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Lucian Minor

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For the Southern Literary Messenger.

LETTERS FROM NEW ENGLAND.—NO. 3.

BY A VIRGINIAN.

Pittsfield, Mass., July 26th, 1834.

ONE means by which Prussian tyranny sought to break down the spirit and health of Baron Trenck, during his long and rigorous imprisonment at Magdeburg, was to have him roused by a sentinel, every fifteen minutes of his sleeping hours. You can form a lively conception of the efficacy of the plan, if you have ever been compelled by exhausted nature to woo her "sweet restorer" in a stage-coach, over a very uneven road: but what think you of dozing it *outside*, on the driver's seat? Instead of *two* this morning, the waiter called me at *one*; when I had not slept a single wink—"sleepless myself, to give my readers sleep." Sickened by the motion of the close and crowded coach, I presently mounted beside the driver; where drowsiness soon overcame me. So, tying one arm with my handkerchief to the iron on the stage roof, I took, for about two hours, such slumber as was permitted by the heavings of our vehicle, on a hilly road: such slumber, as one might enjoy while tossed in a blanket, or "upon the high and giddy mast," rocking his brains, "in cradle of the rude imperious surge." On fully awaking, half an hour before sunrise, I found we were ascending a mountain (part of the Green Mountain,) by a gentle slope of three or four degrees, continuing for six miles. The scenery, (wildly picturesque in itself,) bursting thus suddenly upon the view, was particularly striking. Indeed, no day of my tour has presented a greater number of boldly beautiful landscapes. That I never try to spread these beauties upon my page, you must ascribe to the fear that they would but 'evanish' in the endeavor, and by no means to any profane contempt—unpardonable, you know according to Dr. Beattie, for

—————"the boundless storé
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields;
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even;
All that the mountains sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of Heaven!"

I most devoutly worship them all. But humbler themes besit and demand my pen.

It is a New England custom, to bury all the dead of a township, or of a certain subdivision of it, in a common grave yard; usually, not within any village, and apart from any church. This yard is enclosed with a wall; and every grave is marked by a stone (commonly hewn marble,) with a neat and simple inscription of name and years, supplying "the place of fame and elegy." By a sort of tacit consent, each family is allowed to cluster its dead together in a separate portion of the ground; sometimes in a capacious vault, marked with the family name. The curious may at any time find an hour's amusement—aside from the more serious thoughts proper to the place—in reading, on the tombstones, the surnames common and peculiar to New England, and the Christian names—mostly scriptural—betokening the original and enduring sway of Puritanism. A southerner naturally wonders why the grave yards are without the villages. To an inquiry

of mine into the reason, a 'cute female (evidently far wiser than her husband, who was also in company,) answered, that it was "to accommodate those who live at a distance." How it did this—or how, if the distant on one side were accommodated, those on the other were not equally incommoded—my sage instructress did not expound. The village itself (at least its ordinary nucleus, the meeting-house) is usually central to the town, for the equal convenience of all. It seems more probable that *health*, and the readier command of space, influence the location of burying grounds.

One of the objects that have struck me most pleasingly, is the *Liberty Pole*, in almost every village. Its use is to hoist a flag upon, on the Fourth of July, and other festal days. It figures exquisitely in "McFingal"—that best poem, of its length, that America has produced; so often quoted for Hudibras, and so inadequately honored, not only in the south, but here, in its native north. Do take down the book, or, if you have it not, go straight and buy it; turn to the second or third canto—I forget which—and be grave if you can, while you read how the Tory hero "fierce sallied forth" attended by

"His desperate clan of tory friends:
When sudden met his angry eye
A pole ascending thro' the sky:—"

the ceremonies of its rearing and consecration; the attack, not *wordly* alone, of the hero upon it; his inglorious discomfiture; his waddling flight,

("With legs and arms he worked his course,
Like rider that outgoes his horse;")

his fall, and decoration with tar and feathers; the hoisting of the tory constable by a rope fastened to his *waistband*,

"Till, like the earth, as stretched on tenter,
He hung, self-balanced, on his centre;")

where, as Socrates (according to a witty comic poet of his day) got himself swung in mid air to clear his perceptions,

"Our culprit thus in purer sky,
With like advantage raised his eye;
And looking forth in prospect wide,
His tory errors clearly spied."

I had enjoyed so many a laugh at the whole scene, that when a Liberty Pole was first shown me (at Hartford) by an interesting fellow traveller, it required all my phlegm to refrain from clapping my hands with pleasure.

Albany, July 27.

It was nearly eleven—two hours later than usual—when we arrived last night. A series of little casualties delayed us: a thunder storm, quite as magnificent as most that we have in Virginia, only our thunder and lightning are far superior; a tree, of eight or nine inches diameter, blown across the road by a *semi-tornado* that accompanied the cloud; and divers other detentions. The storm met us near the top of a mountain, upon the line of Massachusetts and New York; obliging us to halt, and fend off the rain as best we might, by buttoning down the curtains. The descent hitherward, winds, for perhaps a mile, along the steep mountain side; commanding a fine view of the pretty village of Lebanon, and its prettier valley. Near Lebanon is a settlement of Shakers. The only incivility I have

yet experienced from a stage driver, was a few miles this side of Lebanon; when, availing myself of a brief halt at a hotel to get some refreshment, I received an indistinct notice that the stage could not wait: and a minute or two after, some one called to me, "you are left, sir!" On going to the door, sure enough, the horses were in a sweeping trot, twenty or thirty yards (or, as they say here, four or five rods) off. I soon overtook them; and was admitted, the driver surlily grumbling at the unreasonableness of expecting him to wait all day. He was soured by being so late. And whoever considers how nice a point of honor—aye, and of duty, and interest—it is with that fraternity to be punctual, will not blame him very severely. They have been civil and obliging to me; the one by whom I slept yesterday morning, was even kind.

So well established is this good character of New England stage drivers, that ladies often travel by stage for scores of miles, with no other protector. And the driver does protect them, vigilantly. Every way, however, the freedom with which females trust themselves abroad there, and in the south, is remarkably different. I have seen handsome young ladies, of refined appearance, driving in a chaise, with no male attendant, to a town seven or eight miles from their home. And such things are of every day occurrence, attracting no especial notice. This freedom arises, I believe, from several causes. It is unquestionably owing, in part, to the sober, honest, and peaceful habits of the people, and to the certainty, that any wrong or insult offered to a female, would be promptly resented and punished; as in Ireland, under the reign of Brien the Brave, a beautiful damsel, richly attired, could walk alone, safe and fearless, from end to end of the kingdom.* Contiguity of residences aids this effect. Then, in the country villages of the north, there are many more ladies than gentlemen, from the emigration of the latter westward, and from their resorting to the maritime cities and to the ocean, for trade and seafaring employment. Besides, New Englanders have less time for pleasure than we have; and no Virginian will deny that "to tend the fair" is a pleasure. But the freedom of female movements is partly attributable also to the prevalence, among the New England men, of a less tender and obsequious manner at least, towards the fair sex, than southrons habitually shew. They do not practise those minute, delicate attentions—that semi-adoration—ingrained in the very constitutions of our well bred men. (Not dandies—I speak of men.) Indeed our claim to superiority may be pushed still further. In affability to inferiors, our northern brethren are decidedly behind us. In their middling and lower classes, nay and in the lower tier of their upper classes, this short-coming is particularly discernible: and extends even to their deportment towards equals. Clowns and servants—I beg pardon—"helps"—seem not to expect, or to relish, the courtesy which, in the Old Dominion, every true gentleman pays to the poorest man. Soon after entering the country, I found it necessary, if I would have respect from them, to abate much of the respectful address, which habit had rendered essential to my own comfort. Can these deficiencies of manner—supposing them to exist—and

my belief of them is confirmed by that of others—be ascribed to the utter proscription of duelling—that vaunted nurse of courtesy? I should rather attribute them to three other causes. *First*—a dislike to outward displays of emotion; a hard-featured sturdiness of soul, which, content to feel kindly and deeply, and to act kindly too in things of solid import, forgets or disdains the petty blandishments of manner, as idle forms, often the offspring of deceit, and unworthy of a mind bent upon substantial good. This estimable, but unamiable trait—derived purely from his sire, John Bull—makes Jonathan disliked on a superficial view. But those who consider him with candid attention, and bearing in mind the true saying of honest Kent, that

"They are not empty-hearted, whose low sound
Reverbs no hollowness"—

perhaps find the unsightly iron casket stored with the richest jewels. *Second*—(a less creditable cause; applicable only to the imputed want of courtesy towards inferiors)—The employment of whites, as servants. A master cannot treat these as his equals: it is utterly incompatible with the relation. His demeanor towards them, he naturally extends to their kindred, and to their class; that is, to all the poor around him. According to that general principle of divine wisdom and goodness, which, by a counterpoise of good and evil, equalizes every human lot, the blighting curse of slavery seems to carry this mitigation along with it—a more delicate and scrupulous regard, in the free, to even the minute gratification of their fellow-free. Hence—and from their greater leisure to cultivate manner—chiefly arises, we may suppose, the superiority of slave-holders in the several points of politeness. Just so, according to Montesquieu, good-manners characterize a monarchy. Those who can see in this, a recompense either for a privation of the glorious right of self-government, or for the unmeasured ills entailed by domestic slavery upon a community, are welcome to the consolation. *Third*—(applicable, like the last, only to intercourse with inferiors)—the system of electioneering practised in the northern states. Usage and public opinion allow no man to declare himself a candidate for office. His doing so, would be political suicide. He must be nominated by a caucus—or convention, as "ears polite" now require it to be called. The convention is got up in this wise: One, or two, or three, tolerably influential men, having a friend whom they wish to exalt, call a private meeting of those over whom their influence especially is, and after insinuating his merits into the minds assembled, get a resolution passed, for a general caucus, of the whole party, in the town, or election district. All who were at the private meeting, bestir themselves diligently to congregate at the caucus, such persons, chiefly, as they, or some of them, can control: and in this they are so successful, that a nomination there, of the individual designated by the first movers of the scheme, is almost sure to result. This nomination goes abroad, as made by a meeting of the people; and unless some more skilfully conducted or powerfully headed counter movement take place, our candidate may count with reasonable certainty upon his election. Such is the machinery by which aspirants get themselves hoisted into office; as explained to me by one familiar with it—who had actually profited by it more than once—and who owned that it was rather a shabby

* See T. Moore's Irish Melody—

"Rich and rare were the gems she wore."

feature in the politics of his country. All aspirants, therefore, (and in our country, how few are not so—openly or covertly!) pay court, not to the people at large, but only to the known leaders of the caucus. Contemning the passive wires and puppets, they regard only the hand that works them. Thus the commonality, losing their importance in elections, lose their strongest hold upon the civility of their superiors. I need not run out the process. 'Twere well, if deprivation of bows, and smiles, and kind words, were all that the million suffer by the caucus system. But, by rendering them insignificant in the body politic, that system threatens popular government itself with overthrow. I wish, I long, to see my fellow Virginians copy our brethren of the north in many things: but *this system*, may they shun as the cholera! May they always adhere to their own frank and manly plan, of having the candidate appear before them, and face to face declare his sentiments and manifest his ability to defend the great interests with which he asks to be entrusted!

While talking of manners, it would have been reasonable to speak of the impertinent inquisitiveness, commonly ascribed to the Yankees. I have seen no trace of the fault: not even so much as our own people sometimes shew. While on foot, in the country, I was sometimes asked *where I was from*; but it was always where the question was suggested and justified by the course of conversation, or by the tenor and number of my own inquiries; or, to furnish a starting place for our colloquy—a platform whence to toss the ball of discourse: never, in a manner the least abrupt or offensive. Among the better classes, such as are casually met in stage-coaches and hotels, there was all the delicate forbearance in this respect, which marks true politeness every where.

Again—Our brother Jonathan is reputed, with us, a great sharper. Yankee tricks, and Yankee knavery, are ideas inseparable from the word Yankee. Now my own experience does not enable me to add a single one to the catalogue of anecdotes, by which that characteristic is supposed to be proven. Not a single cheat—not a single trick—was practised upon me during my sojourn in Yankee land: unless, indeed, it was so adroitly done, as to have been hitherto imperceptible to me. The fact is, our ideas on this point are derived almost entirely from those delectable samples of honesty, ycleped “Yankee pedlers,” who for many years have so swarmed over the south: a race, by whom their countrymen at home protest, with hands uplift, against being judged; and by whom, in very truth, it is no more fair to judge them, than it would be to judge of us by the vilest scum of our society, who may have fled to Carolina or the Western forests, from the just punishment of their crimes, or from the detestation that dogged their vices.

It hardly needs be said—common fame loudly enough proclaims—that religion flourishes in New England, as much as in any part of the world. Yet it does not obtrude itself upon the traveller's notice. It is a quiet, Sabbath-keeping, morals-preserving, good-doing, and heaven-serving religion, free from several extravagancies, that have elsewhere crept into christianity. Meetings for eight, ten, or twelve days together, and suspending, meanwhile, all attention to important secular duties, I have not seen or heard of: even a meeting at

all, on a working day, did not meet my view during the (nearly) four weeks of my stay; except funerals. The people seem to think both parts of the third commandment alike binding: “*Six days shall thou labor,*” as well as “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” Dancing is by no means proscribed, or unusual. It is taught at many or most of the high female boarding schools. Even in Connecticut, “junkettings” are not unfrequent, lively enough to have pleased our venerable Pendleton, yet “soberly” enough conducted, to have suited Lady Grace. At New Haven, within bow-shot of Yale College, a dance was kept up for two successive nights till eleven or twelve o'clock, in an apartment just across the street from my lodging. True, I have seen no match for my father's friend and mine, Dr. K****, who, since the birth of his seventh grandchild, has so often realized that pleasing trait in the picture of French rural life—

“And the gay grandsire, skilled in gestic lore,
Has frisked beneath the burthen of three score;”

but I saw as great a wonder, in a church last Sunday. The music struck me as particularly fine; I doubted not that it was an organ; till, looking up to the gallery, there sat a gentleman scraping away with might and main upon a violin, and another upon a bass viol: accompanied by a flute, and an admirably tuned choir. “Our armies swore terribly in Flanders:” but it was nothing to the deep, anathematizing abomination with which some “unco guid” folks of my acquaintance (not of yours) would have beheld this uncommon mode of “hymning the great Creator.” Even me, it affected very singularly: I thought of the war-lock-dance in Kirk Alloway; of Auld Nick in shape of “towsie tyke, black, grim and large,” whose province it was to “gie them music;” how

“He screwed the pipes and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl;”
While “hornpipes, jigs, strathpeys and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels;”
“Wi' ma' o' horrible and awfu'
Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'!”

and I did not know what catastrophe might ensue, from the profanation. Happily, however, none occurred.

In the formalities of piety, the descendants of the Pilgrims are radically changed from the puritanical strictness of their forefathers. The quaint names, indeed, are retained; but the straight-lacedness they imply is gone: you find *Leah*, or *Naomi*, upon near approach, to be as arch a lass, and *Jeremiah*, or *Timothy*, as merry a grig, as any Sally, or Betty, Tom, or Bob, south of the Potomac.

No one in Massachusetts is any longer compelled by law to pay for the support of religion, its temples, or its ministers. The law, requiring the citizen to do so, only letting him choose the sect or the minister to whom his contribution should enure, was repealed last year. Each religious society—answering to congregation with us—has a sort of corporate faculty, involving the power to tax its members for church expenses, and to coerce payment by distress if it be withheld. Even this is a stride towards hierarchy from which our lawgivers have shrunk ever since 1785; and which our people will probably never permit.

I must say more to you, of the goodly land I have

just left. My having quitted it, need subtract nothing from the credit attached to my observations : for I shall touch no topic, which is not as fresh in my mind, and as susceptible of truthful representation, as if the local scene itself stretched around me. Adieu.
