

A CONSERVATIVE CATCH WORD.

The camp-fires of a re-reading army sometimes cause the enemy to halt, and words that have no meaning sometimes answer the purposes of argument. In the long contest between conservatives and radicals many such words have been used, but before we proceed to these let us look at the nature of conservatism itself.

Mark Twain and his friend Harris arose early on a certain morning to view one of the beautiful sunrises that are visible from the summit of the Rhegi Kulm. From their window they could see the early crimson on the Alpine heights and as it was quite cold they stayed in their room, but were too much interested to dress. After shivering for half an hour it occurred to them that they were waiting for the sun to rise in the place where it had set the evening before. They remained in the place where they had wakened, wrapped themselves in the garments of night and waited for a western sunrise. If an abstract idea could be represented in a picture I should say that this was a picture of conservatism. The conservative remains in the position into which he was born, wraps himself in garments of prejudice, and looks to the west for the rising sun of progress. The conservative is one who exalts the past and despairs of the future, who thinks that whatever is, is, not perhaps, right, but at least so good that it is hopeless for us to attempt to make improvements.

For several thousand years most men were conservatives. That is, mankind was engaged in a gigantic effort to stand still. But ideas must struggle for existence as well as animate things; and so from the beginning there has been another idea developing, till now the conservative must meet on equal terms his daring enemy—the radical. The radical is quite willing to say "Let the dead past bury its dead." He believes that many things that are, are wrong, but he has great confidence in the future, in the destiny of man and in himself.

As I said before, in this discussion between conservatives and radicals that has lasted for six thousand years many fallacious arguments have been used and used repeatedly. I will not pass in review these "veterans that have grown gray in the service of tyranny," but will only notice one point that has been made against every change, needed or needless; yet a quibble which no more ought to stop the course of progress than the old hats in the embrasures of the confederate fortifications should have stopped the march of McClellan.

The conservatives are accustomed to brand every change as *unnatural* and expect you to infer from that, that it will be evil. They seem to say:—We should live in accordance with natural law; every thing that exists must exist in accordance with natural law; therefore existing things should not be changed. This beautiful chain of reasoning proves that we should not interfere to protect home industries because it is natural for a man to buy where he can purchase cheapest; but you will notice that it proves with equal conclusiveness that if a cabbage plant shows an inclination to die when set out you should not water it—let nature take her course. The same reasoning proves that the state should not interfere with monopolies because it is natural competition should be undisturbed: but please remember that if competition were as free as *nature* left it, a big man would have a perfect right to eat a little one.

We now commence to see that all laws are eminently unnatural, are the result of man's meddling propensities, are the out growth of his interference with nature's rule,

"The simple plan,
That he should take who has the power,
And he should keep who can."

This rule is one that holds in a state of society where competition is unrestricted. As all laws are wholly unnatural it seems silly to urge against any particular one the fact that it is so.

In truth, man is wiser than nature. Nature herself is no fool, but she does many an unskillful job, upon which it is man's privilege to improve. For instance she makes a splendid harbor where New York now stands, but has no more sense than to put at its entrance the reefs of Hell Gate, which man is obliged to remove. Nature puts man in a world full of difficulties and leaves him to make improvements. It behooves him to act as would an energetic woman on moving into a long neglected house. Nature neglects man's wardrobe and he dons the fig-leaves; she provides raw meat and he improves by cooking; she limits his means of communication with those who are distant either by time or space and he invents an alphabet. To tell the housewife above referred to that a thing was in a certain state when she moved in, is simply telling her that it may or that it may not be what she wants, and it is the same with man when you tell him that a thing is natural.

So when the conservatives cried that monarchy and slavery were "natural" the reply should have been that a thousand evils were natural, that "man is born unto evil as the sparks fly upwards." When also, the conservatives say that it is unnatural for woman to vote,—the reply should be that it is unnatural for any one to vote, that all systems of representative government are unnatural—that, in short the force of the word naturally consists entirely of moon-shine and that most of those who use it do not know what they are talking about. It is more natural to walk than to go on the cars; more natural to lie than to tell the truth; more natural to let ships be wrecked than to build light-houses; more natural to let paupers die than to take care of them; more natural to dress in buck-skin than broadcloth; more natural to eat with your fingers than with a fork.

The conservatives as I said at the start are lazy, and they use this word "natural" because they are too lazy to notice that it is not an argument. It is effective because it has two meanings. The teacher of elocution says, "Now Mr. Blank read naturally." He replies—"I am reading as I naturally do. From this we see that in one sense the word naturally means that which would take place without the interference of man, and in the other it means that which is in every way best. But the meanings have been so twisted together that for purposes of argument it must henceforth be useless except as a catch-word to deceive the unwary.

The contest between conservatives and radicals can never cease, it is better that it never should; for as Miss Willard says, "it requires the centrifugal and the centripetal forces both to describe the perfect curve." But let us hope that the time will soon come when catch-words shall not be used in the discussions, when laziness shall form no part of conservatism; when the advisability of any change shall be examined on the broad grounds