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A VIRGINIAN

LETTERS FROM NEW ENGLAND.--NO. 4.

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; and a slight indiscretion is sure to draw down reproof, 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, not 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 warden cannot forever row up the stream; weariness for confidence, or impatience, will, some day, relax his arm. In process of time, these miscellaneous 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 show themselves rank hot beds of vice; and make the lower of good morals grieve, that so many souls should ever have been seduced from the healthful air of field, and forest, and rustic fireside, to sickness and death 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. Conversely do these institutions benefit the country, 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 honor them. For these occasions, the first facilities 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 fortesighty 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 useful 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 lowest walks of learning, to open and smooth them for the ingress of...

* In Godwin’s标语, 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 well-known President of a British and Foreign University, on similar grounds (as he told me,) does all that he can to discourage students from boarding and lodging in Colleges. Observation and experience had shown 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 overreached, elements which accidentally enhance the danger.

†Dr. Johnson.
tellethal “babies and sucklings!” When will the
great of Virginia deign this magnificent descent?
When will our Leigh, our Taywood, our Harriett;
our Rivers, our Johnson, our Seward, our Robert-
sen—a generous spirit, from whose devotion to de-
mocracy, something might be expected towards
fitting his countrymen for self-government—when
will they, and the host of talents besides that Vir-
ginia possesses, be found striving in this noble
race of usefulness with Brougham, Jeffrey, McIn-
tosh, Webster and Everett? That trumpet-call
of the North American Review five years ago,
which might have roused quiedy 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 knowledge—doubtless met a response in every
Northern insect; that trumpet-call, which in Virginia,
fell upon senseless ears. You indeed, I remem-
ber, echoed it; but trumpet-call and echo both,
sounded in ears deaf to the miserable wrangl-
ings of party, about the more miserable preten-
sions of opposing candidates: and, at this day, our
people, and their leaders, are in a slumber as pro-
gressive as if we had, in 1830, been the
Literate Fund—no Primary Schools—no youth to edu-
cate—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 Eng-
lard: there remain several topics, which I incline
to touch on. So you shall hear from me at my next
stopping place.

W EST P OINT, N. Y., July 28.

On board the Steam-boat this morning, I met
and his family; who, without my know-
ing 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 Virgi-
nia, or even in New England. The means have
been, perfectly organized action—great diligence
of exertion—and the use of the PRESS. The or-
ganization consists in a regular and intimate con-
cert, of township societies with county societies,
and of these with the State society. This power-
ful 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
monthly paper (the Temperance Recorder) is pub-
lished, 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 some-
thing like this be done in Virginia? In Massa-
chusetts, I perceived with regret, a strong dispo-
sition to invoke Legislative action in a work 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 exclu-
sively upon reason and the exhibition of facts, and
the influence of example—means, which have al-
ready achieved, what were seven years agone
chimeras, and which will doubtless be fully ade-
cquate 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 improve-
mnet; 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 the youth already substan-
tially educate themselves in the manual labor
habit the 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-dayly.—
Franklin, the Trumbulls, Sherman, Dwight,
Pickering, Webster, Burges, and all the illustri-
sous self-made men, who have rendered that other-
wise 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 Eng-
land. At Hartford, a lady, whose name (were it
seemly to publish a lady's name) would give com-
mending weight to the opinion, told me that they
were found hurtful both to body and mind: 'To
baby (and this the physicians confirmed) by over-
exciting, and thus injuring, the brain and the ner-
vous 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 under the care of worse 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 turn their children into 1st. readers, without exercise of the thinking power.

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 afraid 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 strengthenener and quickener of the reasoning faculty; and has dispelled 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.

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Wise discretion, as to the classification of the Common-schools, and as to the extent of the studies in them, is given to the Town. 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 the study an improving exercise to the mind—a2nd. primary schools, where the above branches are further taught, with the addition of some History, Book-keeping, and Geometry: 4th. High schools, for the study an improving exercise to the mind—an.

The voyage hither from Albany abounds with captivating specimens. For the first fifty miles, these consisted chiefly of waving hills, interspersed with modest but handsome country seats half-covered by trees:—and of villages and landing-places, 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 town “order 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 bet-
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 indented with various prominences and depressions, occupied by dark brown rocks, intermingled with scantly 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 skilful 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 shown, 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 name 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 forgive,
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