Politics and Social Rank

Continued from Page Nine.

speeches; everything was as we wished, as informal as if it had been in a private residence, except that a toast was proposed to our guests and their Governments and responded to by the dean of the Diplomatic Corps with a toast to the President. At the second dinner, Mr. Knox having retired, our guest representing the State Department was the then Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. Our committee chairman in his welcome to our guests made a complimentary allusion to Mr. Bryan, and at the conclusion of the chairman's brief remarks Mr. Bryan rose and to general surprise began and continued at an embarrassing length a political speech.

Guests looked at each other astonished; no one there except Mr. Bryan, it seemed, was unaware that a discussion of domestic politics, or politics of any kind at a social affair largely attended by members of the diplomatic corps is listed in the category of things which "are not done." Aside from that Mr. Bryan was not one of the hosts; he was just a guest just as were several of his assistants in the State Department; he had no more authority to speaw for a committee, or to give tone to the style of its entertainment, than any other guest. Elders among the diplomats lowered their eyes and played checkers with their silver and glass; they wanted to continue without oratorical sauce their enjoyment of the excellent dinner; juniors grew nervous as the speaker went on taking away time from the after dinner dance. On, and yet on, the eloquent gentleman talked until over the spirits of the diners a chill descended, nipping sociability. The affair was a frost. What had promised to be an annual social event of interest just flivvered out. A third affair of the kind was not attempted.

Mr. Bryan is a citizen of many remarkable qualities of mind, some of them admirable, and the wonder is, therefore, all the greater that in spite of his abundant opportunity to learn the conventions which govern social relations, especially those which apply to the social life in diplomatic circles, he remains either in ignorance or indifference. Another fact which adds mystery to the Commoner's attitude in this respect is that he did not lack an example which should have attracted his admiration as it did that of many in Washington, who declared that Mrs. Bryan's lawn parties and other entertainments during her husband's term as Secretary of State proved her to be a hostess of much personal charm whose guests' enjoyment was enhanced by her tact and her plans and pilotings—only Washington hostesses know how many they are—revealing her possession of social equipment which concealed its own devices; the art which conceals art, if you please.

There is an international association called, as I remember, The Inter-Allied Parliamentary Union, which has a semi-official recognition by a number of Governments. A little time before the war three or four members of the Japanese Parliament, returning from the annual convention of that Union, were guests at a dinner in the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, given in their honor by some gentleman devoted to the interests of that Union; but because of one of those mysteries of diplomacy our Government was not officially represented at the dinner, although one of the guests was the Secretary of State, Mr. Bryan. The Japanese members of Parliament accompanied by the Japanese Ambassador arrived at the exact minute and hour noted in the invitation, and for half an hour were agreeably occupied in meeting old friends, making new acquaintances and enjoying the pre-Volstead battle cry of freedom—"How!" The Japanese supposed that the Secretary of State was to be there representing the President, a natural supposition, and their surprise was not wholly concealed when the gentleman who was to preside, after waiting three-quarters of an hour for Mr. Bryan, gave his arm to the Ambassador and the march to the table duly proceeded.

Oysters and chablis had been served and disposed of; fish and sauterne followed and were being discussed, when Mr. Secretary of State arrived. We all arose, Mr. Bryan passed down the line of diners, smiling and bowing, took his seat by the side of the toastmaster, whispered to him; the toastmaster rose and with a voice and manner dryer than the sauterne before us or the champagne which followed, said: "I am requested by the Secretary of State to voice his regret that an earlier dinner delayed him, and that another dinner will compel him to depart soon. Gentlemen, I take pleasure in introducing the Honorable William J. Bryan, Secretary of State."

Whereupon Mr. Bryan rose, made a speech, and at once departed to make his third dinner speech of the evening! What the Japanese, to whom social and official ceremony is an observance never to be neglected, thought of the incident could only be imagined; their admired self control revealed nothing of their emotion. But that was a dinner of men only; no one was eagerly looking forward to a dancing period, and after the Secretary departed a genial warmth pervaded and the Japanese made good speeches in good English.

It has become apparent that I am but a poor chronicler of social events, and I would cease my efforts in such enterprise if some one else were at hand to tell the story of the "Snubbed Committeeman and the cold shoulder of a Countess." First it should be explained how the table seatings of our Committee dinners were arranged. When the list of diners was completed it was sent to an attache of the State Department, wise in the matter of official precedence and he, assisted by the social secretary of the White House, made the dinner table chart, which showed who took in who. This chart was displayed in the lobby of the assembly room, and women guests could tell at a glance who their escorts were to be and where they were to be seated. Men were supplied in their cloak room with the customary cards on which the same information was given. The Countess von Bernstorff, wife of the German Ambassador, under this pairing was to be taken in by a western committeeman, a fine and courteous gentleman of the old school; Madame Chang, wife of the Chinese Ambassador, was to be taken in by a wealthy eastern committeeman. These pairings were made by a rule whose purpose was to recognize comparative official ranks, that is, the length of service of a diplomat in Washington, and wives would be regarded as having the same rank of their husbands. Of course, there were many guests who were neither Committee members nor in the diplomatic service, and women who were not wives of diplomats or committeemen, and their pairings were arranged by the wise State Department man and the White House social secretary under some rule which worked admirably.

The committeeman assigned to take in Madame Chang went to the committeeman assigned to take in the Countess von Bernstorff and asked for a "trade." The westerner, not realizing the possible complications of such a transaction, agreed, and the easterner made a penciled notation to that effect on the chart. The Countess, before this trade had been made, had either looked at the chart herself, or her husband had done that for her, so when her substituted escort offered his arm to her as the procession to the dinner hall began to form, she was the most astonished lady in five continents. I have said astonished, but that is not the word; it would be indiscreet to use the right one. There was a quick exchange of glances and signals between the Countess and the Count. Nothing could be done. It was a case of race prejudice on the part of the lady, but she placed her hand on her escort's arm, walked in, took a seat, deliberately turned her head and presented a cool and polished shoulder to her escort, and from oysters to black coffee never looked toward him nor spoke to him. Of course this cold cut, so to say, did not pass unnoticed; there was a ripple of whispered comment as the Countess kept up a lively and seemingly interesting flow of conversation with guests on her side away from her escort. The westerner fared better. Madame Chang did not know, probably, that there had been an exchange; her escort was a handsome and courteous gentleman and she, an exquisite doll dressed in silvery silk, which, as ladies' say, would stand alone, seemed to be happy in his attentions. An explanation of the cold shoulder slowly crept about the table, and the general comment was, "Serves him right."

That genial smile of Mr. Taft is a true index of his social nature; he is the finest host I ever met, and, perhaps, in a later chapter I may tell something of his White House entertainments.

[This is the fourteenth article of a series. The fifteenth will appear in an early issue.]

Mr. Hardy's Lyrics

LATE LYRICS AND EARLIER. With many other verses. By Thomas Hardy. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

NOT the least characteristic item in this new book of Mr. Hardy's—a hundred and fifty and one poems collected from far and near—is the "Apology" which he has written in lieu of preface. The author deprecates, quite courteously, the scorn (or the pity) with which his latest cairn of work—work that began in mid-Victorian time and still lags upon the stage—will be received by the more ardent spirits of the hour. But he turns upon them not ungently: "The thoughts of any man of letters concerned to keep poetry alive cannot but run uncomfortably on the precarious prospects of English verse at the present day. Verily, the hazards and casualties surrounding the birth and setting forth of almost every modern creation in numbers are ominously like those of one of Shelley's paper boats on a windy lake. And a forward conjecture scarcely permits the hope of a better time, unless men's tendencies should change. . . . We seem threatened with a new Dark Age."

And he goes on glomily, yet holding fast to his hope that there will come about some alliance between religion and complete rationality; for "religion there must be, else the world is to perish"; and he declares that "poetry and religion touch each other." And he reflects that "if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it *pour mieux sauter*, drawing back for a spring."

An old man's book, of course. What else should Thomas Hardy publish, in this year of his life? Yet he at least believes he has his eyes open, and he is not wholly downcast (though made regretful) by Mr. Frederic Harrison's complacent dictum: "This view of life is not mine." Nor is he persuaded by it, even though it is backed up by somebody who clerically comments upon a *suggestio falsi* in it, of which its author is not conscious.

Plenty of bitterness in scattered pools here in the book; more of a merely plaintive coloring. But if his self-examination overflows in the "Surview" with which he ends his book, many who know him well will set it aside in favor of a stanza or two from "An Ancient to Ancients":

We who met sunrise sanguine souled,
Gentlemen,
Are wearing weary. We are old;
These younger press; we feel our rout
Is imminent to Aides' den—
That evening's shades are stretching out,
Gentlemen!

. . . . . .

And ye, red lipped and smooth browed; list,
Gentlemen;
Much is there waits you we have missed;
Much lore we leave you worth the knowing.
Much, much has lain outside our ken:
Nay, rush not: time serves: we are going,
Gentlemen.

Jackson's Poem

IN the September 10 issue an article on Civil War music credited to Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson the authorship of the poem "My Wife and Child." Wilmer L. Moore, of Atlanta, writes that this piece was by Gen. Henry R. Jackson, of Savannah.

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