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Letters from New England – No. 4

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BY A VIRGINIAN.

Albany, N. Y. July 27th, 1824.

It is a Southern opinion, that the large factories which have grown up in the North, within the last seventeen years, are of a very demoralizing tendency: that so many persons—*such* persons too—cannot be housed together, and allowed the free intercourse unavoidable where the restraint is not for crime, without a large result of licentiousness and vice. I have long thought thus: and must confess I entered New England with a sort of *wish* (arising from my hostility to the protective system,) to have the opinion confirmed. In some places, I heard and saw confirmation strong: but in most—and those the chief seats of manufactures—my inquiries resulted directly otherwise. The laborers there, it seems, are as moral as any other class of the population. The females watch each other's deportment with the most jealous vigilance: a slip is at once exposed, and punished by expulsion; even a slight indiscretion is sure to draw down remonstrance, and if that fails, complaint to the ruling power. The boys and girls are allowed a reasonable part of the year to attend the common-schools; and are encouraged at all seasons to frequent Sunday schools. Lectures, occasional or in courses, are delivered, of which the operatives are eager hearers: and social Libraries, with habits of reading, sometimes produce among them strengthened and well stored minds. Wherever these good effects appear, be it observed, the proprietors and superintendents (generally men of fortune; as well as intelligence) have taken the greatest possible care to produce them. And where the unfavorable appearances occurred, there seemed to have been a corresponding neglect on the part of owners and agent.

The *natural* course of these establishments, then, seems to be *down the stream of vice*. Great exertions may enable them to resist, nay to surmount and ascend the current; but so soon as those efforts cease, that instant the downward tendency prevails.* While the manufacturing system is young—while high protecting duties enable employers to give high wages—while a desire to conciliate favor to the system keeps both owners and operatives upon *their best behavior*—the favorable moral condition I have described may continue. But the oarsman cannot forever row up the stream; weariness, or confidence, or incaution, will, some day, relax his arm. In process of time, these promiscuous assemblages of hundreds and thousands will vindicate the justness of the reasoning, which argues the danger of contamination (a sort of *spontaneous combustion*) from so close a contact:† will shew themselves rank hot beds of vice; and make the lover of good morals grieve, that so many souls should ever have been seduced from the healthful air of field, and forest, and rustic fire-side, to sicken and die in a tainted, unnatural atmosphere.

I mentioned *Lectures, and social Libraries*.—These, and similar institutions for diffusing knowledge among the multitude, are among the chief glories of New England. In all the cities, and many of the larger and middling towns (towns in the English sense,) there are Lyceums, Young Men's Societies, Library Societies, or associations under some such name, for mental exercise and improvement. A collection of books is a usual, and a philosophical apparatus an occasional appendage. Connectedly with these institutions, or sometimes, independently of them, Lectures on every variety of subjects that can instruct or profit mankind, are delivered by public spirited men—professional and unprofessional—sometimes, by farmers and mechanics themselves. They are gratuitous; and in a style plain enough to be understood by all classes of society, who flock to hear them. For these occasions, the first abilities of the country have now and then been put in requisition. Story, Everett, and Webster—alike with the village teacher and mechanic; have contributed their quota of MIND, towards the holy cause of Popular Instruction. A valuable lecture from each of these; from Mr. Everett indeed, two Lectures—are in Vol. 1 of the "American Library of useful knowledge." The name of this work at once suggests that a similar one, published by Mr. Brougham and his generous associates in Great Britain, in *fortnightly* pamphlets, at a rate so cheap as to be within every laborer's reach; unfolding, in a familiar style, the useful parts of scientific and historical knowledge. To his share in this work, Brougham, you remember, having his hands already filled with pressing employments, was obliged to devote "*hours stolen from needful rest*." How magnanimous the spirit, which could prompt that "hardest lesson that humility can teach—a voluntary descent from the dignity of science,"‡ to explain the simple rudiments of knowledge to unlettered minds! the spirit, which could make genius and power drudge in the lowliest walks of learning, to open and smooth them for the ingress of in-

* In Godwin's Inquirer, are some very just and forcible observations on the corrupting effect upon youth, of too close and numerous an association with each other. He applies it to large boarding schools. The enlightened President of a Rhode Island University, on similar grounds (as he told me), does all that he can to discourage students from boarding and lodging in College. Observation and experience had shewn him the danger of *spontaneous combustion*, from the too near approach of human passions and weaknesses. The same principle applies to the case of Factory hands: only, here, are superadded, elements which incalculably enhance the danger.

† Dr. Johnson.

* Non aliter quam qui adverso vix flumine lembum
Remigis subigit; si brachia fortè remisit,
Atque illum in præceps prona rapit alveus amni.

tellectual "babes and sucklings!" When will the great of Virginia deign this magnanimous descent? When will our Leigh, our Tazewell, our Barbour, our Rives, our Johnson, our Stanard, our Robertson—a generous spirit, from whose devotion to democracy, something might be expected towards fitting his countrymen for self government—when will they, and the host of talents besides that Virginia possesses, be found striving in this noble race of usefulness with Brougham, Jeffrey, McIntosh, Webster and Everett? That trumpet-call of the North American Review five years ago, which might have roused apathy itself to energetic effort in the cause of Popular Education, and which—whether it *betokened* only, or *strengthened*, the beneficent operation of the spirit that has so long been diffusing through the North the blessed light of MIND—doubtless met a response in every Northern bosom; that trumpet-call, in Virginia, fell upon senseless ears. You indeed, I remember, echoed it; but trumpet-call and echo both, sounded in ears deaf save to the miserable wranglings of party, about the more miserable pretensions of opposing candidates: and, at this day, our people, and their leaders, are in a slumber as profound on this subject, as if we had no Literary Fund—no Primary Schools—no youth to educate—no country to save from the certain fate of popular ignorance.

It is bed time, and I must forbear saying more at present. Yet I have not done with New England: there remain several topics, which I incline to touch. So you shall hear from me at my next stopping place.

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WEST POINT, N. Y., July 28.

On board the Steam-boat this morning, I met *** ***** and his family; who, without my knowing it, were in Albany all of yesterday. They have landed here too; and we expect to descend the river together to New York city, to-morrow. He has given me a very gratifying account of the Temperance reformation in this state. It seems to be triumphant, beyond all experience in Virginia, or even in New England. The means have been, *perfectly organized action—great diligence of exertion—and the use of the PRESS*. The organization consists in a regular and intimate concert, of *township societies with county societies*, and of these with the *State society*. This powerful machinery has been aided by the active zeal, and generosity, of individuals, who have profusely lavished time, and toil, and money, to advance the goodly work. And by a judicious use of a great modern improvement of the Press, a monthly paper (the Temperance Recorder) is published, at the price of seventeen cents per annum: a copy of which, or of some other Temperance newspaper, it is believed, is received by almost every family in the state. Measures are taking to convey light

thus to, absolutely, *every family*. Cannot something like this be done in Virginia? In Massachusetts, I perceived with regret, a strong disposition to invoke Legislative action in support of the Temperance Society: to get the making and vending of ardent spirits prohibited by Law. In New York, they disarm opposition of so plausible a pretext for hostility, by fixedly determining to ask—to accept—no such aid; but to rely exclusively upon *reasoning, the exhibition of facts, and the influence of example*—means, which have already achieved, what were seven years ago deemed chimeras, and which will doubtless be fully adequate to the consummation of this great work.—But I am digressing from my design, of dwelling a little longer on some features of New England.

Manual Labor Schools (on the Fellenberg plan) have not multiplied there; or grown in esteem, as might have been expected from the forwardness of the people in adopting every valuable improvement; and particularly, from the congeniality of this one with their own long-cherished custom, of blending labor with study. Possibly, this very custom may, in their eyes, make the improvement unnecessary: since their youth already substantially enjoy its advantages. To study in winter—to work in summer—has, time out of mind, been the routine of New England education: differing from the Fellenberg method only in having the alternations *half-yearly*, instead of *half-daily*.—Franklin, the Trumbulls, Sherman, Dwight, Pickering, Webster, Burges, and all the illustrious self-made men, who have rendered that otherwise unkindly soil so verdant with laurels, were nurtured strictly in the discipline of *manual labor schools*: and perhaps the new method would be quite needless, were not the progress of wealth, luxury, indolence and pride, now rapidly swelling the numbers of those who, urged by no necessity, and relying upon no exertions of their own for distinction, would never feel the salutary influence of labor, if not sent to schools where it is taught; and were not the same progress multiplying those also, who never could procure instruction, except by the opportunity which this method affords them, of purchasing it by their labor. Perhaps too, the Common Schools (in which poor and rich are equally entitled to learn) may tend still more to render the new plan useless; as to the branches of knowledge taught in them.

Infant Schools appear to have sunk a good deal in esteem, among intelligent people in New England. At Hartford, a lady, whose name (were it seemly to publish a lady's name) would give commanding weight to the opinion, told me that they were found hurtful both to body and mind: To *body* (and this the physicians confirmed) by over-exciting, and thus injuring, the brain and the nervous system: to *mind*, by inducing the habit of learning parrot-like, by rote—by sound merely—

without exercise of the thinking power. It seems agreed, that some features of the infant school system may advantageously be transferred to ordinary schools: for instance, the use of tangible and visible symbols and illustrations. And infant schools themselves are certainly well enough, for those children who would otherwise have to be left alone, or untended, while their parents are abroad or at work. But for *young children*, where the sternest necessity does not forbid, there is nothing comparable to *domestic education*; no care, no skill, no authority, like those of a mother—or of a father. And how few parents there are, who, by methodical husbandry of time, and reasonable exertion of intellect, might not find both leisure and ability to train the minds and form the habits of their offspring, for at least the first nine years of life!

The Common-school system, *as a system*, is certainly admirable. But some *minutiae* of its administration may be censured. Teachers are often tasked with too many pupils. I saw a young woman of twenty, toiling in the sway of fifty-two noisy urchins, with twenty of whom I am quite sure my hands would have been over-full; and it was said to be no unusual case. Then, *Webster's spelling book* is in frequent use. There are half a dozen better ones. And the barbarous usage, of making a child go on to spell in five or six syllables, before he is allowed the refreshment of reading—instead of teaching him to read as soon as he can spell in three letters, and then carrying on the two processes together, to their mutual acceleration—is still kept up, as in our *old-field schools*.—A usage about as worthy of this enlightened age, as the old rule, of whipping a boy for miscalling a word, or for not crossing a *t*. I was glad to see Warren Colburn's books—his Intellectual Arithmetic particularly—in pretty general use. His merit is, not so much that he has smoothed the road to that child-perplexing branch of knowledge (though in that respect he has entitled himself to every child's gratitude), as that he has rendered the study an improving exercise to the mind—a strengthener and quickener of the reasoning faculty; and has disclosed the *rationalia* of many processes of calculation, as mysterious before to the young mind as so many feats of jugglery. A pervading fault in the management of the common-schools, is a *false economy*; shewn, in choosing teachers less by their proper qualifications, than by their cheapness. In Connecticut, more especially, this wretched mistake seems to prevail; as a curious fact, told me in Providence, strikingly illustrates. Of the many who go forth from the University there, and from several good Academies in the state of Rhode Island, to find employment as teachers in the adjoining states, few or none, it was said, found it in Connecticut: owing to the niggardly wages paid there. The man for their money, is he who *asks the least*.

Wide discretion, as to the classification of the Common-schools, and as to the extent of the studies in them, is given to the *Towns*. In some, the people, or their commissioners appointed to superintend the schools, are content with a single grade or *tier*, in which are taught merely the *necessary* sorts of knowledge, from Arithmetic downwards. Others classify them, into 1st. *primary* schools, where only spelling, reading, and writing, are taught: 2nd. *secondary* schools, for the rudiments of Arithmetic, Geography, English Grammar, and further progress in reading and writing: 3rd. *Apprentices'* schools, where the above branches are further taught, with the addition of some History, Book-keeping, and Geometry: 4th. *High* schools, for Algebra, Geometry, use of the Globes, Latin, (and sometimes Greek) with perhaps the elements of Natural Philosophy. The classification sometimes stops at the third, sometimes at the second, tier. There are but few towns, in which it is carried to the fourth. Worcester is one of these: Boston, and Salem, are the only others that I heard of. In the first and second grades, boys and girls are schooled together: in the higher grades, male and female schools, are separate.

Latin and Mathematics are coming to be considered as a regular part of female education, throughout the North. But I have not ascertained satisfactorily, whether it is a mere smattering that is taught, or so thorough a course as may solidly improve the memory, taste, judgment and reasoning powers. In relation to women even more emphatically than to men, (it seems generally agreed) these studies are less to be prized, for any specific pieces of knowledge they furnish, than for the activity, strength, acuteness and polish, they give to the various powers of the understanding. The Yankees are too shrewd, and too habitually observant of practical utility, not to perceive this truth, and act accordingly.

The voyage hither from Albany abounds with captivating spectacles. For the first fifty miles, these consisted chiefly of waving hills, interspersed with modest but handsome country seats half-veiled by trees;—and of villages and landings, where, at intervals of four or five miles, our immense floating Hotel would halt to take in and land passengers—if halt it could be called, when her motion was not actually suspended, but only slackened, while by *her boat*, she rapidly communicated with the shore. The Catskill Mountains were in sight; and we were nearly entering the Highlands, so celebrated in the journal of every tourist, from Dolph Heyliger downwards, for their almost matchless combination of beauty and sublimity; when the *lean* "orderer of all things," for reasons best known to himself and his employers, contrived to coop us all under hatches at dinner. A slender appetite, and a surmise that there would be something worth seeing, carried me on deck be-

fore the rest were half done eating; when mountains, hemming in the majestic Hudson to a width of not more than five or six hundred yards, broke at once upon my view. They rise, from the water's very edge, within twenty or thirty degrees of the perpendicular, to a height of fourteen or fifteen hundred feet; their sides and summits undulating with various prominences and depressions, occupied by dark brown rocks, intermingled with scanty shadings of evergreens, stunted bushes, and shrubs. After sailing three or four miles between these awful embankments, we reach West Point. Here are quite too many pleasing objects, for enumeration; a skillful book-wright could make a volume of them. 'Kosciusko's Garden' is a romantic *sinus*, or recess, in the precipice which forms the eastern face, (upon the river) of the *table land* called West Point. Hither, it is said, that hero used daily to retire for meditation and repose; and a shelf in the rock is shewn, as the couch where he often reclined. Nay, within a few inches of where his head probably used to lie, an indentation in the rock is pointed out, said to have been made by a cannon ball, fired at him from a British man of war that lay in the river: but this story "wants confirmation." You descend by a flight of stone steps to the "Garden," which is only ten or fifteen feet above the river. It is furnished with wooden seats; and with a neat fountain of whitish marble, in which bubbles up a bold vein of water.

On the north-eastern angle of the "Point," around which the river somewhat abruptly sweeps, is a handsome monument, erected by the Cadets some years ago, to the same hero. It is a plain marble column, about fifteen or eighteen feet high; with no inscription save the single word "KOSCIUSKO." This simple memorial is, in moral sublimity, scarcely inferior to that conception, one of the noblest of its kind in the whole compass of poetry—

"We carved not a line, we raised not a stone,
But we left him alone with his glory."

There are few names which can justly be relied upon, thus to speak the epitaphs of those who bore them. Among those few, doubtless, is the name of Kosciusko. History, and the halo thrown around that name by Campbell, will ensure it a place among the "household words" of Poland and America, and of every people who shall speak the language or breathe the spirit of either.

"Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell,
And Freedom shrieked, as Kosciusko fell!"

To be mentioned thus, and so deservedly—is to be embalmed in Light, and set conspicuously on high in the Temple of Fame.

A similar inscription is upon the tomb of *Spurzheim*, in the cemetery of Mount Auburn, near Boston. To me, this seems to be taking too

high a ground for him: though you, who are a phrenologist confirmed, may not think so. Possibly, you are right. Contemporary celebrity is no measure of posthumous fame. *PARADISE LOST* was almost unknown till near half a century after its author's death: and he was contemptuously designated as "*One Milton*," by a man then conspicuous, but whose very name (*Whitelocke*.) it has at this moment actually cost me an *effort* to recollect. So, possibly, *Spurzheim's* renown may freshen with time; and a discerning posterity, honoring him above Napoleon, and even above Kosciusko, may apply the just saying of a *great*—that is a voluminous—poet:

"The warrior's name,

Though pealed and chimed on all the tongues of Fame,
With far less rapture fills the generous mind,
Than his, who fashions and improves mankind."

Good night.