obedience while guiding it in the direction of the men or the schemes he favours.

This remark suggests another. We have noted that among statesmen of the former of the two types described, there always exist ability and integrity sufficient for carrying on the regular business of the country. Men with those still higher gifts which European nations look for in their prime ministers (though they do not always find them) have of late years been rare. The Americans admit the fact, but explain it by arguing that there has been no crisis needing those gifts. Whether this is true may be doubted. Men of constructive statesmanship were surely needed in the period after the Civil War: and it is possible that a higher statesmanship might have averted the war itself. The Americans, however, maintain that when the hour comes, it brings the man. It brought Abraham Lincoln. When he was nominated by the famous convention of 1860, his name was not widely known beyond his own State. But he rose at once to the level of the situation, and that not merely by virtue of strong clear sense, but by his patriotic steadfastness and noble simplicity of character. If this was luck, it was just the kind of luck which makes a nation hopeful of its future, and inclined to overlook the faults of the methods by which it finds its leaders.

CHAPTER LXXV

WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK OF IT

THE European reader who has followed thus far the description I have endeavoured to give of the working of party politics, of the nominating machine, of the spoils system, of elections and their methods, of venality in some legislative and municipal bodies, may have been struck by its dark lines. He sees in this new country evils which savour of Old World corruption, even of Old World despotism. He is reminded sometimes of England under Sir Robert Walpole, sometimes of Russia under the Czar Nicholas. Assuming, as a European is apt to do, that the working of political machinery fairly reflects the temper, ideas, and moral standard of the governing class, and knowing that America is governed by the whole people, he may form a low opinion of the people. Perhaps he leaps to the conclusion that they are corrupt. Perhaps he more cautiously infers that they are heedless. Perhaps he conceives that the better men despair of politics and wash their hands of it, while the mass, besotted with a self-confidence born of their rapid material progress, are blind to the consequences which the degradation of public life must involve. All these judgments one may hear pronounced by persons who have visited America, and of course more confidently by persons who have not. It is at any rate a plausible view that whatever public opinion there may be in America upon religion, or morality, or literature, there can be little about politics, and that the leading minds, which in all countries shape and direct opinion, have in America abdicated that function, and left the politicians to go their own way.

Such impressions are far from the truth. In no country is public opinion stronger or more active than in the United States; in none has it the field so completely to itself, be-

cause aristocracies like those of Europe do not exist, and because the legislative bodies are relatively less powerful and less independent. It may seem a paradox to add that public opinion is on the whole wholesome and upright. Nevertheless, this also is true.

Here we are brought face to face with the cardinal problem of American politics. Where political life is all-pervading, can practical politics be on a lower level than public opinion? How can a free people which tolerates gross evils be a pure people? To explain this is the hardest task which one who describes the United States sees confronting him. Experience has taught me, as it teaches every traveller who seeks to justify when he returns to Europe his faith in the American people, that it is impossible to get Englishmen at any rate to realize the coexistence of phenomena so unlike those of their own country, and to draw the inferences which those phenomena suggest to one who has seen them with his own eyes. Most English admirers of popular government, when pressed with the facts, deny them. But I have already admitted them.

To present a just picture of American public opinion one must cut deeper than the last few chapters have done, and try to explain the character and conditions of opinion itself beyond the Atlantic, the mental habits from which it springs, the organs through which it speaks. This is what I propose to do in the chapters which follow. Meanwhile it is well to complete the survey of the actualities of party politics by stating in a purely positive, or, as the Germans say, "objective," way, what the Americans think about the various features of their system portrayed in these last chapters, about Spoils and the Machine, about corruption and election frauds. I omit attempts at explanation; I simply sum up the bare facts of the case as they strike one who listens to conversation and reads the newspapers.

Corruption.—Most of it the people, by which I mean not the masses but all classes of the people, do not see. The proceedings of Congress excite less interest than those of legislative chambers do in France or England. Venality occurs chiefly in connection with private legislation, and even in Washington very little is known about this, the rather as committees deliberate with closed doors. Almost the only persons

who possess authentic information as to what goes on in the Capitol are railroad men, land speculators, and manufacturers who have had to lobby in connection with the tariff. The same remark applies, though less forcibly, to the venality of certain State legislatures. A farmer of Western New York may go through a long life without knowing how his representative behaves at Albany. Albany is not within his horizon.[1]

The people see little and they believe less. True, the party newspapers accuse their opponents, but the newspapers are always reviling somebody; and it is because the words are so strong that the tale has little meaning. For instance, in a recent presidential contest charges affecting the honour of one of the candidates were brought against him by journals supporting the other candidate, and evidence tendered in support of them. The immense majority of his supporters did not believe these charges. They read their own newspapers chiefly, which pooh-poohed the charges. They could not be at the trouble of sifting the evidence, against which their own newspapers offered counter arguments, so they quietly ignored them. I do not say that they disbelieved. Between belief and disbelief there is an intermediate state of mind.

The habit of hearing charges promiscuously bandied to and fro, but seldom probed to the bottom, makes men heedless. So does the fact that prosecutions frequently break down even where there can be little doubt as to the guilt of the accused. A general impression is produced that things are not as they should be, yet the line between honest men and dishonest men is not sharply drawn, because those who are probably honest are attacked, and those who are almost certainly dishonest escape punishment. The state of mind of the average citizen is a state rather of lassitude than of callousness. He comes to think that politicians have a morality of their own, and must be judged by it. It is not his morality; but because it is professional, he does not fear that it will infect other plain citizens like himself.

Some people shrug their shoulders and say that politicians have always been so. Others, especially among the cultivated

[1] This remark does not apply to the malversations of officials in cities like New York or Philadelphia. These nobody can help knowing.

classes, will tell you that they wash their hands of the whole affair. "It is only the politicians — what can you expect from the politicians?" But there are also many who are shocked, and who, as already observed, exert themselves through the press, and by agitating where they see an opportunity of catching the public ear, to purify politics. Leaving out the cynics on the one side, and the perfectionist reformers on the other, and looking at the bulk of ordinary citizens, the fair conclusion from the facts is that many do not realize the evil who ought to realize it and be alarmed, and that those who do realize it are not sufficiently alarmed. They take it too easily. Yet now and then when roused they will inflict severe penalties on the givers and receivers of bribes, as they lately did on the New York aldermen who were bribed to grant the right of laying a horse-car line in Broadway.

Election Frauds. — As these are offences against popular government and injure the opposite party, they excite stronger, or at least more general disapproval than do acts of venality, from which only the public purse suffers. No one attempts to palliate them; but proof is difficult, and punishment therefore uncertain. Legislative remedies have been tried, and fresh ones are constantly being tried. If people are less indignant than they would be in England, it is because they are less surprised. There is one exception to the general condemnation of the practice. In the Southern States negro suffrage produced, during the few years of "carpet-bagging" and military government which followed the war, incredible mischief. When these States recovered full self-government, and the former "rebels" were readmitted to the suffrage, the upper class of the white population "took hold" again, and in order, as they expressed it, "to save civilization," resolved that come what might, the negro and white Republican vote should not, by obtaining a majority in the State legislatures, be in a position to play these pranks further. The negroes were at first roughly handled or, to use the technical term, "bull-dozed," but as this excited anger at the North, it was found better to attain the desired result by manipulating the elections in various ways, "using no more fraud than was necessary in the premises," as the pleaders say. As the negroes are obviously unfit for the suffrage, these services to civilization have been leniently regarded even at the North, and are justified at the South by men quite above the suspicion of personal corruption.

The Machine. — The perversion by Rings and Bosses of the nominating machinery of primaries and conventions excites a disgust whose strength is proportioned to the amount of fraud and trickery employed, an amount not great when the "good citizens" make no counter exertions. The disgust is less than a European expects, for it is mingled with amusement. The Boss is a sort of joke, albeit an expensive joke. "After all," people say, "it is our own fault. If we all went to the primaries, or if we all voted an Independent ticket, we could make an end of the Boss." There is a sort of fatalism in their view of democracy. If a thing exists in a free country, it has a right to exist, for it exists by the leave of the people, who may be deemed to acquiesce in what they do not extinguish.

The Spoils System. — As to spoils and favouritism in patronage, I have already explained why the average citizen tolerates both. He has been accustomed to think rotation in office a recognition of equality, and a check on the growth of that old bugbear, an "aristocracy of office-holders." He does not see how favouritism can be prevented, for competitive examinations have seemed pedantic. Usage has sanctioned a certain amount of jobbery, so you must not be too hard on a man who does no more than others have done before him.

The conduct, as well as the sentiment, of the people is so much better than the practice of politicians that it is hard to understand why the latter are judged so leniently. No ordinary citizen, much less a man of social standing and high education, would do in his private dealings what many politicians do with little fear of disgrace. The career of the latter is not destroyed, while the former would lose the respect of his neighbours, and probably his chances in the world. Europe presents no similar contrast between the tone of public and that of private life.

There is, however, one respect in which a comparison of the political morality of the United States with that of England does injustice to the former.

The English have two moralities for public life, the one conventional or ideal, the other actual. The conventional finds

expression not merely in the pulpit, but also in the speeches of public men, in the articles of journalists. Assuming the normal British statesman to be patriotic, disinterested, truthful, and magnanimous, it treats every fault as a dereliction from a well-settled standard of duty, a quite exceptional dereliction which disentitles the culprit to the confidence even of his own party, but does not affect the generally high tone of British political life. The actual morality, as one gathers it in the lobbies of the legislative chambers, or the smoking-rooms of political clubs, or committee-rooms at contested elections, is a different affair. It regards (or lately regarded) the bribery of voters as an offence only when detection followed; it assumes that a minister will use his patronage to strengthen his party or himself; it smiles at election pledges as the gods smiled at lovers' vows; it defends the abuse of parliamentary rules; it tolerates equivocations and misleading statements proceeding from an official even when they have not the excuse of State necessity. It is by this actual standard that Englishmen do in fact judge one another; and he who does not sink below it need not fear the conventional ideality of press and pulpit.

Perhaps this is only an instance of the tendency in all professions to develop a special code of rules less exacting than those of the community at large. As a profession holds some things to be wrong, because contrary to its etiquette, which are in themselves harmless, so it justifies other things in themselves blamable. In the mercantile world, agents play sad tricks on their principals in the matter of commissions, and their fellow-merchants are astonished when the courts of law compel the ill-gotten gains to be disgorged. At the University of Oxford, everybody who took a Master of Arts degree was, until 1871, required to sign the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Hundreds of men signed who did not believe, and admitted that they did not believe, the dogmas of this formulary; but nobody thought the worse of them for a solemn falsehood. We know what latitude, as regards truth, a "scientific witness," honourable enough in his private life, permits himself in the witness box. Each profession indulges in deviations from the established rule of morals, but takes pains to conceal these deviations from the general public, and continues to talk about itself and its traditions with an air of

unsullied virtue. What each profession does for itself most individual men do for themselves. They judge themselves by themselves, that is to say, by their surroundings and their own past acts, and thus erect in the inner forum of conscience a more lenient code for their own transgressions than that which they apply to others. A fault which a man has often committed seems to him slighter than one he has refrained from and sees others committing. Often he gets others to take the same view. "It is only his way," they say; "it is just like Roger." The same thing happens with nations. The particular forms in which faults like corruption, or falsehood, or unscrupulous partisanship have appeared in the recent political history of a nation shock its moral sense less than similar offences which have taken a different form in some other country.

Now England, while accustomed to judge her own statesmen, as well as her national behaviour generally, by the actual standard, and therefore to overlook many deflections from the ideal, always applies the conventional or absolute standard to other countries, and particularly to America, which has been subjected to that censorious scrutiny which the children of an emigrant brother receive on their return from aunts and uncles.

How then does America deal with herself?

She is so far lenient to her own defects as to judge them by her past practice; that is to say, she is less shocked by certain political vices, because these vices are familiar, than might have been expected from the generally high tone of her people. But so far from covering things up as the English do, professing a high standard, and applying it rigorously to other countries, but leniently to her own offspring, she gives an exceptionally free course to publicity of all kinds, and allows writers and speakers to paint the faults of her politicians in strong, not to say exaggerated, colours. Such excessive candour is not an unmixed gain. It removes the restraint which the maintenance of a conventional standard imposes. There is almost too little of make-believe about Americans in public writing, as well as in private talk, and their dislike to humbug, hypocrisy, and what they call English pharisaism, not only tends to laxity, but has made them wrong in the eyes of the Old World their real moral sensitiveness. Accustomed to see

constant lip-service rendered to a virtue not intended to be practised, Europeans naturally assume that things are in the United States several shades darker than they are painted, and interpret frankness as cynicism. Were American politics judged by the actual and not the conventional standard of England, the contrast between the demerits of the politicians and the merits of the people would be less striking.

PART IV

PUBLIC OPINION