

ENGLISH IDIOSYNCRASIES.—I.

BY W. D. HOWELLS.

NOTHING is so individual in any man as the peculiar blend of characteristics which he has inherited from his racial ancestries. The Englishman, who leaves the stamp of the most distinct personality upon others, is the most mixed, the most various, the most relative of all men. He is not English except as he is Welsh, Dutch, and Norman, with "a little Latin and less Greek" from his earliest visitors and invaders. This conception of him will indefinitely simplify the study of his nature if it is made in the spirit of the frank superficiality which I propose to myself. After the most careful scrutiny which I shall be able to give him, he will remain, for every future American, the contradiction, the anomaly, the mystery which I expect to leave him.

I.

No error of the Englishman's latest invader is commoner than the notion, which perhaps soonest suggests itself, that he is a sort of American, tardily arriving at our kind of consciousness, with the disadvantages of an alien environment, after apparently hopeless arrest in unfriendly conditions. The reverse may much more easily be true; we may be a sort of Englishmen, and the Englishman, if he comes to us and abides with us, may become a sort of American. But that is the affair of a possible future, and the actual Englishman is certainly not yet any sort of American, unless, indeed, for good and for bad, he is a better sort of Bostonian. He does not even speak the American language, whatever outlandish accent he uses in speaking his own. It may be said, rather too largely, too loosely, that the more cultivated he is, the more he will speak like a cultivated American, until you come to the King, or the Royal Family, with whom a

strong German accent is reported to prevail. The Englishman may write American, if he is a very good writer, but in no case does he spell American. He prefers, as far as he remembers it, the Norman spelling, and, the Conqueror having said "*geôle*," the Conquered print "gaol" which the American invader must pronounce "jail," not "gayol."

The mere mention of the Royal Family advances us to the most marked of all the superficial English characteristics; or, perhaps, loyalty is not superficial, but is truly of the blood and bone, and not reasoned principle, but a passion induced by the general volition. Whatever it is, it is one of the most explicitly as well as the most tacitly pervasive of the English idiosyncrasies. A few years ago—say, fifteen or twenty—it was scarcely known in its present form. It was not known at all with many in the time of the latest and worst of the Georges, or the time of the happy-go-lucky sailor William; in the earlier time of Victoria, it was a chivalrous devotion among the classes, and with the masses an affection which almost no other sovereign has inspired. I should not be going farther than some Englishman if I said that her personal character saved the monarchy; when she died there was not a vestige of the republican dream which had remained from a sentiment for "the free peoples of antiquity" rather than from the Commonwealth. Democracy had indeed effected itself in a widespread socialism, but the kingship was safe in the hearts of the Queen's subjects when the Prince of Wales, who was the first of them, went about praising loyalty as prime among the civic virtues and duties. The notion took the general fancy, and met with an acceptance in which the old superstition of kings by divine right was resuscitated with the vulgar. One of the vulgar lately said to an American woman who owned that we did not yield an equal personal fealty to all our Presidents, "Oh, yes, but you know that it is only your *people* that choose the President, but *God* gave us the King." Nothing could be opposed to a belief so simple, as in the churches of the eldest faith the humble worshipper could not well be told that the picture or the statue of his adoration was not itself sacred. In fact, it is not going too far, at least for a very adventurous spirit, to say that loyalty with the English is a sort of religious principle. What is with us more or less a joke, sometimes bad, sometimes good, namely,

our allegiance to the powers that be in the person of the Chief Magistrate, is with them a most serious thing, at which no man may smile without loss.

I was so far from wishing myself to smile at it, that I darkled most respectfully about it, without the courage to inquire directly into the mystery. If it was often on my tongue to ask, "What is loyalty? How did you come by it? Why are you loyal?"—I felt that it would be embarrassing when it would not be offensive, and I should vainly plead in excuse that this property of theirs mystified me the more because it seemed absolutely left out of the American nature. I perceived that in the English it was not less really present because it was mixed, or used to be mixed, with scandal that the alien can do no more than hint at. That sort of abuse has long ceased, and if one were now to censure the King, or any of the Royal Family, it would be felt to be rather ill-bred, and quite unfair, since royalty is in no position to reply to criticism. Even the Socialists would think it ill-mannered, though in their hearts, if not in their sleeves, they must all the while be smiling at the notion of anything sacred in the Sovereign.

Loyalty, like so many other things in England, is a convention to which the alien will tacitly conform in the measure of his good taste or his good sense. It is not his affair, and in the mean time it is a most curious and interesting spectacle; but it is not more remarkable, perhaps, than the perfect acquiescence in the aristocratic forms of society which hedge the King with their divinity. We think that family counts for much with ourselves, in New England or in Virginia; but it counts for nothing at all in comparison with the face value at which it is current in England. We think we are subject to our plutocracy, when we are very much out of humor or out of heart, in some such measure as the commoners of England are subject to the aristocracy; but that is nonsense. A very rich man with us is all the more ridiculous for his more millions; he becomes a byword if not a hissing; he is the meat of the paragrapher, the awful example of the preacher; his money is found to smell of his methods. But in England, the greater a nobleman is, the greater his honor. The American mother who imagines marrying her daughter to an English duke, cannot even imagine an English duke—say, like him of Devonshire, or him of Northumberland, or him of Norfolk—with the social power and state which wait upon him in his duchy and in

the whole realm; and so is it in degree down to the latest and lowest of the baronets, and of those yet humbler men who have been knighted for their merits and services in medicine, in literature, in art. The greater and greatest nobles are established in a fear which is very like what the fear of God used to be when the common people feared Him; and, though they are potent political magnates, they mainly rule as the King himself does, through the secular reverence of those beneath them for their titles and the visible images of their state. They are wealthy men, of course, with so much substance that, when one now and then attempts to waste it, he can hardly do so; but their wealth alone would not establish them in the popular regard. His wealth does no such effect for Mr. Astor in England; and mere money, though it is much desired by all, is no more venerated in the person of its possessor than it is with us. It is ancestry, it is the long uncontested primacy of families first in their place, time out of mind, that lays its resistless hold upon the fancy and bows the spirit before it. By means of this comes the sovereign effect in the political as well as the social state; for, though the people vote into or out of power those who vote other people into or out of the administration, it is always—or so nearly always that the exception proves the rule—family that rules, from the King down to the least *attaché* of the most unimportant embassy. No doubt many of the English are restive under the fact; and, if one had asked their mind about it, one might have found them frank enough; but, never asking, it was with amusement that I heard said once, as if such a thing had never occurred to anybody before, “Yes, isn’t it strange that those few families should keep it all among themselves!” It was a slender female voice, lifted by a young girl with an air of pensive surprise, as at a curious usage of some realm of faery.

England is in fact, to the American, always a realm of faery, in its political and social constitution. It must be owned, concerning the government by family, that it works, and works well. That justifies it, so far as the exclusion of the immense majority from the administration of their own affairs can be justified by anything; though I hold that the worst form of graft in office is hardly less justifiable: it is, at least, one of the people picking their pockets. But it is the universal make-believe behind all the practical virtue of the state that constitutes the English

monarchy a realm of faery. The whole population, both the great and the small, by a common effort of the will, agree that there is a man or a woman of a certain line who can rightfully inherit the primacy amongst them, and can be dedicated through this right to live the life of a god, to be so worshipped and flattered, so cockered about with every form of moral and material flummery, that he or she may well be more than human not to be made a fool of. Then, by a like prodigious stroke of volition, the inhabitants of the enchanted island universally agree that there is a class of them which can be called out of their names in some sort of title, bestowed by some ancestral or actual prince, and can forthwith be something different from the rest, who shall thenceforth do them reverence, them and their heirs and assigns, forever. By this amusing process, the realm of faery is constituted, a thing which could not have any existence in nature, yet by its existence in fancy becomes the most absolute of human facts.

II.

It is not surprising that, in the conditions which ensue, snobbishness should abound; the surprising thing would be if it did not abound. Even with ourselves, who by a seven years' struggle burst the faery dream a century ago, that least erected spirit rears its loathly head from the dust at times, and in our polite press we can read much if we otherwise see nothing of its subtle influence. But no evil is without its compensating good, and the good of English snobbishness is that it has reduced loyalty, whether to the prince or to the patrician, from a political to a social significance. That is, it does so with the upper classes; with the lower, loyalty finds expression in an unparalleled patriotism. An Englishman of the humble or the humbler life may know very well that he is not much in himself; but he believes that England stands for him, and that royalty and nobility stand for England. Both of these, there, are surrounded by an atmosphere of reverence wholly inconceivable to the natives of a country where there are only millionaires to revere.

The most curious thing is that the persons in the faery dream seem to believe it as devoutly as the simplest and humblest of the dreamers. The persons in the dream apparently take themselves as seriously as if there were or could be in reality kings and lords. They could not, of course, do so if they were recently dreamed,

as they were, say, in the France of the Third Empire. There, one fancies, these figments must have always been smiling in each others' faces when they were by themselves. But the faery dream holds solidly in England because it is such a very old dream. Besides, the dream does not interfere with the realities; it even honors them. If a man does any great thing in England, the chief figure of the faery dream recognizes his deed, stoops to him, lifts him up among the other figures, and makes him part of the dream forever. After that he has standing, such as no man may have with us for more than that psychological moment, when all the papers cry him up, and then everybody tries to forget him. But, better than this, the dream has the effect, if it has not the fact, of securing every man in his place, so long as he keeps to it. Nowhere else in the world is there so much personal independence, without aggression, as in England. There is apparently nothing of it in Germany; in Italy, every one is so courteous and kind that there is no question of it; in the French Republic and in our own, it exists in an excess that is molestive and invasive; in England alone does it strike the observer as being of exactly the just measure.

Very likely the observer is mistaken, and in the present case he will not insist. After all, even the surface indications in such matters are slight and few. But what I noted was that, though the simple and humble have to go to the wall, and for the most part go to it unkickingly, in England they were, on their level, respectfully and patiently entreated. At a railroad junction one evening, when there was a great hurrying up stairs and down, and a mad seeking of wrong trains by right people, the company's servants who were taking tickets, and directing passengers this way and that, were patiently kind with futile old men and women, who came up, in the midst of their torment, and pestered them with questions as to the time when trains that had not arrived would leave after they did arrive. I shuddered to think what would have at least verbally happened to such inquirers with us; but, there, not only their lives but their feelings were safe, and they could go away with such self-respect as they had quite intact. In no country less good-hearted than England could anything so wrong-headed as the English baggage system be suffered. But, there, passengers of all kinds help the porters to sort their trunks from other people's trunks, on arrival at their stations,

and apparently think it no hardship. The porters, who do not seem especially inspired persons, have a sort of guiding instinct in the matter, and wonderfully seldom fail to get the things together for the cab, or to get them off the cab, and, duly labelled, into the luggage-van. Once, at a great junction, my porter seemed to have missed my train, and after vain but not unconsidered appeals to the guard, I had to start without it. At the next station, the company telegraphed back at its own cost the voluminous message of my anxiety and indignation, and I was assured that the next train would bring my valise from Crewe to Edinburgh. When I arrived at Edinburgh, I casually mentioned my trouble to a guard whom I had not seen before. He asked how the bags were marked, and then he said they had come with us. My porter had run with them to my train, but in despair of getting to my car with his burden, had put them into the last luggage-van, and all I had to do was now to identify them at my journey's end.

Why one does not, guiltily or guiltlessly, claim other people's baggage, I do not know; but apparently it is not the custom. Perhaps in this, the deference for any one within his rights, peculiar to the faery dream, operates the security of the respective owners of baggage that could otherwise easily be the general prey. While I saw constant regard paid for personal rights, I saw only one case in which they were offensively asserted. This was in starting from York for London, when we attempted to take possession of a compartment we had paid for from the nearest junction, in order to make certain of it. We found it in the keeping of a gentleman who had turned it from a non-smoking into a smoking compartment, and bestrewn it with his cigar ashes. When told by the porters that we had engaged the compartment, he refused to stir, and said that he had paid for his seat, and he should not leave it till he was provided with another. In vain they besought him to consider our hard case, in being kept out of our own, and promised him another place as good as the one he held. He said that he would not believe it till he saw it, and as he would not go to see it, and it could not be brought to him, there appeared little chance of our getting rid of him. I thought it best to let him and the porters fight it out among themselves. When a force of guards appeared, they were equally ineffective against the intruder, who could not or did not say that he did

not know the compartment was engaged. Suddenly, for no reason, except that he had sufficiently stood, or sat, upon his rights, he rose, and the others precipitated themselves upon his hand-baggage, mainly composed of fishing-tackle, such as a gentleman carries who has been asked to somebody's fishing, and bore it away to another part of the train. They left one piece behind, and the porter who came back for it was radiantly smiling, as if the struggle had been an agreeable exercise, and he spoke of his antagonist without the least exasperation; evidently, he regarded him as one who had justly defended himself from corporate aggression; his sympathies were with him rather than with us, perhaps because we had not so vigorously asserted ourselves.

A case in which a personal wrong rather than a personal right was offensively asserted, was that of a lady, young and too fair to be so unfair, in a crowded train coming from the Doncaster Races to York. She had kept a whole first-class compartment to herself, putting her maid into the second-class adjoining, and heaping the vacant seats with her hand baggage, which had also overflowed into the corridor. At the time the train started she was comforting herself in her luxurious solitude with a cup of tea, and she stood up, as if to keep other people out. But, after waiting, seven of us, in the corridor, until she should offer to admit us, we all swarmed in upon her, and made ourselves indignant at home. When it came to that she offered no protest, but gathered up her belongings, and barricaded herself with them. Among the rest there was a typewriting machine, but what manner of young lady she was, or whether of the journalistic or the theatrical tribe, has never revealed itself to this day. We could not believe that she was very high-born, not nearly so high, for instance, as the old lady who helped dispossess her, and who, when we ventured the hope that it would not rain on the morrow, which was to be St. Leger Day, almost lost the kindness for us inspired by some small service, because we had the bad taste to suggest such a possibility for so sacred a day.

I never saw people standing in a train, except once, in a very crowded car in Wales, when two women, decent elderly persons, got in and were suffered to remain on foot by the young men who had comfortable places. No one dreamed, apparently, of offering to give up his seat, and I had some ado to make one of the poor things sit on the end of my inverted valise. On the other hand,

a superior civilization is shown in what I may call the manual forbearance of the trolley and railway folk, who are so apt to nudge and punch you at home here, when they wish your attention. The like happened to me only once in England, and that was at Liverpool, where the tram-conductor, who laid hands on me instead of speaking, had perhaps been corrupted by the unseen American influences of a port at which we arrive so abundantly and indiscriminately.

III.

I did not resent the touch, though it is what every one is expected to do, if aggrieved, and every one else does it in England. Within his rights, every one is safe; though there may be some who have no rights. If there were, I did not see them, and I suppose that, as an alien, I might have refused to stand up and uncover when the band began playing "God Save the King," as it did at the end of every musical occasion; I might have urged that, being no subject of the King, I did not feel bound to join in the general prayer. But that would have been churlish, and, where every one had been so civil to me, I did not see why I should not be civil to the King, in a small matter. In the aggregate indeed, it is not a small matter, and I suppose that the stranger always finds the patriotism of a country molestive. Patriotism is, at any rate, very disagreeable, with the sole exception of our own, which we are constantly wishing to share with other people, especially with English people. We spare them none of it, even in their own country, and yet many of us object to theirs; I feel that I am myself being rather offensive about it, now, at this distance from them. Upon the whole, not caring very actively for us, one way or the other, they take it amiably; they try to get our point of view, and, as if it were a thorn, self-sacrificially press their bosoms against it, in the present or recent *entente cordiale*. None of their idiosyncrasies is more notable than their patience, their kindness with our divergence from them; but I am not sure that, having borne with us when we are by, they do not take it out of us when we are away.

We are the poetry of a few, who, we like to think, have studied the most deeply into the causes of our being, or its excuses. But you cannot always be enjoying poetry, and I could well imagine that our lovers must sometimes prefer to shut the page. The common gentleness comes from the common indifference, and

from something else that I will not directly touch upon. What is certain is that, with all manner of strangers, the English seem very gentle, when they meet in chance encounter. The average level of good manners is high. My experience was not the widest, and I am always owning it was not deep; but, such as it was, it brought me to the distasteful conviction that in England I did not see the mannerless uncouthness which I often see in America, not so often from high to low, or from old to young, but the reverse. There may be much more than we infer, at the moment, from the modulated voices, which sweetens casual intercourse, but there are certain terms of respect, almost unknown to us, which more obviously do that effect. It is a pity that democracy, being the fine thing it essentially is, should behave so rudely. Must we come to family government, in order to be filial or fraternal in our bearing with one another? Why should we be so blunt, so sharp, so ironical, so brutal in our kindness?

The single-mindedness of the English is beautiful. It may not help to the instant understanding of our jokes; but then, even we are not always joking, and it does help to put us at rest and to make us feel safe. The Englishman may not always tell the truth, but he makes us feel that we are not so sincere as he; perhaps there are many sorts of sincerity. But there is something almost caressing in the kindly pause that precedes his perception of your meaning, and this is very pleasing after the sense of always having your hearer instantly on to you. When, by a chance indefinitely rarer than it is with us at home, one meets an Irishman in England, or better still an Irishwoman, there is an instant lift of the spirit; and, when one passes the Scotch border, there is so much lift that, on returning, one sinks back into the embrace of the English temperament, with a sigh for the comfort of its soft unhurried expectation that there is really something in what you say which will be clear by and by.

Having said so much as this in compliance with the frequent American pretence that the English are without humor, I wish to hedge in the interest of truth. They certainly are not so constantly joking as we; it does not apparently seem to them that fate can be propitiated by a habit of pleasantry, or that this is so merry a world that one need go about grinning in it. Perhaps the conditions with most of them are harder than the conditions with most of us. But, thinking of certain Englishmen I have

known, I should be ashamed to join in the cry of those story-telling Americans whose jokes have sometimes fallen effectless. It is true that, wherever the Celt has leavened the doughier Anglo-Saxon lump, the expectation of a humorous sympathy is greater; but there are subtile spirits of Teutonic origin whose fineness we cannot deny, whose delicate gayety is of a sort which may well leave ours impeaching itself of a heavier and grosser fibre.

IV.

No doubt you must sometimes, and possibly oftenest, go more than half-way for the response to your humorous intention. Those subtile spirits are shy, and may not offer it an effusive welcome. They are also of such an exquisite honesty that, if they do not think your wit is funny, they will not smile at it, and this may grieve some of our jokers. But, if you have something fine and good in you, you need not be afraid they will fail of it, and they will not be so long about finding it out as some travellers say. When it comes to the grace of the imaginative in your pleasantry, they will be even beforehand with you. But in their extreme of impersonality they will leave the initiative to you in the matter of humor as in others. They will no more seek out your peculiar humor than they will name you in speaking with you.

Nothing in England seeks you out, except the damp. Your impressions, you have to fight for them. What you see or hear seems of accident. The sort of people you have read of your whole life, and are most intimate with in fiction, you must surprise. They no more court observance than the birds in whose seasonable slaughter society from the King down delights. In fact, it is probable that, if you looked for both, you would find the gunner shyer than the gunned. The pheasant and the fox are bred to give pleasure by their chase; they are tenderly cared for and watched over and kept from harm at the hands of all who do not wish to kill them for the joy of killing, and they are not so elusive but they can be seen by easy chance. The pheasant especially has at times all but the boldness of the barnyard in his fearless port. Once from my passing train, I saw him standing in the middle of a ploughed field, erect, distinct, like a statue of himself, commemorative of the long ages in which his heroic death and martyr sufferance have formed the pride of princes and the peril of poachers. But I never once saw him shot, though almost

as many gunners pursue him as there are pheasants in the land. This alone shows how shy the gunners are; and when once I saw the trail of a fox-hunt from the same coign of vantage without seeing the fox, I felt that I had almost indecently come upon the horse and hounds, and that the pink coats and the flowery spread of the dappled dogs over the field were mine by a kind of sneak as base as killing a fox to save my hens.

Equally with the foxes and the pheasants, the royalties and nobilities abound in English novels, which really form the chief means of our acquaintance with English life; but the chances that reveal them to the average unintroducted, unrepresented American are rarer. By these chances, I heard, out of the whole peerage, but one lord so addressed in public, and that was on a railroad platform where a porter was reassuring him about his luggage. Similarly, I once saw a lady of quality, a tall and girlish she, who stood beside her husband, absently rubbing with her glove the window of her motor, and whom but for the kind interest of our cabman we might never have known for a duchess. It is by their personal uninsistence largely, no doubt, that the monarchy and the aristocracy exist; the figures of the faery dream remain blent with the background, and appear from it only when required to lay corner-stones, or preside at races, or teas or bazars, or to represent the masses at home and abroad, and invisibly hold the viewless reins of government.

Yet it must not be supposed that the commoner sort of dreamers are never jealous of these figments of their fancy. They are often so, and rouse themselves to self-assertion as frequently as our Better Element flings off the yoke of Tammany. At a fair, open to any who would pay, for some forgotten good object, such as is always engaging the energies of society, I saw moving among the paying guests the tall form of a nobleman who had somehow made himself so distasteful to his neighbors that they were not his friends, and regularly voted down his men, whether they stood for Parliament or County Council, and whether they were better than the popular choice or not. As a matter of fact, it was said that they were really better, but the people would not have them because they were his; and one of the theories of English manliness is that the constant pressure from above has toughened the spirit and enabled Englishmen to stand up stouter and straighter each in his place, just as it is contended elsewhere

that the æsthetic qualities of the human race have been heightened by its stresses and deprivations in the struggle of life.

For my own part, I believe neither the one theory nor the other. People are the worse for having people above them, and are the ruder and coarser for having to fight their way. If the triumph of social inequality is such that there are not four men in London who are not snobs, it cannot boast itself greater than the success of economic inequality with ourselves, among whom the fight for money has not produced of late a first-class poet, painter or sculptor. The English, if they are now the manliest people under the sun, have to thank not their masters but themselves, and a nature originally so generous that no abuse could lastingly wrong it, no political absurdity spoil it. But if this nature had been left free from the beginning, we might see now a nation of Englishmen who, instead of being bound so hard and fast in the bonds of an imperial patriotism, would be the first in a world-wide altruism. Yet their patriotism is so devout that it may well pass itself off upon them for a religious emotion, instead of the superstition which seems to the stranger the implication of an England in the next world as well as in this.

V.

We fancy that, because we have here an Episcopal Church, with its hierarchy, we have something equivalent to the English Church. But that is a mistake. The English Church is a part of the whole of English life, as the army or navy is; in English crowds, the national priest is not so frequent as the national soldier, but he is of as marked a quality, and as distinct from the civil world, in uniform, bearing and aspect; in the cathedral towns, he and his like form a sort of spiritual garrison. At home here you may be ignorant of the feasts of the Episcopal Church without shame or inconvenience; but in England you had better be versed in the incidence of all the holy days if you would stand well with other men, and would know accurately when the changes in the railroad time-tables will take place. It will not do to have ascertained the limits of Lent; you must be up in the Michaelmas and Whitmondays, and the minor saints' days. When once you have mastered this difficult science, you will realize what a colossal transaction the disestablishment of the English Church in England would be, and how it would affect the whole social fabric.

But, even when you have learned your lesson, it will not be to you as that knowledge which has been lived, and which has no more need ever to question itself than the habitual pronunciation of words. If one has moved in good English society, one has no need ever to ask how a word is pronounced, far less to go to the dictionary; one pronounces it as one has always heard it pronounced. The sense of this gives the American a sort of despair, like that of a German-or-French-speaking foreigner, who perceives that he never will be able to speak English. The American is rather worse off, for he has to subdue an inward rebellion, and to form even the wish to pronounce some English words as the English do. He has, for example, always said "financier," with the accent on the last syllable; and if he has consulted his Webster he has found that there was no choice for him. Then, when he hears it pronounced at Oxford by the head of a college with the accent on the second syllable, and learns on asking that it is never otherwise accented in England, his head whirls a little, and he has a sick moment, in which he thinks he had better let the verb "to be" govern the accusative as the English do, and be done with it, or else telegraph for his passage home at once. Or stop! He must not "telegraph," he must "wire."

As for that breathing in the wrong place which is known as dropping one's aitches, I found that in the long time between the first and last of my English sojourns, there had arisen the theory that it was a vice purely cockney in origin, and that it had grown upon the nation through the National Schools. It is grossly believed, or boldly pretended, that till the National School teachers had conformed to the London standard in their pronunciation the wrong breathing was almost unknown in England, but that now it was heard everywhere south of the Scottish border. Worse yet, the teachers in the National Schools had scattered far and wide that peculiar intonation, that droll slip or twist of the vowel sounds by which the cockney alone formerly proclaimed his low breeding, and the infection is now spread as far as popular learning. Like the wrong breathing, it is social death "to any he that utters it," not indeed that swift extinction which follows having your name crossed by royalty from the list of guests at a house where royalty is about to visit, but a slow, insidious malady, which preys upon its victim, and finally destroys him after his lifelong struggle to shake it off. It is even worse than the wrong

breathing, and is destined to sweep the whole island, where you can nowhere, even now, be quite safe from hearing a woman call herself "a lydy." It may indeed be the contagion of the National School teacher, but I feel quite sure, from long observation of the wrong breathing, that the wrong breathing did not spread from London through the schools, but was everywhere as surely characteristic of the unbred in England as nasality is with us. Both infirmities are of national origin and extent, and both are individual or personal in their manifestation. That is, some Americans in every part of the Union talk through their noses; some Englishmen in every part of the kingdom drop their aitches.

The English-speaking Welsh often drop their aitches, as the English-speaking French do, though the Scotch and Irish never drop them, any more than the Americans, or the English of the second generation among us; but that extremely interesting and great little people are otherwise as unlike the English as their mother-language is. They seem capable of doing anything but standing six feet in their stockings, which is such a very common achievement with the English, but that is the fault of nature which gave them dark complexions and the English fair. Where the work of the spirit comes in, it effects such a difference between the two peoples as lies between an Eisteddfod and a horse-race. While all the singers of Wales met in artistic emulation at their national musical festival at Rhyl, all the gamblers of England met in the national pastime of playing the horses at Doncaster. More money probably changed hands on the events at Doncaster than at Rhyl, and it was characteristic of the prevalent influence in the common civilization (if there is a civilization common to both races) that the King was at Doncaster and not at Rhyl. But I do not say this to his disadvantage, for I was myself at Doncaster and not at Rhyl. You cannot, unless you have a very practised ear, say which is the finer singer at an Eisteddfod, but almost any one can see which horse comes in first at a race.

What is most striking in the mixture of strains in England is that it apparently has not ultimately mixed them; and perhaps after a thousand years the racial traits will be found marking Americans as persistently. We now absorb, and suppose ourselves to be assimilating, the different voluntary and involuntary immigrations; but doubtless after two thousand years the African, the

Celt, the Scandinavian, the Teuton, the Gaul, the Hun, the Latin, the Slav will be found atavistically asserting his origin in certain of their common posterity. The Pennsylvania Germans have as stolidly maintained their identity for two centuries as the Welsh in Great Britain for twenty, or, so far as history knows, from the beginning of time. The prejudices of one British stock concerning another are as lively as ever, apparently, however the enmities may have worn themselves away. One need not record any of these English prejudices concerning the Scotch or Irish; they are too well known; but I may set down the opinion of a lively companion in a railroad journey that the Welsh are "the prize liars of the universe." He was an expert accountant by profession, and his affairs took him everywhere in the three Kingdoms, and this was his settled error; for the Welsh themselves know that, if they sometimes seem the prey of a lively imagination, it is the philologically noted fault of their language, which refuses to lend itself to the accurate expression of fact, but which would probably afford them terms for pronouncing the statement of my accountant inexact. He was perhaps a man of convictions rather than conclusions, for, though he was a bright intelligence, of unusually varied interests, there were things that had never appealed to him. We praised together the lovely September landscape through which we were running, and I ventured some remark upon the large holdings of the land: a thing that always saddened me in the face of nature with the reflection that those who tilled the soil owned none of it; though I ought to have remembered the times when it owned them, and taken heart. My notion seemed to strike him for the first time, but he dismissed the fact as a necessary part of the English system; it had never occurred to him that there could be question of that system. There must be many Englishmen to whom it does occur, but if you do not happen to meet them you cannot blame the others.

I fancied that one of the Englishmen to whom it might have occurred was he whom I met in Wales at Aberystwith, where we spoke together a moment in the shadow of the coeducational University there, and who seemed at least of a different mind concerning the Welsh. "These Welsh farmers," he said, "send their sons and daughters to college as if it were quite the natural thing to do. But just imagine a Dorsetshire peasant sending his boy to a University!"

W. D. HOWELLS.

JAPAN'S COMMERCIAL ASPIRATIONS.

BY FREDERIC COURTLAND PENFIELD.

"The Pacific Ocean, its shores, its islands, and the vast region beyond, will become the chief theatre of events in the world's great hereafter."—WILLIAM H. SEWARD in the United States Senate, 1858.

So much has been published, since the signing of the peace agreement at Portsmouth, of Japan's golden future as a trading nation that readers may be forgiven for coming to believe that the sturdy yellow men are hereafter to dominate the trade of the Orient as completely as their strategy and courage mastered Russia's military strength on land and sea. No country has ever been written of to the extent that Japan has been by Americans and Englishmen in the past two or three years; and the amazing successes of the Japanese army and navy so fired the admiration of journalists having to do with the war that the pens of many of them ran riot when they came to write of what Japan would be after the conflict. But to elevate the Japanese by a few sounding phrases to an immediate commercial importance in the Far East, to the obvious exclusion of the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France—with no intervening formative period, and no upbuilding processes—is scarcely permissible.

None better know the amount of hard work that will be required to give their nation a secure place in commerce than the Japanese themselves; and, throughout the Island Empire, the determination to take advantage of the opportunity now presented is well-nigh unanimous.

Japan's scheme for national betterment, already inaugurated, is presumably as carefully prepared as was the war programme. The Mikado's Empire emerged from the Russian war with energies enormously aroused, and every condition now favors a speedy realization of the dream of empire, giving to Japan an