

nations that will pull up the plant to see whether it has begun to strike root. This is not the way of the Americans. They are no doubt ready to listen to suggestions from any quarter. They do not consider that an institution is justified by its existence, but admit everything to be matter for criticism. Their keenly competitive spirit and pride in their own ingenuity have made them quicker than any other people to adopt and adapt inventions: telephones were in use in every little town over the West, while in the city of London men were just beginning to wonder whether they could be made to pay. I have remarked in an earlier chapter that the fondness for trying experiments has produced a good deal of hasty legislation, especially in the newer States, and that some of it has already been abandoned. But these admissions do not affect the main proposition. The Americans are at bottom a conservative people, in virtue both of the deep instincts of their race and of that practical shrewdness which recognizes the value of permanence and solidity in institutions. They are conservative in their fundamental beliefs, in the structure of their governments, in their social and domestic usages. They are like a tree whose pendulous shoots quiver and rustle with the lightest breeze, while its roots enfold the rock with a grasp which storms cannot loosen.

CHAPTER LXXXI

CLASSES AS INFLUENCING OPINION

THESE are some of the characteristics of American opinion in general, and may, if I am right in the description given, be discovered in all classes of the native white population. They exist, however, in different measure in different classes, and the above account of them needs to be supplemented by some remarks on the habits and tendencies of each class. I do not, of course, propose to describe the present opinions of classes, for that would require an account of current political questions: my aim is merely to state such general class characters as go to affect the quality and vigour of opinion. Classes are in America by no means the same thing as in the greater nations of Europe. One must not, for political purposes, divide them as upper and lower, richer and poorer, but rather according to the occupations they respectively follow and the conditions of life that constitute their environment. Their specific characters, as a naturalist would say, are less marked even in typical individuals than would be the case in Europe, and are in many individuals scarcely recognizable. Nevertheless, the differences between one class and another are sufficient to produce distinctly traceable influences on the political opinion of the nation, and to colour the opinions, perhaps even to determine the political attitude, of the district where a particular class predominates.

I begin with the farmers, because they are, if not numerically the largest class, at least the class whose importance is most widely felt. As a rule they are owners of their land; and as a rule the farms are small, running from forty or fifty up to three hundred acres. In a few places, especially in the West, great landowners let farms to tenants, and in some parts of the South one finds large estates cultivated by small tenants, often

negroes. But far more frequently the owner tills the land and the tiller owns it. The proportion of hired labourers to farmers is therefore very much smaller than in England, partly because farms are usually of a size permitting the farmer and his family to do much of the work by themselves, partly because machinery is more extensively used, especially in the level regions of the West. The labourers, or, as they are called, the "hired men," do not, taking the country as a whole, form a social stratum distinct from the farmers, and there is so little distinction in education or rank between them that one may practically treat employer and employed as belonging to the same class.

The farmer is a keener and more enterprising man than in Europe, with more of that commercial character which one observes in Americans, far less anchored to a particular spot, and of course subject to no such influences of territorial magnates as prevail in England, Germany, or Italy. He is so far a business man as sometimes to speculate in grain or bacon. Yet he is not free from the usual defects of agriculturists. He is obstinate, tenacious of his habits, not readily accessible to argument. His way of life is plain and simple, and he prides himself on its simplicity, holding the class he belongs to to be the mainstay of the country, and regarding city-folk and lawyers with a mixture of suspicion and jealousy, because he deems them as inferior to himself in virtue as they are superior in adroitness, and likely to outwit him. Sparing rather than stingy in his outlays, and living mainly on the produce of his own fields, he has so little ready money that small sums appear large to him; and as he fails to see why everybody cannot thrive and be happy on \$1500 (£300) a year, he thinks that figure a sufficient salary for a country or district official, and regulates his notions of payment for all other officials, judges included, by the same standard. To belong to a party, and support it by his vote, seems to him part of a citizen's duty, but his interests in national politics are secondary to those he feels in agriculturists' questions, particularly in the great war against monopolies and capitalists, which the power and in some cases the tyranny of the railroad companies has provoked in the West. Naturally a grumbler, as are his brethren everywhere, finding his isolated life dull, and often unable to follow

the causes which depress the price of produce, he is the more easily persuaded that his grievances are due to the combinations of designing speculators. The agricultural newspaper to which he subscribes is of course written up to his prejudices, and its adulation of the farming class confirms his belief that he who makes the wealth of the country is tricked out of his proper share in its prosperity. Thus he now and then makes desperate attempts to right himself by legislation, lending too readily an ear to politicians who promise him redress by measures possibly unjust and usually unwise. In his impatience with the regular parties, he is apt to vote for those who call themselves a People's or Farmer's party, and who dangle before him the hope of getting "cheap money," of reducing the expenses of legal proceedings, and of compelling the railroads to carry his produce at unremunerative rates. However, after all said and done, he is an honest, kindly sort of man, hospitable, religious, patriotic: the man whose hard work has made the West what it is. It is chiefly in the West that one must now look for the well-marked type I have tried to draw, yet not always in the newer West; for, in regions like northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Dakota, the farming population is mainly foreign, — Scandinavian and German, — while the native Americans occupy themselves with trading and railroad management. However, the Scandinavians and Germans acquire in a few years many of the characteristics of the native farmer, and follow the political lead given by the latter. In the early days of the Republic, the agriculturists were, especially in the middle and the newer parts of the Southern States, the backbone of the Democratic party, sturdy supporters of Jefferson, and afterwards of Andrew Jackson. When the opposition of North and South began to develop itself and population grew up beyond the Ohio, the pioneers from New England who settled in that country gave their allegiance to the Whig party; and in the famous "log cabin and hard cider" campaign, which carried the election of General Harrison as President, that worthy, taken as a type of the hardy backwoodsman, made the Western farmer for the first time a noble and poetical figure to the popular imagination. Nowadays he is less romantic, yet still one of the best elements in the country. He stood by the Union during the war, and gave his life freely for it. For

many years afterwards his vote carried the Western, and especially the North-western States for the Republican party, which is to him still the party which saved the Union and protects the negro.

The shopkeepers and small manufacturers may be said to form a second class, though in the smaller towns, of the West especially, their interests are so closely interwoven with those of the cultivators, and their way of life so similar, that there is little special to remark about them. In the larger towns they are sharper and more alive to what is passing than the rural population, but their intellectual horizon is not much wider. A sort of natural selection carries the more ambitious and eager spirits into the towns, for the native American dislikes the monotony and isolation of a farm life with its slender prospect of wealth. To keep a store in a "corner lot" is the ambition of the keen-witted lad. The American shopkeeper, it need hardly be said, has not the obsequiousness of his European congener, and is far from fancying that retail trade has anything degrading about it. He is apt to take more part in local politics than the farmer, but less apt to become a member of a State legislature, because he can seldom leave his store as the farmer can at certain seasons leave his land. He reads more newspapers than the farmer does, and of course learns more from current talk. His education has been better, because city schools are superior to country ones. He is perhaps not so certain to go solid for his party. He has less ground of quarrel with the railroads, but if connected with a manufacturing industry, is of course more likely to be interested in tariff questions, or, in other words, to be a Protectionist. His occupation, however, seldom gives him any direct personal motive for supporting one party more than another, and he has less of that political timidity which Europeans take to be the note of the typical bourgeois than the retail dealer of France or England.

The working men, by which I mean those who toil with their hands for wages, form a less well-marked class than is the case in most parts of Europe, and have not so many subclasses within their own body, though of course the distinction between skilled and unskilled labour makes itself felt, and one may say, speaking generally, that all unskilled labourers are

comparatively recent immigrants. The native work-people are of course fairly educated; they read the daily newspapers, and very likely a weekly religious journal and a monthly magazine; many of them, I think a majority, except in the greater cities, belong to a congregation in whose concerns they are generally interested. Many are total abstainers. Their wives have probably had a longer schooling and read more widely than they do themselves. In the smaller towns both in New England and the West, and even in some of the large cities, such as Philadelphia and Chicago, the better part of them own the houses they live in, wooden houses in the suburbs with a little verandah and a bit of garden, and thus feel themselves to have a stake in the country. Their wives and daughters dress with so much taste that on Sunday, or when you meet them in the steam cars, you would take them for persons in easy circumstances. Until lately, strikes have been less frequent than in England, nor, in spite of the troubles of recent years, has there hitherto existed any general sense of hostility to employers. This is due partly to the better circumstances of the workmen, partly to the fact that the passage from the one class to the other is easy and frequent. Thus, notwithstanding the existence of so-called Labour parties, and the recent creation of a vast organization embracing all trades over the whole Union (the Knights of Labour), there has hitherto been less of collective class feeling and class action among workmen than in England,¹ certainly much less than in France or Germany. Politicians have of late years begun to pose as the special friends of the working man. Although in a country where the popular vote is omnipotent there seems something absurd in assuming that the working man is weak and stands in need of special protection, still the great power of capital, the illegitimate means by which that power acts upon legislatures, the growing disparities of fortune, and the fact that rich men bear less than their due share of taxation, have furnished a basis for labour agitation. While contributing as

¹ An experienced American friend writes me: "Although immigrants from Great Britain are the best of all our immigrants, English workmen are more apt to stir up trouble with their employers than those of any other race. Employers say that they fear their English workmen, because they are generally suspicious, and disbelieve in the possibility of anything but hostility between men and masters."

many recruits to the army of professional politicians as do the other classes, the wage-earning class is no more active in political work than they are, and furnishes few candidates for State or Federal office. Till recently little demand was made for the representation of labour as labour either in Congress or in State legislatures. There are of course many members who have begun life as operatives; but, so far as I know, very few in Congress (though some in the State legislatures) whose special function or claim it is to be the advocates of their whilom class. Such progress as communistic or socialistic movements have made has been chiefly among the immigrants from Central Europe, Germans and Slavs, with a much smaller contingent of Irish and Italian support, but it is not easy to say how great this progress is, for the educated classes had known and cared very little about it until the outbreak of Anarchist violence at Chicago in 1886 turned all eyes upon a new source of peril to civilization. One question, however, which never fails to excite the workmen, both natives and immigrants, is the introduction of cheap foreign labour, and the bringing in of workmen to fill the place of strikers. A law passed some years ago, in the enforcement of which considerable difficulties have arisen, forbids the landing in the country of persons coming under a contract to work. In the Pacific States the feeling against the Chinese, who take lower wages, often one-half of what whites obtain, has not merely been the prime factor in Californian State politics, but has induced the Senate to ratify treaties and Congress to pass Acts, the last one extremely stringent, forbidding their entry. When a shoe manufacturer in Massachusetts some years ago brought a number of Chinese to replace his own men who had gone out on strike, they were threatened with molestation. One trade, however, the Chinese are permitted to follow, and have now almost monopolized, that of washermen — one cannot say, washerwomen. Even a small city rarely wants its Chinese laundry.

It will be gathered from what I have said that there is no want of intelligence or acuteness among the working people. For political purposes, and setting apart what are specifically called labour questions, there is really little difference between them and other classes. Their lights are as good as those of farmers or traders, their modes of thinking similar. They are,

however, somewhat more excitable and more easily fascinated by a vigorous demagogue, as the success of General Benjamin F. Butler among the shoemakers of his Massachusetts district proved. A powerful speaker with a flow of humour and audacity will go farther with them than with the more commercially-minded shopkeeper, or the more stolid agriculturist, if indeed one can call any American stolid.

The ignorant masses of such great cities as New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, San Francisco, together with the dangerously large "tramp" class, are hardly to be reckoned with the working class I have been describing, but answer better to what is called in England "the residuum." They are largely Irish and Germans, together with Poles, Czechs, and Russians, negroes, Frenchmen, Italians, and such native Americans as have fallen from their first estate into drink and penury. From the more recent immigrants neither national patriotism nor a sense of civic duty can as yet be expected; the pity is that they have been allowed civic power. Political opinions they can hardly be said to possess, for they have not had time to learn to know the institutions of their new country. Yet there are three sentiments which guide them, besides adhesion to the party which snapped them up when they landed, or which manipulates them by leaders of their own race. One of these sentiments is religious sympathy. Such of them as are Roman Catholics are ready to stand by whichever party may obtain the favour, or be readiest to serve the interests, of their church.¹ Another is the protection of the liquor traffic. The German loves his beer, and deems a land where this most familiar of pleasures is unattainable no land of freedom, while the Irishman stands by a trade in which his countrymen are largely engaged. And, thirdly, the American-Irish have been largely swayed by hatred of England, which has made them desire to annoy her, and if possible to stir up a quarrel between her and the land of their adoption. The events of the last few years in England seem, so far as one can gather, to have lessened this feeling, on which, of course, unscrupulous politicians play, and which is the only remaining obstacle to a good understanding between the two countries.

¹ Those of the German immigrants who remain in the great cities instead of going West, seem to be mostly Catholics, at least in name; as are also the Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks.