

## AMERICAN CIVILIZATION.

ITS GREAT BLEMISHES AND ITS APPARENT DEFECTS.

An Address Delivered by Col. A. W. Slayback, of St. Louis, before the Literary Society of the State University at Columbia, Mo., June 21, 1875.

Only before an audience representing largely the culture, refinement and learning of the State, would I venture upon the discussion of a subject so melancholy in its contemplation as that which I have selected for the learned gentlemen of the University Literary Societies, and their assembled friends. It is easier to be entertaining when the topic under consideration is pleasing within itself.

But disregarding the arduousness of the task for me, and the painful reflections it may awaken for you, the same sense of duty which induced me to speak at all to my young countrymen in response to their invitation, prompted me to speak to them of those things which most deeply concern their active future among the population of the country in which they are to live. It is the fashion for Americans to boast of their advancement in learning, and just at this time Uncle Sam's physiognomy is rosy with smiles of self-glorification over the general progress of the country, emphasized by the near approach of the Centennial celebration of that proud day when our sturdy ancestors flung defiance in the face of a King, and promulgated to the world their sublime Declaration of Independence.

Our great grandfathers did that, and they did well. Our grandfathers did well, and our fathers did well, with the questions and the duties of their day. They lived their lives, and left their legacies, and dwelt in the regions of rest. What they did is done. Of what they did wisely we enjoy the fruit. Of what they did unwisely, we of this generation have had to endure some bitter consequences. They had their responsibilities. They have left their record. It is now our turn to tread the shining sands of the arena of life. They gave close observation to the times and circumstances in which they lived, and if we are worthy of the sires from whom we sprang we must do likewise. They shed their blood and gave their treasure that they and we might be freemen.

Liberty and freedom of conscience they bequeathed us. It is for us to bear in mind that eternal vigilance is the price of their preservation. Their duties were with the past. Ours are with the present. The evils that they saw they fought against. The evils that we see creeping in we must overcome. The patrimonial field is good. The harvest is fair. We must keep up the fences, keep out the weeds, and look for new fields to conquer, if we would enlarge and enrich the estate. One of the errors of our day is national boastfulness. We are fond of believing, and of being told, that we are the forwardmost nation on earth. Perhaps we are. I shall not argue the question. But I will say that we are not what we might be, if every man should do his duty. With all our boasted progress, we have growing elements of vice, of ignorance, and of corruption, that must be eradicated, or in the very near future they will endanger the country and destroy all that makes existence dear.

There are tendencies in our institutions which must be combatted or eventual ruin is inevitable. There are departures from the simple honesty of our forefathers which bode no good for the future. There are defects in our system of education which every day renders more apparent. It is defective in that it does not reach the masses; it is defective in that it fails to develop as high a standard of manhood as it ought in those it does reach.

Among those we call educated, the physical is sacrificed too much to the intellectual; the intellectual too much to the false comforts of life. Those whom we call our best educated young men grow up with such habits of luxury that they are unfitted to bear the hardships of honorable poverty or resist the temptations of adverse fortune. The heroic is too much frittered away, and in its stead there is nourished a sickly ambition and a delusive self-importance that is battered to pieces in the sham-testing mill of life. Almost the first disappoint-

ment the college graduate encounters after he enters practical existence is to find himself subordinate to some man no older than himself, whom he considers uneducated. Instead of being a leader, he finds himself a follower. This disgusts him very much. It causes many a man to settle down into a soured and disappointed life.

In New York, the college-bred men are clerks or salesmen, or second-class professionals. The heads of houses and the men who take the lead in great enterprises are generally men who start in life without this advantage. And so it is all over the country as a general rule. The fault must be in the system. Milton says (Vol. I, p. 160, Prose Works): "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war."

But if there is so little in our system of education that so fits a man, what shall we say of the danger to be apprehended from the fact that what we call education fails to reach the masses?

Not only is the system we have defective, but such as it is, its distribution is totally inadequate to the welfare of a people relying upon the wisdom of their own votes for government.

We boast that ours is a land of churches and schools. And yet the stubborn fact is that we have not enough of them, and those we have are not attended as they should be.

If it is sad that our best educated men are educated so imperfectly, it is worse that an almost incredible proportion of our people are not educated at all.

We shudder at the ignorance of the South Sea Islanders, and think too little of the thick darkness of that illiteracy which shadows our own land. We make liberal contributions for the support of expensive foreign missions, but show too little practical sympathy for the heathen at home. What! Heathen? Yes, plenty of them. I call heathen those who ignore the existence of the living and true God—people destitute of moral wisdom.

And we have right here, in the hearts and centers of our civilization, people who do not know enough to comprehend what is meant by the God of the Bible. Also vicious heathen, who wilfully disregard what they do know. People of whom society has to beware. People dangerous in a commonwealth where majorities govern—dangerous anywhere. People who can scarcely understand any language. People who cannot read or write. People who never go to school, or to church, or to hear a lecture. People who look upon a college professor as a special ambassador of Old Satan, and upon a preacher as a cunning chap who lives by his wits—people whose votes count just the same as yours or mine!

But surely you may say, "This kind of folks must be scarce in this country?" No; on the contrary, far too numerous, and too much neglected, even by those who have love of country and love of the human race at heart.

I do not make these assertions recklessly. I come prepared to prove them by those passive, inexorable witnesses—the statistics of the census. The figures are official. They are as correct as the government can obtain. You will find them recorded for the future reference of coming generations, and for the information of statesmen and voters, teachers and students. I hope you will not find the tables I have prepared tiresome. I expended some labor in their collation, and if you will study the census for yourselves your minds will soon begin to make other groups of the figures as interesting and as startling. You will find yourselves comparing decade with decade, State with State, section with section, class, age, wealth and race with their respective parallels.

The interest grows, as fact after fact, conclusion after conclusion, is reached.

New calculations suggest themselves as you go along, and facts stranger than fiction rise before the mind, just as a traveler in a mountainous country, climbing and gazing, beholds range after range dissolve itself and stand solid to his vision.

The true condition of a country cannot be so reliably ascertained in any other way as by a careful study of its census, and inasmuch as I

have undertaken to show not how advanced, but how illiterate the population is, in the country in which our lot is cast, I must trespass upon your forbearance while I produce the figures, which may be dull, but at the same time are terribly convincing.

The census of 1870 shows that the total population of the United States, of all ages, was 38,558,371; total ten years old and over, 28,238,945; of these, the males are 14,258,866; the females, 13,980,079; total illiterates, ten years old and over, 5,658,144; and of these illiterates, the males are, 2,603,888; the females, 3,054,256; percentage of total illiterates to total population of that age, 20.04; percentage of male illiterates to male population of that age, 18.26; percentage of female illiterates to female population of that age, 21.87—in language a child can understand, more than one-fifth of the entire population. Nearly one-fifth of the males, and more than one-fifth of the females, ten years old and over, can neither read nor write! "Ignorant foreigners," you may say. No. Let the truth be told if it brings a blush. Only 777,864 are foreign born, and 4,882,280 are natives.

"Ignorant blacks," you may say. No. Another table shows that the white illiterates are 2,879,543, and the illiterates of that age of all other races combined are 2,778,601. In other words, about 100,000 more white illiterates than Indians, negroes, Chinese, and all combined.

"Surely, Missouri is not so bad as that average," you may say. But the tables show that our State has illiterates of that age, 222,411; of whom only 15,584 are foreign born, and 206,827 are natives; and of these the colored illiterates are only 38,000.

You will next ask if many of these will not learn sometime. Making another compilation, to answer this question, we find that in the United States there is a total population, twenty-one years of age and over, of 18,536,000; of these, the males are 9,443,001; the females, 9,092,999. Of these grown-up persons, the illiterates are, males, 1,619,147—and these men are voters, law-makers and rulers under our Constitution; and females, 2,096,049—and these women are the mothers and natural guardians over the young of the land. In all, of men and women twenty-one years of age and over, there are 3,715,196, or more than one-fifth of the entire adult population, unable to read and write.

These are terrible figures. To be more exact, of the male adults—voters, remember—there is a percentage of 17.15, and of females, a percentage of 23.05. How can these voters exercise suffrage understandingly, or act with wisdom in the use they make of the ballot? How can these poor benighted women comprehend wifehood and motherhood, or interpret to their tender offspring the mysteries that Nature has ever confided to a mother's lips alone? Are there no missionaries to spare for the 23.05 per cent. of American mothers who can neither read nor write? Nearly the fourth of them! Yet here they are, right in the shadow of church-spires and college-domes, toiling, struggling—many of them hungering—for the comforts of life; and, while expensive missions can be maintained abroad, there is not a cent of money, not an hour of instruction, and but precious few kind words to be had for these home heathen, whose ignorance and degradation lower the standard of health and morals in the land. How can an ignorant mother take intelligent care of a child? Is it a wonder that so many children perish under five years of age—that tender period when intelligence, care, skill and constant vigilance do not always obviate those fatal catastrophes which send too late the hot tears of grief down the parental cheek? Think how the helpless little mortals lean for its very life upon the maternal discretion and solicitude to aid it in resisting the assaults upon its frail existence. And with what dismay must it lift its eyes for relief into the stolid face of a mother who cannot read the simplest rules for its health and preservation! Look at the tables of mortality published every week in the city. The large majority of deaths are of children under five years of age. That is, children who have to depend on the care, intelligence and nourishment supplied them by others, being too young to take care of themselves.

I candidly believe that a majority of these children would reach maturity if they had well-informed and careful mothers.

Returning to the census of 1870, another table shows that out of the total population, 38,558,371, there are 12,135,798 unable to exchange information with others; in other words, nearly one-third of the entire population, who are dumb with ignorance or imbecility, and who hang like a helpless burden upon the shoulders of the other two-thirds. True, many of them are too young, but the number of those who are too benighted to tell their age, their parentage, their native places or religious belief astounds even the census-taker.

It may be tiresome to pursue these tables further at present, but I cannot refrain from a glance at some disclosures about our own State.

From the number of our schools and their costliness you may think that no child could grow up in ignorance, and yet there is cold comfort in the official report. The total population of the State is 1,721,995; of these there are from five to twenty years old, 631,443; of this number there are males 328,013, females 303,430. Out of the entire 631,443, of what may be called the school-going age, there is a daily average attendance upon public schools of 187,024, private schools 29,398; in all, attending schools 216,422, not attending any school 274,975, and there are 143,046 irregulars, who sometimes attend and sometimes do not. So that in this, the State of our pride and of our boasted school privileges, the official statistics declare that every day more children are growing up in ignorance than attending any school.

When we think of what dwarfed and crippled lives lie just ahead of an actual majority of the children of the State, and how the interests of the State itself must suffer in consequence of the inferiority of average citizenship thus produced, can we wonder that many thoughtful minds are leaning to the conviction that improvident, ignorant, avaricious and undutiful parents should be compelled by law to educate their children, if not from choice and affection, as a duty they owe the State. Does not the State itself owe a duty to these children? If parents abandon their offspring on the streets, or leave them to starve in the fields, shall they be left to die? No. The law provides how such unfortunates may be fed and clothed.

Why should not the same humane spirit go further, and declare that where the soul and the intellect of the child are abandoned by its parents the State will gather in her children as a true and faithful mother would fold them to her breast, and nourish their minds with wisdom and strength? What possible service could the State do them that would awaken within them deeper gratitude, or imbue them with more lofty patriotism? There ought to be some way provided to enlighten and to save these Missouri children from growing up into full-grown heathen.

And how is it with our adult population? We have in the State 84,904 illiterates, twenty-one years old and over. Of these the males are 34,780—voters, remember!—and females, 50,124.

Missourians can contribute their thousands of dollars annually to teach the ignorant of other lands to read and write, and yet there are 84,904 grown persons, and a total of illiterates over ten years old of 222,411 right here at home who never read a verse in the Bible in their lives. Enough souls to make a heathen State! And yet we are constantly told that our civilization is approaching absolute perfection!

Let us revert once more from our own State to the general census, and the moral blemishes are as revolting as the intellectual, and the philosophy of the schools, the ingenuity of the law-makers, and the piety of the Church, seem unable by their united efforts to remove the reproach. Out of the grand total, 38,558,371, only 21,195,546 are in any manner connected with any religious order or denomination whatever.

Now, add the number of the wicked who can read to the number of the ignorant who are unable to do so; that is, add together the irreligious, the illiterate and those who profess more piety than they practise, and where is your majority? But go on, and to the illiterate and irreligious add those who

are just barely able to read and write, and who stop there without making any further progress. Add to these the number who can read and write well enough but do not exert their knowledge for any good to themselves or others. Then consider the paupers, the hospital patients, the helpless cripples and the poor imbeciles, and is not the number of those who are of any use reduced until every good man counts?

The census shows the number of criminals arrested, the number convicted, the number kept in prison, and a great many strange facts concerning the prevalence of crime, its causes, its expense to the honest part of the population, and its other consequences. I cannot ask you to go with me into the painful and shocking particulars. I will merely give a hasty glance at some of the conclusions.

It is estimated that there is annually paid in support of the gospel \$6,000,000; in support of criminals just double, \$12,000,000; for tobacco and cigars, \$610,000,000; for liquors, \$2,200,000,000, of which \$1,500,000,000 goes for the direct support of grog-shops.

We call ourselves a people of law and order, and yet the agencies employed seem inadequate to check the growth of crime, or even to arrest and punish the criminals. Unredressed and unpunished wrongs multiply in number and intensity in horror.

In New York, the murder of Nathan, which took place years ago just opposite the Fifth Avenue Hotel, remains a mystery to this day, and the magnificent brown stone front residence in which it occurred was so condemned as a haunted house by popular superstition, that, last summer when I was there, I saw workmen tearing it down because no one would live in the fatal place.

In Philadelphia, the ransom of a prince fails to rescue little Charlie Ross, to his parents, or to bring to punishment the men who stole the child.

In Missouri, a little boy is murdered in his own house, at midnight, and his mother dangerously wounded, out of vengeance for wrongs committed by others whom the law has failed to reach, and the perpetrators all go at large.

In Massachusetts, right in Boston, the supposed focus of our civilization, child after child has been murdered in a manner so revoltingly cruel that a fiend would look away, and up to this time nobody punished.

All over the land the record of crime is swelling and the people of good faith are insecure. The murdered floater is anonymously buried in the potter's field while the hand that slew him remains unknown. The assassin fires into the bosom of his victim, in the light of open day, with the sure, steady aim of emotional insanity. Robbery is reduced to fine art. The absconding defaulter bears off with impunity his plunder to foreign lands. The crafty full-handed bankrupt exults in his temporary but well-provisioned retirement from active business, and with serene satisfaction placidly pities the people who trusted him, and attributes their disaster to the fact that they would not wait for their money until he was ready to pay.

The well-dressed shop-lifter pilfers at the counter where the merchant she is robbing, too polite to expose, or too cowardly to accuse her, connives at the crime he detects but dares not denounce, for fear it will injure his business. The daring rural outlaw ditches a train laden with innocent women and children, that he may rob the mail or the express. The shirking prize-fighter has whole columns of newspaper notoriety bestowed upon him, pockets his excursion money without hesitation, and takes good care not to be hit too hard by his partner in business.

Congress, Legislature, and even Constitutional Convention suffer the presence of bribe-bearing lobbyists, ready to buy or to sell in their infamous vocation, and the first struggle of every wholesome law is like that of the infant Hercules tearing the coil of venomous serpents from about his neck. In a land of civilized charity, full of misdirected and mistaken philanthropies, the sick and suffering stranger languishes and dies before he reaches the hospital. The blind beggar gropes in the street. The friendless maniac wreaks his ghastly vengeance on the innocent, and, weary of life, in some so strange