothes. It may go on being the best company, but unless exclusive society invites it, and it appears in the public prints among Those Present, the world of society, and the yet vaster world of readers about society, know nothing of it.

Any attempt to modify or ameliorate exclusive society by an infusion of the best company must proceed upon the supposition that this society wishes to be improved, or that it is sensible of a duty toward the best company and wishes to discharge it. But there is no proof that exclusive society feels the need of improvement, or is conscious of any neglected duty. In fact, it is where it is solely for its pleasure, and has no other ideal. It would be contrary to the nature, to the genius of exclusive society to have any sort of obligation except to what is for the moment good form. If it could somehow become good form to receive the best company, then exclusive society would do it, and not otherwise; but perhaps then that other difficulty might present itself, and the best company would refuse to be received.

We have already hinted at one very notable difference between exclusive society and the best company which the friend of both seldom takes into account. Exclusive society is willing to work for its pleasure, and the best company is not. The best company, or genius, as Mr. Depew calls it, is willing to work for any of the arts in which it seeks distinction, but it expects pleasure to accrue to it without being worked for. It regards pleasure as a relief from work, but the pleasures of exclusive society do not seem to be reliefs from work; they are apparently themselves its work, its sole employment, and they look like terrible drudgery. The life of a person of fashion has the effect of

slavery which it is wonderful any one should sell or give one's self to; and the offer to impart some supreme moments of this servitude to the free laborers in other fields could not conceivably be regarded with favor. What those blithe spirits want in the way of pleasure is a festivity, and any function in exclusive society has to them every effect of a solemnity. Their real happiness they find in their art or their science, and when they unbend from that they like their pastimes to be gay.

It may be urged that if genius took part in the pastimes of society they would be gayer than they now look, but this is very doubtful. They would probably still seek, as they have always sought, the lowest intellectual level, or, if they did not, they might further stupefy the less enlightened majority. Things are as they are quite inevitably and irretrievably. Fashionable society here is made up solely of people who have duties to it, and to nothing else. They are bound to invite the best company, or the representatives of intelligent achievement, or genius, call it what you will, only in their own interest, and if they do not find it in their interest, there is nothing more to say. It seems to have always been so in New York, and it probably always will be so. New York is above all a commercial capital, and its good society must be thoroughly commercial, and can take account only of pecuniary values in its membership.

London is a different sort of capital, and it represents something besides commercial success in England. It is a real synthesis of all the English interests, achievements, aspirations; and more logically, more reasonably, more fitly, the representatives of intelligent achievement find themselves in its social swim. Apparently they find themselves there upon a perfect social equality, but at such crucial moments, for example, as going out with titles to dinner, they bow their necks and take the yoke of social inferiority in the most public manner. If it ever happened to genius, or intelligent achievement, to be asked into exclusive society in New York, there would be no rule of precedence to make it the tail of the procession to the dining-room. It might even stand some little, slender

chance of finding itself at the head; but in London the rule of the road is so absolute that the least lordling of them all gives his dust to the greatest commoner. That is not the American idea of "cordial welcome and intelligent appreciation in the homes of the proudest aristocracy and oldest nobility," yet under the frown of precedence hospitality may hide a smiling face, all the same, for the representative of intelligent achievement. But how about the women of his family? It is woman, lovely or unlovely, who defines the social status of every man belonging to her, and if the wife of genius is not asked along with genius into those stately English homes, then genius is received there to be petted, perhaps, or perhaps snubbed, but certainly to be patronized, and not welcomed on an equality.

Upon the whole, self-respecting genius might prefer to be left out altogether, as by our society of exaggerated incomes. In the great world genius has always had a humiliating part to play. When Philip II. picks up the brush of Titian, it is with the understanding as distinct as it is tacit that the difference between them is simply intensified by the King's condescension to the painter. Voltaire is welcomed to the table of one of the greatest French nobles, but he is called out from it to be cudgelled by the lackeys of another; and a contemporary dignitary of the church confesses that he would not know how to manage if poets had no shoulders. Addison "married discord in a noble wife," but Pope, who notes the fact, found as little comfort in his less intimate relations with the Great, though he put on such an air of being at ease with them. He could give insult for insult, but they had the superior power of snubbing. We may be sure that in all the Augustan ages, when genius seems to have been cordially welcomed and appreciatively recognized by fashionable society, it was accepted rather as a curious monster. Fashionable society has been more cultivated at some times and in some places than others, but it has not been from an infusion of intelligent achievement. The general spread of education has reached it; that is all; and if our exclusive society is sordid and stupid, it

may be because our period and people are so, or it may be because it is made up of exceptionally belated and benighted persons whom the universal enlightenment has not yet reached. It is not the duty, as certainly it could not be the pleasure, of "genius which has won distinction" to bear the torch among them. Even if they decided to admit men and women of moderate incomes, there would be no obligation on the part of the illustrious poor to profit by the opportunity; still less are these invoked by any high behest to clamor at the unyielding gates with proposals of benevolent assimilation.

If in any considerable number the representatives of intelligent achievement among us are just now resenting the implicit intention of the very rich to stamp them as "socially second class," they have an easy means of retaliation at hand. They can refuse to invite or to receive any of the millionaire exclusives who seek their acquaintance; they can make great wealth a cause of hesitation, of suspicion, even of exclusion from the best company. It might work a hardship in some cases, but these would be few. If the reader will search his mind, what multi-millionaires will be found worthy to associate on equal terms with the representatives of intelligent achievement among us? There can be no genuine reciprocity between the two classes. If they met, the man of genius would be continually giving the man of money ideas, which could not be repaid in cash, and for which the most sumptuous dinner, the largest tea, the grandest ball, would be no equivalent.

By looking at the actual situation in some such way, we shall finally reconcile ourselves to it. If the representatives of achievement go on thinking the very rich do not want them, their spirits may in some cases droop; but if they once vitally possess themselves of the truth that the very rich cannot get them, they will in all cases experience the most consoling rise of self-respect. They must never forget that they are the best company, or suffer themselves in their meekest moments as individuals to relax the collective consciousness of their social primacy.

## Editor's Study.

### I

LOOKING backward has this advantage over any prospective outlook, that it is not an imaginary view, but one regarding actual events and accomplishments; the perspective is clear, and the data for comparison, if not for perfect co-ordination, are complete. It is true that if we look back far enough the record is lost, and even such monuments as remain are enigmatic, and our vision of early men and institutions is more imaginary than that of things to come. This year we are looking back a thousand years to the date of the death of Alfred, the first English king. That far the record stands forth in clear outline; but it is mainly due to his studious industry, completing the work already done by Bede, the father of English scholarship, that we have any definite knowledge of our ancestors and their doings in the few preceding centuries.

If we look back to the first Christian century, we have, outside of monuments, no clear knowledge of the Europe and Asia of that time save through the Latin and Greek literatures; and in these there is not to be found a single intimation, through contemporary mention, of the greatest personality that ever was upon earth. Going back three thousand years, we could not find in the records now extant of so advanced peoples in civilization as the Egyptian and Assyrian any distinct indication of the Hebrew people beyond that of its mere existence, although, in the religious history of the world, of all ancient peoples it was the most eminent; for any knowledge of its character, history, and singular mission we depend wholly upon its own scriptures. By way of contrast, we have in those scriptures a vivid illumination and informing characterization of every other important ancient people. Indeed, for the unlearned there is little other knowledge of those peoples; in their minds Babylon, Tyre, and Sidon exist only as pictured by the prophets. How much of "the know-

ledge of Egypt" goes with Moses in the Exodus; how much of Chaldaic lore is revived in the story of Genesis, to say nothing of the great Chaldaic spiritual drama preserved in the Book of Job! The only picture of patriarchal life in all literature is given in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a picture true to its specialty, but also generically typical. The Hebrew was so assimilative (creatively assimilative, for whatever he derived from Chaldea, or Egypt, or Persia he transformed, informing it with his own spirit) that his history and institutions give us indications beyond themselves—reflexes of the peoples with whom he had contacts in his ever-shifting career.

Even a brief retrospect, going no further back than to the time of our own grandfathers, is an imperfect view. From *It is* to *It was* is a change not merely of tense, but of the point of view as well, so that even the immediate past refuses to be revived in its full content and color, however readily it may yield its precise form. Human nature is the same in all ages and under all conditions in only its simple, primary emotions, and these are so modified in their expression by culture that they seem to undergo transformation, moving upon new planes, weaving more complex webs with ever-varying patterns. When, therefore, we attempt to take into our view the whole of a past century or of a past millennium, the picture is in outline, truer in form than in reality.

We strive not the less to truly restore the past, through scholarly research and in our literature and art; it is the special office of the historian. We mark the closing of a century by literary enterprises that supplement the historian's proper work—undertakings by specialists having for their end a summary of the century's progress in different fields. Sometimes a single field will furnish material for a volume, such as Dr. Williams's *Story of Nineteenth Century Science*. In 1876 the close of the first century of the re-