

"Should Public Opinion Affect Our
Individuality?"

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Study first before accepting Popular Sentiment.

"Opinion", says Sir Phos. Brown, "rides upon the neck of reason; and men are happy, wise or learned according as that empress shall set them down in the register of reputation. However, weigh not thyself in the scales of thy own judgement but let the opinion of the judicious be the standard of thy merit"

This is a question that comes before us in every relation of life, and it is always within our own choosing whether or not we will do certain things that are according to or against "Public Opinion"

It has been truly said that "Men may encounter without fear the danger of the sea, the horrors of war, the pestilence that walketh at noonday, but the opinion of all men he cannot face so easily," and why? Because the desire to be well thought of by others is one of the most deep seated of all sentiments that belongs to the human heart." We are by nature imitative creatures, fearing to do a single uncommon thing, for the reason that it might make us ridiculously conspicuous and if perchance, we do reject the popular standards it is generally thought that all standards are rejected. Boldness, therefore an

our part is frequently very essential, in order that the wrong might be righted. This determining the right or wrong of a popular sentiment is very hard sometimes for says Bishop Hilkins "Time wears out the fiction of opinion and doth by degrees discover and unmask that falacy of ungrounded persuasions and confirms the dictates and sentiments of nature". It is shown by this that Public Opinion cannot be wholly relied upon for everything. This results usually from the fact that the thoughts advocated have not originated or sprung from the masses, spontaneously but from prominent individuals in whom the people generally have confidence. The procedure is similar to a volcanic eruption beneath the ocean: the greatest or movement is at the first within comparative small space but this commotion cannot be confined to that one locality but it gradually spreads in every direction in immense waves, the greater the upheaval the more rapidly & forcible will be its movement as it sweeps over the whole ocean. Its real depth, however, will be known only when it has met some strong opposing force, as

the shore line for instance. It is just as true that, - as the great wave motion was caused by a single eruption so with the origin of the great questions they are started by but comparatively few men, who, indeed, possess great executive ability & in whom the people place much confidence. This has been demonstrated many times in history, as in war times, slavery cause, & at present in Cosey's Army.

So closely interwoven are the three departments of national life, social, political & religious, it is difficult to say that Opinion favors this movement which may be political in its nature, & objects to that one that is more religious, for the questions greatly enter into all three departments.

In the earlier times it was the prevailing custom, as we learn by many poems descriptive of rural life, when the

"Gray-haired sires, and their sweet wives
The youths & maids met on the green"

whether for a jolly social time, for the adoption for some law or to listen to the gospel call, they all went together to the place of meeting, acted as one body, believed heartily that in "union there is strength" & greatly enjoyed the purity and simplicity of careless freedom. But later

* we find sociability is found not to consist of all but of the more humble classes, who believe in this method, while the courts of nobility keep aloof and indulge in their feasts and gay festivities, no longer in the pure, cool & perfumed air, but in the hot foul & poisonous atmosphere of closed halls. This latter is what we find prevalent at the present time. It seems indeed that the further apart the wealthy and poorer classes get the better are the upper classes suited. This is due usually to the fact that the poorer classes realize the superior advantages of the others & so give up to this feeling, at the same time neglecting to "insist upon themselves & not to imitate". Sometimes the ideas advocated are perfectly right & legitimate, & are for the upbuilding of those interested, but again it is very dangerous to take up the customs set forth by the party in power. For example, take the fashions. As a general thing we find think of these as pictured in the fashion plates adorning tall, slender persons with extremely small waists & so on, but at the same time we have the the highly recommended & least costumes. No it rests with the people which of these should be adopted, - that which would

tend to make the figure attractive or that which will insure health. We find, I believe that neither are taken as the originals advocate but more persons favor, at present, a comfortably-fitting gown made after the first style.

So it is in many things connected with society and its ways that make us slaves to habits that are sometimes very harmful and degrading.

The distant feelings that exist between the family & the hired help are very prevalent. The girl is required to do alone the whole washing and ironing for the large family: wash & wipe & put in place all the dishes, after each meal prepared by herself; and at the same time keep every apartment in a neat and orderly condition after all this at a late hour she ~~steals~~ slips away for the night's rest. But where? Here in that small & ill furnished back room up in the attic is this right? Doesn't this look like we were cherishing an element of slavery? It is true that she is not bought and sold but her very life is being exchanged for a very minute sum as compensation for the hard labor that rightfully de-

mands more. As the result of such treatment she naturally becomes cross & dissipated & dissatisfied with life in any form and this is the average type who are now employed on that come to our homes for trial. Now if their feelings of discouragement and slight are seen once in a while should we censure these girls severely? Our work along this line should be slow & work care. The first thing enquired into being the cause of this offensive trait.

Not only can this degradation be noted in the homes, to their shame, but also on a vast scale in the factories where many men & women are employed for a mere pittance and when we hear and read so much of this, although perhaps we haven't witnessed it, we are inclined to believe that brutality, foul atmosphere & ill kept rooms are of the lowest grade in these places. It seemed, for a time, that each establishment tried to outstrip the others in this respect. At present, however, this quality is not so prominent a feature as it was but advancement hasn't gone any too far yet. This has been accomplished, so far, by the determination of the heads of these places because they found that in order to real-

ize the most in a given time the laborer requires plenty of food, good air & light & plenty of room. Public Opinion heartily sanctions this movement & urges the carcer along the road to forever blotting such inhumane treatment of fellow beings, out of our midst.

One writer says "Our house keeping, arts, occupations, marriages, and religion we have not chosen but society has chosen for us," and how true it is when we come to look at these things in this light. It has not been long since the mothers and daughters were employed only in such work as was best suited to women, as weaving, knitting mending & the making of the clothes for the family use but when the more ambitious ones ventured into occupations (aside from those mentioned) and found that by standing firmly they could hold their ground, progress was made. This done the less bold ones dared to venture into the cold world to become business women, who are alive to the world and its commercial interests. Today so diversified is woman's work that it saves time & space to name what she doesn't do, rather than what she does. In this connection we may mention those who have been

brava enough to introduce for their sisters, dresses which immitates that of man thinking, I presume, that with it would come an added dignity and that all this would be far better suited to her various duties. Public Opinion however, objects seriously to any such dress being worn by the women; the newspapers are full of it, the magazines have a column after column satirizing it; the orignators hear it on the street corners, in the homes, until they woman like, set their teeth and say "We will do it now out of spite"—having in mind what Elizabeth Harlan has said "When you have chosen your part abide by it do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world." Now should they proceed with their plans in the face of this strong opposition? What does society give as a reason for thinking thus? It says "No dress which tends to immitate that of man will keep woman in that high sphere she is the type of grace purity & holiness." Is not this then sufficient for any clear minded person? Let it then be the ruling sentiment.

Our housekeeping is governed greatly by what people say. Some homes will perhaps be furnished entirely or in part after the English

style or perhaps Japanese or Chinese. There may be scattered through the house many "curios" of various origin that are both interesting & educating. All these Society recommends but when a home is found in which the furnishings are far too costly than is thought to rightly correspond to the earnings of the owner, it begins to question, and it rightfully should, for it is then that its eyes are turned ultimately to its own wrongful demands in making this weak-minded person feel that he must make this exertion to appear well before the public.

Furthermore our ways and methods in the home corresponds greatly to those around us. While callers are being entertained in the afternoon a dainty little lunch of chocolate (or tea) & a wafer or cake is a pleasant feature (until it becomes an expected part of the visit, then it becomes a work of competition). If the callers are not admitted they hear the servant girl say "Not at home" or receive cards to that effect while at the same time the hostess may be reclining on the couch interested in either some fancy work or a fascinating novel. Again you may be unaware

if the presence of any one very near you, & on turning quickly around (of necessity) you cause a collision. Immediately turns are exchanged as "Excuse me, I'm sorry I hurt you"; "You receive his answer Oh don't mention it, it didn't hurt in the least" while you know that it did from your own feelings. Many are the equivocations used that are sanctioned by Society as a means to lubricate the rules.

Good training received in the home is very essential to life when out in the world. To do this in the best and proper way requires the soundest judgement, a wide range of reading & conscientiousness ^{living} on the part of the advising person.

Society recognizes as the highest types of good breeding those who have a good supply of unaffected sympathy, unselfishness, cheerfulness & earnestness. If these be the traits of those sent out from the home then society would be far more noble. But this is not always the case so rules are established that these persons may have a schedule to direct them. The question worth us is, should these persons adopt such rules when

They cannot naturally conform to them? No answer in the negative would be very unjust for although an assumed, and, most generally affected ways, are not to be advocated, yet it is a plan by which there have a chance to become more at ease when in company.

A gentleman, admiring highly one whose presence in company is greatly appreciated, will read diligently all the latest treatises on etiquette. He becomes enthusiastic as he finds the many useful & pleasing requirements which he imagines himself putting into practice. One point, in particular he says he will keep in mind which is that when calling on a family of several ladies it is his place to arise & speak to each one that enters the room. He is so intent on making a complete success that by the time one of the ladies has the third time (if necessary) entered the room he has arisen and bowed to her a corresponding number of times. Thus it is that the text is taken without the due amount of common sense along with it. Now by taking what society said did it help this person? No, for it brought out the lack of independence on his part to act

for himself. As Carlyle has said "Welcome
evermore to gods & men is the self helping
man". Yes, what we need greatly are men
and women who possess enough of common
"horse sense" to judge rightly the way to ~~so~~
perform certain things.

Society in general calls for reasonable in-
dividuality in all things & this is the final
result of having been trained when young
to observe such principles, these will be
shown best in the naturalness of every little
act under any circumstances, as asking to
be excused if the back is turned to one of the
company, or when a gentleman accompan-
ies a lady through a crowd or ^{ascending} ~~up~~ stairs
he should precede, but at other times as pass-
ing into a door or out of it or descending
stairs the lady should go before. These are
but the natural & just requirements. But in
in special cases as with the wealthy, almost
exclusively, we witness sometimes the most
absurd regulations. This is due principally
to their financial standing. This procession
seems to take away the in some cases. The
power to deal reasonably with requirements
forced in upon them by what "People say"

Take for instance our barbarous mourning customs which are well enumerated by Dr. Falmage "Christian burial" falsely so called, "is barbarous, irrational, gloomy, chilly & despairing. The waving crepe upon the door knob the darkened windows, the body shrouded and coffined in the color of gloom; women and children veiled and draped in hideous black; men's hats banded with crepe; what hopelessness all these things express. In some places crepe-covered per dogs - crepe mounted drivers are used to further emphasize the negations of christian truth. Many young women I have heard complain that they had to go into mourning whose only compensation was, that it was becoming to them. We have "full mourning", "mourning jewelry", "mourning visiting cards" "mourning stationary" but the ghastly humor of this custom reaches its climax in "second mourning" followed by the full bloom of gorgeous colors, for the time appointed by the inexorable decree of fashionable society, has passed and now sorrow & weeping may be laid aside with the funeral garments" all this carried on for vary-

ing lengths of time, until in the end it is found that it is more expensive to die than to live. Oh! that standards were set forth by the wealthy class that would prove an impetus to obtain the means to use for noble purposes.

But we need not look long at such customs for they are not characteristic of "American life". Bryce accounts for this in the fact that the citizens of this country believe heartily in a popular government - consequently when this is secured we have government by public opinion because wherever all power is lodged in & issues from the people, there it is that we find fewer binding laws and less despotic government. Again the national characteristics mould public sentiment very greatly & they are as follows: "The Americans are good-natured, humorous, hopeful, educated, moral, well conducted, religious, busy, commercial, untutted, associative because sympathetic, changeful, and lastly they are a conservative people". These traits then give rise to the high grade of opinion existing in the United States. especially is this true in the national life. In no country is true & voluntary patriotism so prominent.

A common chord is touched when it is known that a desolate home is made glad by the return of the poor, weak and famished soldier. So dear to the hearts of the American people is this land of ours that every effort put forth for its welfare is highly appreciated, especially in trying to carry to the highest degree the freedom of speech & the press.

Our fore-fathers thought that the best way to procure a democratic form of government was to have mass meetings where the elections would & did take place, in fact this may have been the best method for that age of our growth but as the population ~~has~~ greatly increased it was found that the excitement which created great enthusiasm and this in turn much clamor and turmoil, such a state of confusion existed where the tyranny of the majority was felt and the minority not heard, that the Public Voice said we must have better & quicker work done. A plan was then resorted to which brings into the real political life only representatives of the people who are elected by the masses. We are now enjoying the fruits of this change. But as every rose has

its thorn so does the national especially the political life of this nation. Several things along this line may be given that will go to show the failure of Public Opinion in this respect 1st. that the representatives are made to act not for the whole nation at large but for the particular section from which they come. In many cases they are bribed to such acts; the money or gift looms up before them that actions will be in the direction of procuring this personal benefit. Their audible "yeas" are in reality "nays." Oh, thin false pretensions! If this be the characteristic of many of our representatives what will be the condition and outcome of the work of such? If they do not stand up boldly by their own dictates, insofar as they are for the good of the people, destruction will be the outcome. Emerson says "I cannot see any road of perfect peace which a man can walk but after the council of his own bosom. Let him quit too much association; let him go home much and establish himself in the courses he approves." When this is made the guide for actions then, we will have a form of government and a type of people far more noble and strong for good prin-

ciples. This however can be accomplished only when popular sentiment is strong enough to over balance the present existing things. At present, however, it has not succeeded in preventing the Congressmen ^{from} fixing their own salaries but it has gained control in this respect with the state legislatures.

Another thing in regard to congressmen is what custom requires for them to live. In the first place to have gained this place of honor he is usually one who has sound mental power and more especially he is in a thriving financial condition. If coming from a distance he sometimes moves his family to Washington and while there he must go into a large well furnished house have all the modern conveniences; his family must have correspondingly good clothes they must have their table well spread & there must also be hired help in the house. Evening parties must be entertained and attended and many other things that might be mentioned that of a necessity, according to society, are required accompaniments of this public life. This is ludicrous, it is true custom is something

that we can hardly turn our backs on, but to fulfil these demands is not what he was sent for. But ^{to} represent his section of the country the best work, then, will be accomplished when they have just enough of social intercourse that will afford them a pleasant stay at a reasonable cost.

To say that public opinion extends no further would be a great understatement for is the life of a single individual free from its influences in innumerable ways, more than he ever realizes? Especially is this strongly felt in his religious relations. This may be shown best by the way the houses of worship are built and furnished. The most refined will have the church a little heaven here on earth. The whole a perfect beauty to lovers of the harmony of colors. The scene within is most of a pure white with ^{polished} brass railings and curtain poles, the decorating and hangings of a pale green, high up in the alcove back of the minister is the great pipe-organ in front of which is the paid choir; all the pews are richly upholstered & the floor heavily carpeted, all this together make it truly "a dream of a place". But future to yourself.

a little church in a western town where money is seldom used for luxury; here, the church to the stranger is not one that has rich hangings nor is it decorated with a beautiful blending of colors, indeed it has had no paint added more than the prime coat. On the bright sunny mornings in Spring the brethren & sisters good & true ^{to hear the preaching} come together. No great choir nor the mellow tones from a pipe organ greet their ears, no cushioned pews but the simplest and sometimes the rudest of their kind are their best. Comparing now these two pictures the things we find in common are the ministers. In the first case he is but a secondary part, perhaps he is not seen until it is time for the sermon; in the other, the preacher has the first place in his congregation's eyes and thoughts, for there are no other things to take their attention. Now can it be supposed that in the well furnished church as soon as the sermon is commenced the whole congregation will give their undivided attention to it? No, we cannot truly say this of all of them, for Sunday morning is generally such a tired morning that it is much easier to look around at the beauti-

ful things than to follow closely for forty or fifty minutes a line of deep thought; besides, nothing in fact is demanded of the members but to come and when a person feels no responsibility resting on him, he is not apt to look around for it; there are the ushers to seat the persons, the janitor to keep fires & ventilation in good order and also deacons at the door to greet those who come. But look at the other church there are no attractions for these people except perhaps a stray new bonnet, but this holds the attention for only a short time for the words from their dear pastor are, by experience, the building up of their characters each time they hear him. What is more they realize that they are responsible for the success of each meeting. In the evening, the first one who comes lights the lamps, builds the fires etc & each makes himself a committee to heartily greet every other one. Decide for yourself which of these two congregations do the most work for their Master. It is quite evident from this that Public Opinion varies with the financial condition of the community. But should it be so strong in the upper classes to make

them entirely lose sight of the reasonableness of things? Should it not rather make them better able to be more thorough and gain a deeper insight into religious truths and teachings? Too much satisfaction with ones surroundings makes become morbid.

Many, many other things could be mentioned that would prove to us more than ever that to follow strictly the dictates of Public Opinion is in most cases dangerous for this reason that if a person gives up completely to its control he is sure to exchange his own individuality for the sake of escaping popular criticism. ~~But~~ he has one counsel to give "Think of living. Thy life wert thou the pitifullest of all the sons of earth is no idle dream but a solemn reality. It is thy own it is all thou hast to face Eternity with Work then with all thy God given powers
"Like a star unblinking yet unceasing"