

time yet when the people who now combine against the law may combine to enforce it, and when it will be as dangerous to shoot a landowner in Mayo as to steal a horse in Texas. The faculty is there, in a high state of development, and the power to use it for social ends, instead of unsocial ends, may yet arrive. We at least cannot despair of a people among whom a shepherd or a herd will throw up his place and go out into poverty, because he has been made to believe that fidelity to his community requires that he should undergo that suffering. He is hopelessly in the wrong, for he breaks contract and forgets his duty to his work and to his beasts; but he is wrong from an impulse which is only indirectly selfish, and he is capable of self-forgetfulness for a public, though a mistaken, end.

## RESERVE.

ONE of the most interesting questions of the present day seems to us the influence of the political upon the moral code. The fundamental principles of morality are not, it is true, necessarily affected by any political creed, the claims of justice, of mercy, and of truth, remain untouched, whatever our views of the best form of government; and we do not think it could be said broadly that men have been either better or worse under any. But the goodness of one political epoch is not the goodness of another. The emphasis of moral urgency is shifted with political change. The duty of an equal is not the duty of an inferior or of a superior, and a generation to which the levelling tendencies of modern life have given equals in place of superiors or inferiors has a different ideal of life from its predecessors. The change has percolated through the most minute portions of the structure of society, there is not a single relation of life that is not more equal than it was; and thus it has come to pass that the principles which our forefathers drew in with the air they breathed have become to us laws for an exceptional state of things, and the proportions of moral requirement are so much changed, that some elements seem to have vanished altogether.

To strike the balance of good and evil in this great change would be an ambitious attempt. It is difficult in an individual life, in national life it is perhaps impossible, to make an impartial comparison between the present and the past. We know not any work that points out the moral dangers of Democracy better than Sir James Stephen's book on "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity;" and, on the whole, his warnings against our temptations seem to us just. A scrupulous respect for individual liberty and an anxious attention to the claims of the poor and the lowly appear to us worth even the price we have paid for them,—but the price is great. The world is much poorer for the loss of loyalty, of reverence, and of submission. Even perfect justice would not fill their place; such justice as the world has seen does not come near filling it. The tradition of moral beauty, till a late period in the history of the last eighteen hundred years, was aristocratic, and Democracy has yet to form a rival ideal, equally complete and inspiring. For whatever else the ideal of the future is to be, it must be democratic. He who most keenly sympathises with the Democratic spirit, and he who regards it as the principle of evil in our modern world, must be agreed in thinking it the dominant influence of our day. It is sometimes too readily assumed, however, that their attitude towards it should be therefore similar. It is true that a spirit which has been growing for centuries is rather to be understood, than to be approved or condemned; but political science does not imply political fatalism,—to discern a tendency is not to yield to it, still less, as is often assumed, to help it forward. This seems to us a very important consideration on the field of politics proper; but our present object takes us in another direction, where it is not of less importance. We would note a certain characteristic of the morality of equality, as contrasted with the morality of inequality, which unquestionably affects the whole of social relations, and affects it much more strongly than we are apt to suppose. We would dwell on the general decay of reticence, as a result of the new spirit of Democracy.

The connection between the two things is obvious enough. What Tennyson says of our country—that it is the land "where a man may speak the thing he will"—is also eminently true of our time. Any one may say what he likes now, so long as it is not libellous, without fear of legal or even social penalty. What had to be obscurely hinted five-and-twenty years ago, is now proclaimed as from the house-top. The law has given up the theory which it once sanctioned, that a man is to be

held responsible for the expression of opinions, and he knows little of the influence of law who thinks that the only opinions thus set free for expression will be those which fear of legal penalties would previously have repressed. A barrier removed in one direction, is to some extent—sometimes to a very considerable extent—a barrier removed in all.

This is the main reason why the spread of Democracy means the decay of Reserve, but it is not the only one. No one will deny that, as a matter of fact, reserve is the virtue of an aristocracy. In truth, its presence or absence makes the social gradations of actual life. If any one accustomed to what is conventionally called "good society" is thrown by chance into a lower stratum (which may be just as good or better than that he is accustomed to, in all important respects), he is very apt to think his new acquaintance egotistical. An intimate knowledge of the inhabitants of Grosvenor and of Bloomsbury Squares would lead any one to distribute the epithet with entire impartiality, but the traditions of breeding impose a certain reticence as to all that concerns oneself, which makes itself felt when we have a background of contrast. And take notice that this influence tells on others than aristocrats. The sense of inferiority imposes reticence, no less than the sense of superiority; servants are not unreserved with their masters, any more than masters are with their servants. It is on this side, indeed, that the connection is most obvious, though we also think it often misunderstood and exaggerated. Every reader will remember the interesting passage in J. S. Mill's biography, where he takes stock of the loss and gain in his own training, and decides that even his great debt of gratitude to his father for setting him as a youth in the intellectual position of maturity was almost cancelled by the rigid coat of reserve in which the severity of his education had enclosed all emotion and impulse. His deduction that "it is impossible to be open with any one, as long as one looks up to him," will not meet with general coincidence; some might even be inclined to say rather, that it is impossible to be perfectly open with any one, *unless* one looks up to him. Still, here, as elsewhere, the middle region, between the poles of absolute completeness and absolute deficiency, is that which it most imports us, in practical matters, to take into account. The openness of a child with a loving mother is more perfect than that between two equals, and every one must have felt that his impulses of most absolute unreserve were in the presence of a larger nature than his own. But absolute unreserve is for mature human beings so rare, that it can hardly be considered in discussing ordinary human relations; and all those inferior shades of openness which we feel to be natural under ordinary circumstances suggest the relation of equality. John Mill could not imagine looking up to another person without fearing him, and fear is incompatible with openness, even if it is not carried to the painful extreme of his experience. The tendency of every social change for the last hundred years has been to diminish fear, and with fear, reserve has, we cannot doubt, greatly diminished. We do not mean that the proportion of persons who would generally be called "reserved" is less than it was,—we should not suppose there was much change in that respect; we mean that the standard of reserve is lowered.

The assertion is one which it would not be difficult to illustrate, if it were desirable. In a general way, we suppose it would be admitted by most people, at least as it affects public life. A public man is far more ready to explain his position, far less ready to let attacks pass without notice, than he would have been at an earlier period. The wish to stand well with one's neighbours may be regarded as a constant quantity in the different generations, but the neighbours with whom it imports a man to stand well are no longer what they were. A statesman now has to justify himself to a crowd. He has to take the whole world into his confidence. Only remember that it was by artifice that any reports of Parliament used to reach the outside world, that Maria Theresa and Frederick the Great had to be indicated by transparent anagrams, lest any Parliamentary allusion to them should reach the ear of the public. It was an impertinence to overhear the debates in Parliament. What a social change we sum up in that sentence! Its influence is felt everywhere. It is very obvious in the literature of the day. The book which remains as its typical pattern is not, indeed, of our day; nearly two centuries have passed since the birth of the man who first, as he declares (not quite truly), aimed at revealing himself to the world as he was. But Rousseau emphatically belongs to the age

of Democracy,—he is the prophet and, to some extent, the inspirer of the spirit of Revolution, and illustrates the tendencies of the century he did not live to see, better than many who are among its famous men. Perhaps we may seem to do injustice to an age which, in expression at least, is scrupulously pure, when we speak of the most shameless book that ever was written as containing in germ any of its characteristics; and that strange and painful self-revelation must certainly have been a warning, and not a pattern, to any human being who has ever glanced at it. Still, the impulse to unveil the whole nature is closely connected with the impulse to unveil the deepest part of the nature, though the two things are quite distinct, and like many other close connections, fundamentally antagonistic. "The most interesting biographies," said one who contributed in no small degree to the social life of his day, "are those which should not have been written." Yet in spite of some remarkable exceptions, we incline to think that the canons of literature, quite as much as those of social ethics, condemn this undress of the soul. We have heard the literary merit of a writer of fiction in our own day ascribed in part by a high authority to the political circumstances which obliged him not only to prune away all exaggeration, but carefully to say less than he meant; and, indeed, the saying of Schiller, "By what he omits, show me the master in style," is illustrated in almost everything that is worthy to be called literature. We would bring forward, as one interesting, though, perhaps, not obvious example, what appears to us among the most finished specimens of the English eighteenth-century literature,—Gibbon's autobiography. Though the writing of a vain and egotistical man, it has always struck us as an admirable specimen of the way in which a man should speak of himself. Gibbon keeps his readers everywhere at the same distance from the series of pictures he puts before them,—the timid school-boy at Westminster, the would-be Romanist martyr, the captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers, the self-satisfied sinecurist, and the epicurean historian, all are revealed with equal confidence; but throughout all the reader feels, we think, that the confidence might conceivably be increased. It seems ungracious to point the contrast by referring to the autobiography of a better man, and no doubt the contemporaries of J. S. Mill read his account of his life with a much keener interest than the contemporaries of Edward Gibbon read his. But we are sure that it will not, in years to come, be said of the later work, what many will agree with us in saying of the earlier,—that it is the literary gem of its time.

We have spoken of Reserve as an excellence, we have lamented its decay among us, as a price—necessary perhaps, and not excessive, but still great—which has to be paid for the advantages of increased liberty in other respects; we have urged, or intended of increased, that this price should not be increased by any failure to recognise its importance. The remark will sound strangely in some ears. Reserve is generally spoken of as a fault, and unquestionably many lives are chilled and impoverished by the influence of something that goes by the name,—sometimes, perhaps, by the reality. But when we speak of reserve, we assume that there is something to reserve. We do not use the word as a synonym for coldness, indolence, or cowardice. Mr. Trollope, in one of his cleverest sketches, describes a hero who thought himself undemonstrative, when the truth was that he had nothing to demonstrate. The conventional dialect of society easily fits itself to such a delusion. It is true that Reserve, carried beyond a certain point, is apt to end in mere oblivion. It sometimes happens that those emotions which are denied all outlet wither away, and he who was silent once because he felt much, is silent now because he feels nothing. And it is also true that the importance of reserve as an indication of character is often exaggerated. If we can say that there is a natural alliance between depth of feeling and reticence of expression, that is as much as we can say. Every one must have known some profound nature remarkable for openness, or discovered that the curtain of reticence fell on a mere magpie's hoard, where farthings are secreted as if they were guineas. Still, the importance of the power and habit of saying what we will, and not what we must, can hardly be exaggerated. A very strong personality may bring compensation from its own wealth for failing in this respect, but compensation will be greatly needed. And no one will question, we presume, which way lies the dangers of our time. No one will say that we are too cautious about giving details of a life to the public, too scrupulous about anything that may be called betraying confidence,

too reticent as to our own experience and feelings. No one, in short, will seriously question that an age which adores liberty needs to be reminded of the excellence of self-restraint, that a generation which prides itself on its love of truth should fail to discern that truths should often be left unspoken, and should need to find in deliberate self-judgment the checks which the waning of all authority has gradually removed in every other quarter.

The true clue to a right relation among human beings appears to us that while love, in all its forms and gradations, should represent a positive aim, truth, the intellectual virtue, should mould conduct only negatively. Only the rarest beings ought to be encouraged always to "speak the truth." Perhaps there is hardly anything that human beings oftener crave from each other than reticence, hardly anything, at least, which it is equally easy to give. The futile regret, the anxiety that cannot be acted on, the vague suspicion,—who does not know how these may drop like melting snow into the hearts that crave warmth, and thus how life may be chilled by the mere presence of beings who, in their intentions, and even their actions, are on the whole unselfish? Nor can we ever confide absolutely in any one, however honourable in intention, if he has been accustomed to think aloud. The habit of expressing unrestrainedly all one's own thoughts, feelings, and sensations ensures the betrayal of anything else that occupies the mind, however carefully guarded. The veil of silence can as little conceal it as a curtain can conceal a strong perfume; no word may consciously betray it, but chance allusions will imply it over and over again. And it is not only the power of receiving confidence which vanishes with reserve, the power of giving it is equally forfeited. The charm of openness departs with its background. Perhaps we might let all these advantages go, great as they are, and be none the poorer, if by the change we gained a truer view of life. But paradoxical as it may seem, we believe that truth itself is often served by a suppression of truths. He who tells everything might often as well have told nothing. It is conceivable that the most misleading contribution to the biography of a great man might be the accurate reminiscence of some fact in his history. No human being can know enough of the inner life of another to enter into the exceptional element in his circumstances, and discern that at a particular moment, from some overpowering pressure of outward impulse, it was not *he* who spoke or acted. All that a particular person knows of the most generous of men may happen to be a failure of generosity towards himself. It needs magnanimity in such a case to see the offence in its true proportions, and we are speaking of a much smaller virtue. But the habit of reticence makes even magnanimity easier. It gives us time—and time, in some cases, is all we need to do justice to those who have wronged us. The habit of checking unconsidered words enables us to know our own mind, and utter what is permanent, rather than the feeling of the moment. It does not bestow generosity, justice, or, except in a small degree, even prudence. But for want of it all these virtues are sometimes hidden, and seem lost.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### A PYRENEAN HOLIDAY.—IV. TO GAVARNIE.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—Amid this dismal autumn rain, it is hard to realise the sunny loveliness of the valley of Argelez, where the two wild forks of the Gave de Pau, the one descending from the glaciers of the Vignemale, the other from the glaciers of the Cirque de Gavarnie, unite, and the widening valley enjoys at once the shelter of the great mountains,—the Pic du Midi de Viscos, as it is called, standing out like a northern sentinel of the higher range, two or three miles above Argelez,—and also the southern air and southern sunshine shut out by the towering ranges above. Lord Houghton, in the picturesque little poem on the tragic fate of Mr. and Mrs. Patteson, who were drowned in the Lac de Gaube, under the Vignemale, within a month of their marriage, nearly fifty years ago, touches off Argelez very vividly, and describes our route too:—

"They loiter not where Argelez,  
The chestnut-crested plain,  
Unfolds its robe of green and gold,  
Its pasture, grape, and grain;  
But on and up where Nature's heart  
Beats strong amid the hills,  
They pause, contented with the wealth  
That either bosom fills."