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Reflections on the Coats-of-Arms of the States

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man, tread a path of happiness and joy, but that he has overarched himself with a frowning sky, and planted with his own hand the thorns that vex and annoy him.

Bonaparte made his way to power. When he stood amidst the gorgeous scenes in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, though the Pope was there to consecrate the day, no Pope must make him Emperor; he placed the crown on his own head. Glory had not been laid up for him, he made the mountain upon which he sat, mined the gold of his throne with his own hand, and his only sceptre was the gleaming sword, with which he carved out his sovereignty.

There are some who work out for themselves a darker destiny, who shut up the fountains of the heart and make it their life to despair and to hate. What an awful world such a man makes for himself! It will return his hate as heartily as it is given, and measure scorn for scorn. He may fight on for years, but at last when every spring of hope is dried, every fond affection perished, every light gone down in dreadful gloom, he will be found by the wayside of life, with quenched spirit and shattered frame, a suicide.

Such spirits man may conjure up, but they will not down at his bidding. It may be well to reflect upon the ills of life, but it cannot be well to brood over them. The seasons of the mind, like those of earth, must not all be winter. As well might there be all decay with no renewed supply for it to act upon. Soon there would be no flower to be chilled by the frost, and no leaf to grow scar. So would the mind, without the light of hope, consume its very essence in repining, and sink into a dark mornless night.

For it is possible to dwell upon dark scenes and fancies till the whole soul is dark and the light of hope extinguished. Thus “all that we enjoy and much that we suffer, is placed under our own control.” Let man have the eye that never quails, and the heart that never wavers. When clouds and darkness are about us, let a good conscience make a sunshine in the heart, it will cheer us there, and radiate in joy and gladness to life’s remotest destiny: the world will seem to be lit up with a new brilliancy, and our fellow men appear not half as bad as we thought them to be.

REFLECTIONS ON THE COATS-OF-ARMS OF THE STATES.

A few days ago, whilst looking upon the coats-of-arms of the different States, the question arose in my mind, what gave each its peculiar charm, and the whole their harmony? This at once suggested a series of reflections, which were alternately pleasing and displeasing—these terms are too tame to express the intensity of them: the distance would be so slight that we would pass from one to the other almost unconsciously. Not so with our reflections: so great is the difference between them, that, secure on one side, I tremble
to reach the boundary of the opposite, and touch its shores. I gazed long and intently upon the noble fabric of our government, affording happiness to a free people. Again, in conception, I looked upon it prostrate, its energies dead, the labors and efforts of many great men made abortive by the vices of their posterity. *Profecto virtus atque sapientia major in illis fuit, qui ex parvis opibus tantum imperium fecere, quam in nobis, qui bene parta vicem assumus.* How degrading to confess one’s faults, and yet how proper when necessity calls for it. ‘Tis thus alone we can retain our republic, by being sensible of our errors, by asking whether others failed, or succeeded in such and such a course; not by prating about liberty, and trusting to an abstract principle, listless and inactive ourselves.

But I wander; our native pride and national feeling prompt us to look well to the interests of our country; and when we speak of her, the mind involuntarily dwells upon her prosperity, or trembles for fear of failure.

In inquiring into the cause or source of some emblem, or signet, we first look to the individual: we ask what warlike chieftain, or patriot statesman first gave impress and signification to them: with them we associate “deeds of valor done,” or the sacrifice of a noble soul to the cause of liberty and truth. The imagination paints a thousand images which recall to our memory scenes of baronial times, of the Crusades, and the gaudy yet imposing show of their heroes.

Next we turn to clubs and parties, which were employed in defence of some principle, rendered dear to them by suffering or victory—for both unite human hearts more closely than kindred blood. Here our minds revert to the Jacobin, the Mountain, the Gironde, of the French Revolution, to the Whig and Tory of our own. We may pause here to mark and observe the influence of their *insignia* upon the populace. But let the cockade of the American patriot appear in some public place, and shouts for freedom “cleave the liquid air;” it seemed to inspire them with such confidence in their and our cause, as to make them regardless of all reverses; they trusted to the majesty of right and were successful. This devotion to a *sign* is in accordance with the principles of human nature, set forth by the actions of men. *The thing signified,* in time of excitement, is associated and blended with the sign.

But it is worthy of remark that there is nothing enduring in “fasces” which are adopted on such occasions; when the excitement has passed which gave rise to them, they live only in the memory of the participants in such scenes, and become the synonyms to children of their fathers’ greatness. Doubtless the reason of the strong attachment to the badge of a club, or party, is because of its medium generality. It presents itself to men, not as the rallying-sign of an individual—then all but one would be excluded from privileges attendant upon its use; not as a token of fidelity to all men—then no one could call it his own, and no one would be left to praise or censure the support of it. Men, like slaves, become careless when the
popular voice, their master, is silent. But when the world looks on, they cherish their faith as their being.

Continuing the generalization, we come to the insignia of nations and states; and here the questions which first proposed themselves to me, again arise in my mind. Their isolation, so to speak, from all historical incidents, the want of fabulous legends, and the exclusion of the individual, call for deeper and more mature study than the classification of such as I have mentioned—the study of shades of character. We speak of Grecian and Roman emblems and inscriptions as though all others were inferior; in romance this is true, but not in philosophy; theirs were founded in fables, ours in the hearts of our countrymen. When events and fables fail us, we look to something higher, to things unwritten save in the "eternal mind." The only resort remaining to discover the origin and fitness of the coat-of-arms of each State, is in the genius of its people, not a part, a majority, but the whole. Then casting aside all accidental circumstances, we arrive at something fixed and substantial. In this light we look upon the coats-of-arms of any State as a mirror, in which may be traced the feelings, thoughts, and characteristics of that State; hence the charm of each, and the harmonious commingling of the whole. Virginia well sets forth her character when she places her foot upon the tyrant's neck, and cries "Sic semper tyrannis." How comprehensive and beautiful! It records her history and breathes forth her noble sentiments. We read at one glance her bold and patriotic exertions during the Revolution, and admire the civium morem atque legem of her after days.

The even course of Maryland, from her organization as a State to the present day, justly entitles her to her coat-of-arms. She has never been found wanting to do her duty; and justice has always presided in her deliberations. The temple of Georgia, calm yet severe, represents her firm and inflexible faith to the Constitution, and opposition to tyranny. We love to gaze upon it, because of the idea of the loftiness and grandeur of human nature it conveys to us. I would continue my journeyings throughout the States, but too long a tour makes us weary and wish we had never set out.

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THE LAST PAGE FROM MY JOURNAL.

"Nemo sapit omnibus horis."

April 1st, 1849.—A bright and lovely Sunday morning! The genial rays of the sun smile through the window. But notwithstanding the sweet serenity of nature—I shudder! I would not tell why, and yet I must; for a journal to be of any worth, must be truthful.

It was one year ago, that I was sitting clasped in the arms of this old and tried friend, my rocking chair, and lost to everything around, save that most