

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

Justin McCarthy And Irish Home Rule

Mr. Justin McCarthy in his pleasantly-garrulous address to the Club last week, referred to Mr. Matthew Arnold's remark made after visiting this country, that he had not found a single educated American who advocated or believed in the principle of Home Rule for Ireland. Not to be outdone in exaggeration by the apostle of seeing things as they really are, Mr. McCarthy pushed the credulity and forbearance of his audience to the other extreme by the declaration that he had not found a single educated American who was not in sympathy with the cause that he represented. The Literary Club is always cordial to its guests; and having confidence in Mr. McCarthy's sincerity and single-mindedness of purpose if not in the literal truth of his statement, this remark met with universal applause. However, it is to be feared that had Mr. McCarthy asked each man personally his views on the subject of Home Rule for Ireland, that he would not have been obliged to look further than the rooms of this club for Mr. Arnold's educated American friend, and his Diogenes lantern would have been put aside as having served its purpose. There were undoubtedly several present like myself would have given a qualified approval to Mr. McCarthy's sentiments. For I think there is no cause to doubt that both Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Arnold had good reasons for drawing their conclusions as to American feeling on this subject, however diametrically opposed those conclusions seem to be, and are. For although we do not approve of the methods that have been adopted by the Irishmen, such as dynamiting and murder, there is still down in our hearts a calm belief in the truth of the general principle that each nation should rule itself. The fact, – and it is right here that Mr. Arnold got his impression of American ideas on the subject, – we are quite willing to have the Irish rule Ireland but we object to their ruling our own country. It is not that we object to the Irish people as our rulers, but that an ignorant Irish man is no better than an ignorant man of any other race; and for a long time in our large cities at least we have been burdened with an ignorant Irish rule. But it is the ignorance to which we object and not the people. It is an old complaint that in our large cities at least ignorance rather than sense rules. We find everywhere corruption and inefficiency, and at once complain of our ignorant office-holders. We hold them responsible, and cry out that the educated classes should rule, indignant that the ignoramus whom that same educated class has put into office should realize what every reasonable man should expect of him. It is not the ignorant class that is to be blamed; they merely do what the educated class tolerates. The whole blame for our mistakes of government must be laid upon the shoulders of our educated class who are primarily responsible for them.

To revert to Mr. Matthew Arnold in whose works one never seeks in vain for a deep insight into all matters that he takes up. That writer makes the hero of his delightful work "Friendship's Garland" the zealous Armenius, give the real difficulty with England and what is to a much more greater degree the difficulty with America. "What you lack is *geist*" says he to England. "In a democracy alone do you see *geist* victorious over *ungeist*, the victory of reason and intelligence over blind custom and prejudice." This descendent

of the Westphalian family, that great house whose history Voltaire wrote in *Candide*, may perhaps be right in the statement that Geist is lacking in England; but his assumption that it is triumphant in a democracy is, so far as America is concerned, a mistake. For nowhere do blind custom and prejudice so much prevail over reason and intelligence as in America; and for this the educated classes are as much responsible as any one. Do not think that I wish to urge the better classes to take more active interest in elections; for that is after all, of small importance. The work that should be done is far greater than this. The whole tone of the community must be changed. Somebody, I have forgotten who, says that a ruler or a government must be representative, and can never be better than the people that are governed. If this be true, and it probably is, our own government can not be improved by a few bursts of virtuous indignation, resulting in a temporary turning-out of the rascals to put in some honest men, who, in time, in obedience to the above stated principle of government, must also become rascals. If the ruler or government can not be better than the people governed, we must not begin at the top, but at the bottom. We must not try to improve the government, until we have made the governed up to a higher standard.

What then is the weakness of our institutions? Is it that same absence of Geist, that same inability to "see things as they really are" that same blind custom and prejudice that Arminius complained of in England: – in a word, so far as America is concerned – party-spirit. Nowhere does party spirit, that triumph of ungeist over geist, that subjection of reason and intelligence to blind custom and prejudice exist so much as in our own country, and among our very educated classes. The weakness of our ignorant classes is indulged by our educated men until the adherence to a particular party. After that party, and all other parties in fact have wholly forgotten all principle and even dared to nominate candidates for their availability irrespective of their merit is considered a loyalty far more to be commended than loyalty to one's country. "Why" said a very prominent lawyer of the city to me not long since, while speaking of a recent political scandal "the Democrats are not fit to have power. Just look at this: they go on investigating elections where fraud is alleged by their own party, when they ought to leave that to the Republicans. It is their business to watch for Republican frauds, not Democratic ones." Such a sentiment as this is the prevailing one. When a small body of men dare to revolt against a nomination that shocks their very sense of decency and honesty, they are reviled and ridiculed as mugwumps." The unfortunate mugwump has, however so far managed to exist in spite of this ridicule, for he is confident that he at least has thrown off that adherence to blind custom and prejudice, which is the root of many of the evils of the government.

If I were asked to give in one word the most marked trait in American character I should answer – buncombe. And it is this buncombe, this self-complacency, this imperviousness to ideas, this exaltation of ourselves and party that is undermining our national strength. "We are the greatest nation on earth" says Buncombe. "Therefore we can not be improved. The Republican (or Democratic) Party is the greatest party the country has ever seen" says Buncombe. "Therefore it has no faults" and the educated Buncombe takes his cue from his supposedly-wiser brother; and they all join in one universal chorus of Buncombe; one of whose worst manifestations is party spirit. The failure to see things, and parties and principles as they really are, instead of as they were a century ago.

Not until we have done something to conquer this great ruler Buncombe; not until we have strangled this fast-growing, intellect-stifling Party Spirit, and substituted in its place Principle Spirit; not until we have taken the bandage from the eyes of our educated classes through which our ignorant classes see; not until we have raised the standard with the governed should we prate about our bad government and the ignorant and corrupt office-holders whose only possibility of existence is dependent upon the absence of Geist, – of reason and intelligence from the minds of our educated people

Charles Theodore Greve
Budget
Dexter editor
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