

Editor's Easy Chair.

IN a world that seems to grow poorer rather than richer in the article of novelty the point of view is the thing that apparently promises most to the lover of novelty. Any mind dealing with a theme or problem new to it, sheds the light of its own interest upon it, brings to its interpretation the lessons of individual experience, and blends with it some color of character peculiar to the student. The student shares himself with the subject which he appropriates, and no witness of the result can wholly separate the two. If the subject was attractive before it was studied, it has become more attractive in the process, and the result is enriched with the importance which any man's history must have for all other men. If the student is a man of uncommon history, if his opinions are imaginably the outcome of his environment as well as his inner consciousness; if he is a man of culture standing in an almost unexampled relation of fealty to a political condition hitherto untouched by culture, then he presents himself and his thesis with such an extraordinary claim upon the curiosity of the witness, as we think we are about to instance. There may be incidents of greater psychological allurements, or of more striking dramatic picturesqueness than that of a New York politician, of the strict Tammany tradition, coming forward at the moment of his party's triumph, with a scholarly treatise on *The Oligarchy of Venice* in his hand, but we cannot think of any that match it or surpass it. If one were tempted to consider the spectacle lightly, or with reference merely to its mystifying effect upon the rank and file of those who have recently made Mr. George B. McClellan Mayor of the greatest American city, one would find one's sufficient rebuke in the honest make and excellent manner of the book which contributes its specific touch to his very striking attitude at a signal moment of his political career.

It is probably in an ignorance of which we have not yet been able to ascertain the bounds, that we fail to recall

any study of the Venetian oligarchy besides Mr. McClellan's since the delightful James Howell wrote, in the middle of the seventeenth century, his "Survey of the Signorie of Venice, of Her admired policy, and method of Government, with a Cohortation to all Christian Princes to resent Her dangerous Condition at present," she being then in danger more than usually imminent of destruction by the Turk, to whose mercies Christendom was leaving her with more than usual indifference. The author's "cohortation" formed a constantly recurrent note of his discourse, such as Mr. McClellan, addressing the world more than a hundred years after Venice ceased to be, was not obliged to sound. He could therefore write of her from a much cooler mind than Howell was able to command; and there are also some differences of circumstance as well as of temperament in the two students of the subject which favor his more judicial view of the case. He had not, for instance, to address his appeal, as Howell had, to a Puritan Parliament which had imprisoned him for his royalist sympathies (Howell had mostly sympathies rather than principles) or to conjure his country by her community of maritime interests to have compassion on a sister sea-going commonwealth. Neither was there any urgent occasion, in the taste of his age, or the humor of his public, to preface his treatise with a sonnet on "Upon the Citty and Signorie of Venice." Once for all Howell had done that so effectually, that any reader who feels the need of such a sonnet may recur to it in his book, where he will learn that—

Could any State on Earth Immortall be,
Venice by her rare Government is She. . . .
Yet She retains her Virgin-waters pure,
Nor any Forren mixture can endure;
Though Syren-like on Shore and Sea, Her
Face
Enchants all those whom once She doth embrace;
Nor is ther any can Her bewty prize
But he who hath beheld Her with his Eyes.
These following Leaves display if well observed . . .

How for sound prudence She still bore the
Bell;
Whence may be drawn this high fetchd
parallel:
Venus and Venice are Great Queens in their
degree,
Venus is Queen of Love, Venice of Policie.

Mr. McClellan has been as little obliged to offer any old or new version of "the famous Hexastic which Sannazarius made upon the City of Venice, for which he receavd 100 Zecchins for every verse (amounting neer to 300l sterling) in lieu of reward by decree of the Senat," but this payment is so much beyond the highest modern magazine rates, that we cannot forbear reproducing the lines here, in Howell's English, omitting Sannazaro's Latin, as an example to publishers and an incentive to poets, if for no pertinence in the lines themselves,

When Neptun 'mong his billows Venice saw,
And to the Adrian Surges giving law,
He said, now Jove boast of thy Capitoll,
And Mars his Walls; This were for to extoll

Tiber above the Main: both Citties Face,
You'l say, Rome *men*, Venice the *Gods* did trace.

A writer of such constantly besetting fancy as Howell would naturally call his work "A Venice Looking-Glasse," in that "short Analysis of the whole Peece," with which he prefaces the "Proeme" at last introducing the subject of his Survey; and an anxious author appealing to the English public as well as Parliament could not well forbear a wish to "preposse the reder . . . that he would not have adventured upon this remote Outlandish subject had he not bin himself upon the place; had he not had practi-call conversation with the peeple of whom he writes. . . . And herin," he adds, "the Author desires to be distinguished from those who venture to write of Forren affaires and Countreys by an implicit faith only, taking all things upon trust, having Themselfs never trodd any part of the Continent." It is by right, therefore, of an immediate and personal acquaintance with the matter that Howell is able to take the confident tone he takes at the beginning, when he does begin, and to assure his readers that "were it within the reach of humane brain to pre-

scribe Rules for fixing a Society and Succession of peeple under the same Species of Government as long as the World lasts, the Republic of Venice were the surest pattern on Earth both for direction and imitation. . . . It seems some propitious Star was predominant at Her Nativity, and that Nature brought Her forth with Her limms well knit, and apt to grow up to a strong constitution, which is the cause that She is so long liv'd, and hath continued above a thousand hot summers . . . still fresh and flourishing, without the least furrow of age in her forehead, or any visible symptom of decay, whereunto Civill Bodies as well as Naturall, by those distempers and accidents which attend Time, use to be subject."

From this point so firmly established, in his own mind at least, our author goes on, not without a great deal more preamble, to the study, or as he calls it, the survey, of the Venetian constitution and government, "wherin ther may be divers things, usefull for this Meridian," that is to say England, where a theocratic oligarchy fast tending to a military despotism had supplanted the monarchy, and where Howell addresses the Parliament as "the supreme authority of the nation." He considers the Venetian state politically, geographically, internationally, commercially, and historically, especially in the light of "Her imitation of old Rome in most things," and devotes half his book to her annals under "Her 98 Dukes, Doges, or Souverain Princes." All along the line of his discourse and narrative blossom delightful conceits of fancy, and quaint flowers of rhetoric, but it may be frankly owned that with a prevailing fidelity to fact he does not scrutinize his material very closely, or forbear to report an event merely because it happens to be fabulous.

He was one of the most agreeable travellers and liberal observers who ever enlarged the bounds of English sympathy, and the "Familiar Letters" by which he is chiefly known, and which he is said to have written from Spain, France, Italy, and Holland, while resting quietly within the walls of the Fleet prison, where "the supreme authority of the nation" had lodged him, are graceful and charming pieces of prose in a time when most prose

was neither graceful nor charming. But while we may allow him literary qualities finer than those of all but a very few English travellers, and own him an ingenious and interesting observer, we cannot accept his view of any alien "people" as philosophical. His survey of the Signory of Venice is thoroughly entertaining, but his conversation with those "gentlemen of Venice" with whom he so much loved to speak, in the intervals of looking up the glass industry at Murano, does not seem to have supplied him a perspective for a very luminous view of their actual political character; or if it did, he scarcely invites his reader to share its advantages with him. He takes note of the successive changes by which Venice became the strongest and closest aristocracy from the wisest democracy, but not with such effect as to leave them strongly stamped upon the imagination or to render them significant. Perhaps no contemporary observer could have detected in the Venice which Howell surveyed in the seventeenth century the facts and reasons of her inevitable decay. He, at any rate, saw her flourishing in immortal youth, with a glorious perpetuity before her, though in the retrospect she can be seen to have entered long before on the course of disease and death, which was not to end for yet more than two hundred years. Yet it is to be said of him that he was not, with all his fond admiration of Venice, a sentimental adorer, and the peculiar Venetian myth, the superstition of a state all dramatic incident, darkling intrigue, and ruthless tyranny, had no root in him. The seeds of this were to be sown after the fall of Venice, and to find their nurture in the deposits of that flood of romanticism which swept over the European world at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As far as any complicity in that folly is concerned, Howell is as guiltless as Mr. McClellan, and for his time and place he is almost equally modern.

What Mr. McClellan has done, and done so well as to give his performance almost unique value, is to have given us a view of the Venetian oligarchy which is modern in this time and place, in the year 1904, and in the city of New York. He has conceived of Venice, as some one

was sure at last to conceive of Venice, as the most strictly businesslike state that ever existed, a state built upon commercial principles, rather than moral and political ideals, and destined to endure as long as the business conditions continued propitious. She was a business enterprise, and if she failed at last, she escaped for a thousand years the doom which awaits ninety-five per cent. of all business enterprises. She was the New York, she was the Chicago, she was the Dawson City of her day; and she was not the less so because history and fancy so richly clothe her in the picturesqueness of the past. But it does not follow that because she was so modern, our modernity should evolve in her direction. We are a part of the English evolution, and it appears that we have not yet completed the democratic solution from aristocratic origins, which Mr. McClellan makes us observe was reversed in the Venetian process evolving an aristocracy from democratic origins. Whatever end we are going on to, the end that she attained with an unexampled perfection was a commercial patriciate in which feudalism and populism were alike sacrificed. The highest nobles and the lowest plebeians were thrust aside together by the successful plutocrats who formed themselves into a new aristocracy and became the state. After several *coups d'état* had culminated in the closing of the Grand Council under the Doge Pietro Gradenigo, that ossification of Venice began which so long had the effect of strength, that three hundred years later it gave the lively Howell the impression of immortal youth.

Mr. McClellan, of course, is not the first to bring the fact to the reader's consciousness; it has been the common property of philosophical observers since the fall of Venice, but his sense of the Venetian oligarchy as "the machine" is a contribution to the philosophy of the subject which is fairly his own. His notion of the involution, rather than the evolution of a national life, is very interesting and suggesting, and it seems to be the one thing absolutely new in his study. Other things in it are more or less derivative from former surveys of the subject, but it had remained for him to formulate if not to originate this. It

is the central light of his philosophy; it penetrates to all points of his study, and on his part there is no apparent shrinking from the conclusions to which it shows the way. With every outward semblance of a nation, and a very powerful nation, Venice, after the closing of the Grand Council, or the limitation of the government to the powerful plutocrats who managed the matter, became simply a corporate enterprise, a trust, a monopoly, and was destined, like everything else that is unjust and selfish, to final defeat and ruin. The latest student of the condition is not deceived by any of the pretences of necessity which have imposed upon most of the earlier students. These may have had no friendlier feeling toward the oligarchy than he, but they have hardly recognized as he recognizes the fact that there was nothing in the situation of Venice, at the closing of the Grand Council, which compelled any patriotic spirit to acquiesce in that treacherous violation of the constitution. Outwardly Venice would have been as strong against her enemies under what survived of her ancient democratic forms as under the new authority of the usurpation, and Mr. McClellan clearly sees this. There was of course no inward weakness against which the oligarchy strengthened her. It has been generally supposed that the oligarchy preserved her from all sorts of domestic and foreign perils to which she would have succumbed but for its potent agency, but there is no proof of this in her history. The democracy made her great and glorious, and if she held her own under the oligarchy, it was with a finally failing grasp, which there is no reason and no evidence to suppose would have relaxed sooner under a popular government. She became a monopoly, a commercial enterprise, not so explicit or so barren of tradition as, for example, the East India Company, but with no more heart, and with no greater hold upon the real affections of her subjects. They were ready to die for the oligarchy, as they had been ready to die for the country of which the oligarchy had dispossessed them, but not so much because it was sweet, as because they found their account in it, or could not help themselves. San Marco was still synonymous with Venice, but San Marco had ceased

to be the father of a country, and had become the president of a syndicate.

Mr. McClellan glances rapidly over the events which, with all their apparent success, weakened Venice one after another. The ideal of the syndicate was expansion, expansion on the Italian mainland, where it acquired large territories, and expansion in the Levant where it forced its way to commercial primacy when it could not force its way to political power. But the blood and treasure of the Venetian people were spent in continual wars, now with the Pope and his allies, and now with the Porte and his minions. On both hands the syndicate had to face treachery as well as violence, but it was fully qualified to play the game. It could command all talents: it had the people's money to pay them; and it was not afraid: courage is the one unquestionable virtue of an aristocracy. It bought mercenaries to fight its battles, and it knew how to deal with their captains when these favored its foes. It salaried and supported such a fearless mind as Paolo Sarpi, in his conflict with the Pope, and when the Church pronounced its interdicts of the republic, the syndicate ignored or defied them. It was a potent and perfect machine, but after all it was a machine, as Mr. McClellan calls it, and as he characterizes it when he does not call it so, and was not a country, not a nation.

It would have been interesting to have our author push his notion of the oligarchic machine to its logical conclusion on the parallel with our own party machines which offers itself to the reader's fancy. In our history we have seen more than once how a machine has consumed the vitality of a great and generous party, and it has always been the latent fear of certain patriots that some party machine may become so powerful as to consume the vitality of the people. This is what the Venetian machine did in the Venetian case, and its fatal and ruinous success is its lesson and warning. The machine, as one of its greatest masters and managers expressed, is always there for what there is in it, but when it has got that, there is nothing left, not even the machine itself. Mr. McClellan's perception of this fact in the

experience of the Venetian oligarchy will add a lively hope to the expectations of civic reform which the spirit if not the letter of his municipal administration has already awakened. A philosopher who has so intimately acquainted himself with the evils of a machine on the national scale may not unjustly be supposed to have his misgivings of the final beneficence of a party machine.

But this is something apart from our real business, which is with his admirable book. This seems to us not only a careful legal scrutiny of the subject, but a very judicial inquiry. Like the author of *The Signorie of Venice* the author of *The Venetian Oligarchy* had evidently "not adventured upon this remote Outlandish subject had he not bin himself upon the place." The subject, indeed, is not so remote or so outlandish as it was in the time when Howell felt obliged to excuse it to his "reder," and Mr. McClellan has rendered it indefinitely less so. As we have already noted, he has taken the American view of it; and without losing the dignity of a scholarly inquirer, he has given us a familiar picture, a very personal sense of the Venetian patriciate acting as a syndicate. We do not know how much he intended to distinguish the oligarchy of Venice from the people of Venice in the reader's mind, but he has distinguished it we think, with a finality which will not allow him to be confused about it again. Hereafter, no reader of his will have any excuse for conceiving of the Venetian oligarchy as the Venetian commonwealth, and will hardly be able to justify himself in the belief that the oligarchy was a political necessity. It was no more a political necessity than the second empire in France, and it was no less a usurpation. If the English Parliament which Howell addresses as "the supreme authority of the nation" had succeeded in perpetuating itself as political England, instead of degenerating into the Rump Parliament, we should have had in English terms a fairly literal version of the Venetian oligarchy which eventuated from the closing of the Grand Council.

After that causeless and excuseless

coup d'état, the history of Venice, though a record of splendid achievements, ceases to have the highest human interest. It will always be from beginning to end a fascinating study, but it will from the middle of the fourteenth century, down to the end of the eighteenth, be without instruction for those who would learn the lessons of an unselfish patriotism. The greatest heroes and the greatest deeds of Venice were of the days and years before Pietro Gradenigo. After him there were, almost to the end, great politicians, great captains, great logicians, great artists (though there never was any great author in Venice), but her annals were without the charm of the personality which is the soul of history. Never, in the long life of a state which rose from the waters after the ravage of Attila, and sank before the fear of Napoleon, was there any such sublime moment as that in the life of Florence when Savonarola heard the dying confession of Lorenzo de' Medici, and bade him make restitution of her liberties to the republic. There is, indeed, a sort of businesslike dryness in the story of Venice, curiously compatible with its fascination as a study, but inseparable apparently from its nature, and perhaps inalienable from that of any people bent constantly upon their material aggrandizement. She had no ideals but her safety first and her prosperity afterwards; she was without real poetry in her aspirations, and after the first period of industry, when she was strengthening her foundations amidst the shifting islands of the lagoon, she was purely commercial, in principle as in practice, whether she made money out of the crusades, or constituted herself the bulwark of Christendom against the Turk, or fought the Pope with priest against priest, or mercenary against mercenary. What she might have been if the spirit of a generous patriotism could have prevailed in her evolution as a real commonwealth can now never be known, but it cannot be claimed that her involution as an oligarchy was not the logic of her prevailing motives and endeavors.

Editor's Study.

AMONG the impressive happenings which are called events and which "make conversation"—as the outlet for a fine excitement—and arouse tense expectation, perhaps none is so mentally piquant as the beginning of a new serial story by that particular novelist who at the time most readily commands the polite audience of the English-speaking world. Many of the readers of this Magazine remember the kind and depth of feeling awakened by the appearance in its pages of the opening chapters of Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, of Thackeray's *Adventures of Philip*, and of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Our audience awaiting such things now is much keener, more deeply cultivated, and a very much larger one in America, besides including the polite reading public of England, so that these exciting Magazine events have come to be of international importance.

Other events whose initiation invites public celebration—such as great expositions and the visits of princes—promise no surprising sequel in their continuance. The prince has arrived, and when we have once seen him such curiosity as we may have had is satisfied; we know pretty well all else that will happen in the festive proceeding—the parades and dinners and speeches. But a new novel by a great writer—what charms are hidden in the far reaches of this dark forest of romance? What forms of manhood and womanhood will flash upon our vision and dwell in our regard—so much more interesting than fabled nymphs or fairies because they are real and human! We search the tantalizing caption and try to divine all the possibilities intimated; we eagerly devour the first instalment, in which we are likely to be introduced to the heroine and hero; and since their future is, for the present, left to our dreams, we dream. A year of travel, wherever we might go, could unfold no such mystery: and here we have no Baedeker to forecast our course.

It is this element of mystery which gives a great serial novel its irresistible hold upon the reader—which, indeed,

makes serial publication possible. In a year it will be at every reader's command in book form. Why not wait? Some readers will, but not those who have felt the writer's power and charm.

In the Study, where the editor meets the readers of the Magazine on somewhat homely and familiar terms, he could not without affectation be silent about a thing of such moment as the beginning of Mrs. Humphry Ward's new novel, "The Marriage of William Ashe." He is addressing an audience which has undoubtedly already read the first two chapters of this novel, and the air about him seems vibrant with celebrant enthusiasm, to which he cannot fail to respond. If he could have had the first word, could have heralded prelusively the note of the play before the curtain was lifted and the note already sounded, there would have been much that he could say, but now his readers are saying it for him, and his utterance must seem an echo. They have seen Lady Kitty enter, and they ask the editor if, though so different from Julie Le Breton, she is not just as appealing and even more suggestive of lively possibilities in the succeeding acts; and the young hero, in his as yet loosely fitting diplomatic habit, more open to the beauty and charm of the world than to ambition for the mastery of its affairs—"how youthful, how interesting!" And "how delightful that all the elements for a fascinating love-story are brought together in this first view!" The editor hears all this, and the expression of the readers' pleasure that, as in "Lady Rose's Daughter," they are to have glimpses of high social life in England, blended with reminiscences, at least, of tempting, fateful Paris, and, perchance, enchanting views of the author's beloved Italy, and he echoes their plaudits and their hopes.

The editor knows something more of the story than the readers do, but that, of course, he may not tell, and they would have it told only in the author's own way. He can only give them his confident assurance that their highest expectations will be fully met. As to the