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Matthew Arnold's Thankoffering.

By Albion W. Tourgee.

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The American people ought to be neither surprised nor angry at Mr Matthew Arnold's revelation of himself in his recent atricle concerning his so-called observations in this country. In the first place Mr Arnold is an Englishman and ~~like all his~~ countrymen, looks upon other nationalities as of necessity inferior in personal qualities or social development to the inhabitants of the favored island. He does not recognize the fact, which is just as much a law of social life, as the survival of the fittest is of material growth, that transplantation under favorable circumstances improves human stocks just ~~as much~~ as it does plants. The voluntary emigrant is always the best of his class--a man too brave and resolute to longer endure the ills with which he is oppressed at home and with self-reliance enough to face competition in a strange land. He may be deceived and over-venturesome but the fact that he dare make the

attempt shows him to be of better temper than the man who merely shrugs his shoulders, bows his head and endures what he has not courage enough to try to escape. The emigrant may be mistaken in his confident self-appreciation. He may be so strong and rugged that he cannot adapt himself to new conditions: instead of success he may reap failure: instead of wealth he may miss even the comfort he would have enjoyed at home,--but he will be sure to leave sons and daughters who in strength of character and resoluteness of purpose will be a great advance upon the class from which he sprung.

Even the involuntary emigrant,--the transported felon has something of the same advantage. He is a strong man although a bad one. He may be anything but an honor to the country that sends him out, but under new conditions he may develope into a valuable and worthy force and perhaps in one or two generations become the mainstay of a new and more excellent civilization.

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Mr Arnold fails to realize that for three hundred years this country has been drawing on the best life of England: that this mighty process of natural selection has been going on without interruption and this transplanted stock has been developed under the most favorable conditions: that we have not half the illiteracy and not one-fifth the poverty which are the results of English methods and English culture. We have taken the worst English subjects, the poorest and most abject, and transformed them by the million into brave self-supporting, self reliant citizens. Mr Arnold fails to understand that a nation thus derived, which in a little more than a hundred years has grown from a mere dependency to a foremost place among nations, which is today

the largest English speaking community in the world, has something more worthy of consideration than the mere view its people take of a man who comes and exhibits himself at so much a head and as a ~~pre tended~~ quid pro quo, an equivalent for the gate money he receives, reads very badly indeed, treatises of little interest to any one and none at all to his auditory. How could a man expect to be appreciated who took the liberty of re-hashing an official report made to his government years before, ~~as a lecture, and then read it, as only~~ and reading it as a lecture to an intelligent audience! Reading it, too, as only Matthew Arnold can read! The simple fact is that he asked all and gave nothing, and is now angry because we were not content with the trade and did not ask for more at the same rate. He takes our money for his second-hand wares with an untroubled conscience but he cannot forgive us that our farewell plaudits were not as hearty as those with which we greeted his advent among us--that we do not find the pleasures of memory as delightful as we did the pleasures of hope. In other words, Mr Arnold blames the American people, because having chosen to appear as a lecturer for the sake of making money, and re-

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ceived a most flattering and unanimous welcome as such, he was unable to please, attract and satisfy his hearers. They were willing to pay extravagant prices to hear--or rather to see him once, but once was usually enough.

So far as he was concerned, his tour in America was purely a speculative venture. He came professing to have something to sell--something it would be worth our while to buy. There is no use in t trying to put any other ~~phase~~ guise on the matter. He came either as a trader or a monstrosity. His attitude was either that of a merchant or ^ of a showman who is his own exhibit. The unmistakable language of his position was: "If you will pay me a certain sum, seventy-five cents or a dollar apiece, I will give you a lecture worth your ~~time and money~~ while to listen to. I will interest and instruct you to the value of your money."

This man is what he held himself out to do. He was so advertised to his knowledge, by his consent and at his procurement, all over the land. The only escape from this tradesman's position is that of

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showman. If he did not come to sell his wares he came to exhibit his person. He was either a British thinker with something to say it was worth a dollar to hear, or a British author whom it was worth a dollar an hour to look at. Mr Arnold has his choice of ~~positions~~ attitudes. In the one case he entered into voluntary competition with such men as Gough, Emerson, Beecher and the host of thinkers who have made the Lyceum platform of America a forum worthy of the best powers of any man. In the other case, he stands on a par with John L. Sullivan and the Simese twins. The animus of his complaint is not that the American people were niggardly and did not pay him well, but that they were not satisfied--they did not appreciate his wares. He stands in a position of a tradesman who scolds his customers or a showman who abuses his patrons. Yet the fault was not ours. We did not advertise nor set the price upon his wares. We only bought what he, himself appraised. We did not even say it was not good of its kind, but did say in the most good-humored way, that it ought to have been better-handled and that we ought to have had new goods for the price we

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paid, instead of shop-worn remnants.

The man who occupies such a position does not stand absolved of obligation towards a people to whom he has thus appealed either as a tradesman or a suppliant. It does not become him to take the very highest ground in criticising the manners, culture and refinement of those he has thus personally solicited to buy his wares. A man who makes merchandise of his person and performances is in a most unpleasant position when he accuses his patrons of sordidness, materialism, a general lack of culture and nobility of impulse. The position in which Mr Arnold has placed himself is a most unfortunate one as it seems to involve a violation of the most obvious ethics of trade--that commercial honor which the British author as well as the British merchant is, at this time particularly anxious to impress on the American people as the sine qua non of a perfect civilization. Surely the honorble tradesman will not sneer at a liberal ~~tradesman~~ customer for having a soul above barter!

Mr Arnold is quite unaware of the fact that the collective value of a people or a nationality depends not upon the wealth or culture of any particular class, but upon the average strength, individuality and virtue of the masses. He did not come to this country to study our people or attempt to comprehend our civilization. In fact,

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he is inherently and constitutionally unfitted for such an investigation and altogether incapable of appreciating or understanding its results. As an observer,--leaving out of consideration for the nonce, the speculative character of his trip across the sea,--he came here simply to measure one class of English society with what he deemed a corresponding class in American society. This measurement was to be made with an English foot-rule, to wit, himself. That there should not be any corresponding class or that in any reasonable sense, could be counted correlative with it, never once occurred to him and never will. A peculiarity of his social philosophy,--if indeed the whimsical notions he takes the trouble to cloth in that elegant diction which alone makes them endurable, can be dignified by the name of philosophy,--a chief peculiarity of it, indeed, is the fact that it boldly limits Divine power to strictly English models. Government, religion, society--to be acceptable to the Divine mind, must according to his view, be constructed on the English plan, covered with a gloze of verbalism just characteristic enough

to reflect himself. Whatever national life or phase of civilization fails to fit this curious preconception, he pronounces without hesitation or any sense of conscious injustice, worthy only "to be cast out and trodden under foot."

Mr Matthew Arnold, as an investigator of social development, is even more ridiculous than Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle knew his facts, so far as they were obtainable from books, at least. Of men he knew nothing and was incapable of knowing much about them. Having created an ideal always charged with his own inherent grotesqueness--if he had been a painter his centaurs would have had bull forms with cleft hoofs—he gave it a name and distorted all the facts of current history to meet its impossible demands. Mr Arnold makes a similar use of imagination in the study of man and society, only he does not take the trouble to know the facts he misrepresents. It is easier to imagine than to collect, and a conclusion which is foreordained to infallibility does not need to lean on vulgar props of fact. If the life about which he discourses does not furnish the facts to sup-

port his conclusions, so much the worse for the life. This method does well enough, so far as the theorist is concerned, when applied to an historical epoch or to a people whose language and habit of thought make them incapable of appreciating or indifferent to the estimate he may ~~make of~~ put upon them. When it comes to be applied to present times and related peoples it is even more troublesome than Carlyle's method. The Frenchman had hardly ~~time~~ cause for anger at Carlyle's ~~distortion~~ clumsy distortion, for it was so self-evident that he could ~~not~~ have supposed that any intelligent being would credit it; and Frederick's ghost must have suffered new and fiercer torments if he was conscious of the grotesque impossibility of his admirer's portraiture. There was one great advantage, however, which Carlyle's plan had over that of Mr Arnold: it was impossible to convict him of malice, falsehood or ignorance, though he was habitually guilty of them all. He asserted nothing; but implied everything. To him history was only inference and philosophy only conclusion. He never disclosed his premises nor gave a reason for his decision. The few facts he condescended to state were usually indisputable. The motives he hinted at were nearly always absurd and impossible to

any ~~one~~ but himself. As a consequence, Carlyle's ~~hyperfactual~~ hyperfervid impersonations bear the same relation to veritable history that a purely imaginary restoration ~~of~~ the Jurassic period would sustain to one based on a careful study of its remains. When the old growler of Chelsea tried to apply the same method to our American life he soon found he was making an ass of himself and quickly drew back his head to hide the ears, not, however, before it had been soundly cudgelled.

Mr Arnold is not nearly so shrewd as the satiric Scotch calumniator ~~of Chelsea~~. He shows his hand and reveals thereby not only the poverty of his data but the weakness of his conclusions. With all the venom of Carlyle he lacks the sagacity to conceal either his weakness or his malice. He shows at the same time how little he knows and how bitterly he hates the people whose ducats he secured by exhibiting himself in a role he was utterly unfitted to assume and whose willing adulation was qualified only by the fact of unmitigated failure on his part. It is this ~~fact~~ that galled his sensibility and ruffled his self-love which is only less egregious than was that of Carlyle.

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That he should have so clearly shown his pique and laid himself open to instant and effective rejoinder by his own countrymen would be an inexcusable fault in any one, but more especially in an author whose only claim of merit is his knowledge and mastery of artistic methods. It is only another demonstration of the fact that literature is something more than mere words and literary skill dependent on some thing more than form of expression. Mr Arnold as a mere critic has long since revealed this very weakness--a singular inability to appreciate the skilll which is found in the accomplishment of great ends by the use of fit methods. He is well able to note the quality of the weapon. The excellence of the blade with which Saladin severed the silken scarf which floated in the air would have impressed him greatly, but the power of arm by which the iron bar was cleft in twain, would have been an incomprehensible merit to his mind. He made the double mistake of attacking our American life without comprehending either its strength or its weakness and of allowing not only his own ignorance but also his malice to appear. The former was a griev-

ous enough fault; but the latter, in so distinguished an apostle of culture and high-breeding and so notable an exponent of art as the supreme element of literature, is little less than a crime. Those Americans who had studied Mr Arnold's personality as well as read his works, probably expected nothing more manly or appreciative from him than this long delayed and evidently carefully feathered shaft. Such, however must be bitterly disappointed at the lack of skill with which the envenomed dart is aimed. They would hardly have felt aggrieved had the fleeing Apollo laden with golden plunder obtained by shrewd posing and persistent advertising, sent back a shaft so bright that its flash should enchant the victim's eye even while it sank into his flesh. If he had carved us with a skill worthy of the ~~finest weapon and a notable occasion~~ weapon of which he boasts and in a manner worthy of the occasion which he magnifies by his complaining, if he did not make friends he certainly would have made admirers. But to be fallen upon in true John Bull ~~style~~ fashion, to be hacked with a cleaver instead of being carved with a sword, to be served up as a dish which has only the rank sauce of malice to give it flavor--faugh! It is inexpressibly

disgusting to those who expected at least daintiness and skill from the self-elected arbiter of fitness and propriety! Ah, poor America! How our English idols crumble! Oscar Wilde, Lilly Langtry, Matthew Arnold! How we feted, praised and todied to them! And now--but enough.- bring us finger-bowls and a mouthwash and give us a long, lousy rest before importing another English celebrity!