

## THROUGH BRITISH EYES

Some Impressions of American Social Life.

**R**ALPH Allen Harding Berkley, a Briton who has lately traveled extensively in this country, writes an article on some of the social aspects of life in the United States, as follows:

It is not enough that I should be reinforced in my views by the straightforwardness of Mr. Hewitt when he complained that it was high time for Americans to throw off the transparent disguise in which so many of them have so long and discontentedly masqueraded. In another Sunday paper your social maitre d'hotel, Mr. Ward McAllister, also bore me out in the most unequivocal manner. After directing American girls how to escape from the morass of colonial mediocrity, in which they must perforce flounder over here, and after complaining with a good deal of justice that the premarital dowry contracts of your rich people are seldom faithfully kept by the parent of the American bride of an English or French or German aristocrat, Mr. Ward McAllister pointedly goes on to tell this truth.

"We must not forget," he says, "that the Americans are regarded as colonials all over Europe."

That is to say all Europe regards America as a British colony, regulated by a somewhat vague and hazy code of ethics based on what are fondly supposed to be the ethics of England.

This slavish fidelity of yours to English principles, very often much misunderstood, has rather a comical look from our point of view. For instance, I heard a fellow very severely reprehend the other day the social aspirations of a man whose grandfather used to repair dilapidated tea kettles. The speaker looked like a rather bad case of indigo planter—the sort of indigo planter who is never so happy as when an otherwise intelligent native puts him down for a covenant service stipendiary magistrate in the Punjab.

Yet the man who, in this case, stigmatizes the pretender as an "impudent cad"—and he was frightfully severe on him—was himself the son of a breeches maker, who made a fortune in twenty years by the monstrous increase of the value of his little shop on Sixth avenue in which he had meekly cut and made trousers for over half a century.

I must say, however, that although this very sensitive fellow was a master of a pack of hounds—a truly colonial pack—he had the good taste not to wear home made breeches in the field.

It is in this sort of thing that you Americans distinctly fall behind your brother-colonials of Australia. You never hear Australians disparage each others' ancestry. There the subject is quite as delicate a matter as it is here, and everybody has the good sense to keep a still tongue in his head.

It is, by the way, this curious propensity of Americans on tour to say nasty things about one another which makes Europeans not only consider you colonials, but very ill bred, vulgar and back-biting colonials into the bargain. The failure to so far find a definite place for you at the English family table has had a most irritating and vulgarizing effect, if you will let me say, as your own domestic manners. It is true that those of you who are honest enough to confess your somewhat subservient relation to the mother country—a relation growing more subservient every day—naturally look upon London as a central focus of everything that is desirable and in any degree laudable in your aspirations. But it is, perhaps, too much to expect at present that so motley a population as that of your provinces should be content to avow an open dependence on the central English idea as what constitutes decency, good taste or good form.

Naturally you cannot expect Chicago to be satisfied for a moment with the New York idea; nor can you insist upon San Francisco surrendering her individual judgment to the dictation of Boston. All your great cities—varying types of a great university, as they are—are by the nature of things driven to deny at all times any inferior relationship to one another.

If you had no criterion of the sort you would wear loaded pistols to a charity ball, after the manner of California, or deposit your feet on the dinner table, as they do in the freer and less effete and conventional social circles of Kansas.

That sort of thing most likely would be discouraged even in Birmingham. Here in New York, in Philadelphia, or in Boston the most heterodox and independent society would beyond doubt hesitate, on that account, to venture upon such practices.

Really, the obviousness of all this is not only undeniable, but re-

flects a good deal of credit on your native indisposition to be betrayed in the practice of your own theories into behavior which, not being English, is distinctly barbarous.

I am told by a highly esteemed American friend that no more striking proof of the rapid advance of colonialism among you is to be found than the fact that your public characters—your parsons, your statesmen, your comedians, your dancers, your second chop literary people, who, being closer to the ground, hear its subterranean utterances all the more distinctly—are never tired of talking of the way Englishmen are apt to honor all social drafts made upon them by their American fellow subjects.

It is, I say, a most reassuring sign of the times to find your representative public men eager to drop all pretences and publicly confess their joy at every step taken in the direction of your restoration to the ancient status. For example, that eminent American, Mr. Chauncey Depew, has just returned from Europe. In the exuberance of the popular regard this great man has been spontaneously christened "Our Chauncey." In a manner he is a sort of social ambassador, who carries round with him, in his annual bagman's tour, the passport of the universal esteem and confidence of his fellow countrymen—a passport vided by the unanimous approval of the entire American press.

It is undeniable that he represents the aristocracy of business. It is equally undeniable that he typifies the condescension of business to the lower class—that equally typical American republican-democratic stratum of your society.

Hardly has he come ashore before he hastens to tell you that he has again spent a great deal of time at Hamburg, in the enjoyable company of the Prince of Wales, that His Royal Highness is in excellent health and spirits, that the Prince's present regimen agrees with him wonderfully well, that he never felt better in all his life than he does now, that he is not quite so stout as he used to be, but is much quicker on his feet; that he is not above alluding, with great good humor, to his new grandfatherly estate—in short, Mr. Depew came back all but over-burdened with the minutest particulars of news about the Prince of Wales—news most admirably calculated to thrill all loyal colonial hearts, such as yours, with the most ardent and loyal rapture.

And Mr. Depew doesn't forget the aristocracy either. He knows what a warm corner American colonialism has got for all real lords and ladies—sometimes even for mock ones. So he tells, with a natural complacency, how Lord Rosebery once invited him to take dinner. He describes how cordially he was on one occasion received by Lady This, how the Countess That made room for him by her side at a four o'clock tea at Camberwell, how the Duchess of T'other Thing was not above appealing to him for confirmation of Her Grace's statement that American ladies had at last given up wearing nose rings.

Of course, the present state of things is somewhat threatening to a continuation of your historic relationship to English society. That, of course, will have to undergo a decided change. So long as you were a queer, hybrid race, English people admitted you to a strange and special intimacy. Naturally we could not ask you to estimate your social standing by our formulas. It was none of our business how you got the money we expected of you so long as we had it. We might adopt your daughters under the stress of necessity into our noble families. Your sons were not to seriously considered for a moment and as to the fathers and mothers of your girls, why, there was never the slightest pretensions made to demanding any consideration of them. We had to take them, coute que coute, as something undesirable thrown in with the bargain.

But now that you insist on becoming colonial, you have really got to take the consequences—all the consequences. There is no shirking them. You can no longer extenuate yourselves or plead mitigating circumstances. You really must be taken au pied de la lettre. This you will find, I fear, has always been the trouble with colonials of all kinds. As a matter of fact, the royal army establishment had to be withdrawn from Canada because the subaltern officers got addicted to a most reprehensible habit of marrying the daughters of Canada's trades-people.

This sort of thing puts your girls in a most humiliating light. As your Mr. McAllister said the other day, no lot can be imagined more unhappy than that of an American girl who marries an English nobleman and "stacks" up against his real title and noble qualities a monstrous accumulation of the rubbish which is known as "securities" among Americans.

You can't expect an English nobleman really to put his best foot forward as a husband whose wife brings him nothing more valuable than a trunk full of worthless poker chips—chips for a game which it takes an especial education to learn how to play.

You must, in the language of Mr. Sparkler, drop all your "begod nonsense" and come down to the truth, the plain truth and nothing but the truth.

This is my very friendly and unbiased advice to you.