CHAPTER XXVI.

BENEFICENCE OF WAR—BARBARISM OF SLAVERY.

The conflicts that convulse nations and shake down rock-rooted institutions are often blessings in rude disguise. In heroic treatment there must be suffering. The compensation follows, but sometimes far behind. The calamity of one generation may be a godsend to the next. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. One generation plants; the next reaps; but the thread of human sacrifice and recompense runs through all. The river is made up of drops, but it is a continuous stream. Human society likewise is a continuing body. Individuals appear and disappear, men come and go, but the stream of life, achievement and purpose flows on forever.

So whatever may be individual wrong, suffering and loss, the body of the people in their social and political structure, may as a whole be the gainer. The temporary calamities of war may pave the way to a beneficent recompense. Civil Wars are most apt to do this, for they are usually fought over some principle in whose triumph there is a vindication and establishment of justice. Age after age, England through her internecine strifes emerged from each to a higher level of intellectual and religious liberty.

Nations in peaceful times grow up to their opportunities. The opportunities themselves mostly come through violence. The portion of peoples, as of individuals, comes
to them by irregular allotment, not always recognized nor welcome at the time. The tendency of society, as of men, is to grow into grooves; and through the natural aggressiveness of all evil things, the innate inertness of harmless things and the inclination of people to non-resistance, the ruts into which the affairs of every people run if left to themselves, are oppressive to popular liberty and progress. A sort of crust grows around institutions, as the moss grows on the undisturbed stone. Social and political life becomes bound in the habit of acquiescence in wrong. When a people have become thus enmeshed through long periods of indolence, nothing but the splendid, energizing shock of war can save them from worse calamities.

In his "History of Civilization in Europe," Guizot describes how immensely Europe was broadened, educated, liberalized as the result of the Crusades, with their two centuries of waste in life and treasure, through the intellectual impulse resulting from the contact of the Western nations with the superior civilization and refinement of the Asiatics. "On the one hand," he says, "the extension of ideas and the emancipation of thought; on the other, general enlargement of the social sphere and the opening of a wider field for every sort of activity; at the same time, more complete freedom and more political unity; the independence of men and the centralization of society. They drew society out of a very narrow rut and threw it into new and infinitely broader paths." Nothing in the previous history of Europe had carried it so far on the road to intellectual development as those two hundred years of war and sacrifice, which constituted the crowning struggle
between the Christian and Mahommedan systems—a struggle which began when the Saracens crossed into Spain six or seven centuries before, established themselves in that peninsula and threatened seriously to subdue and possess all Europe. Dr. Draper says of the influence exercised by the crusades: "Coming indiscriminately from all classes of communities that were scarcely elevated above barbarism, the crusaders were suddenly brought in contact with people inhabiting countries that for ages had been the seats of civilization. Their ideas were not only enlarged but their very style of thinking was changed. Whoever escaped the perils of these religious enterprises became on his return to his native place an influential and authoritative teacher. There was a weakening of the force of those maxims that heretofore had been a guide, society relieving itself of the stress of former modes of thought. It may be doubted whether that great religious movement known as the Reformation would have been possible had it not been for the occurrence of the crusades."

The words of these writers not unfitly describe the effects wrought by the Civil War in the Southern half of this Republic. That region for more than a century had been barricaded against the enlightening and humanizing influences which had been doing their work in the Northern half as in other enlightened countries. Now the barriers which had lain for more than a hundred years across the path of liberty and progress were burned away. Until the crusades there was no Europe in the sense of intellectual or other unity. The States were petty, feudal, provincial; divided by ignorance of and consequent prejudice against each other, without community of thought or aim.
From their contact with the Eastern World resulted a compact and comparatively homogeneous Europe, to a great extent free from local prejudice and religious bigotry. In a similar way, the overthrow of slavery and the educating contact with Northern armies swept away the provincial spirit that had been bred in the South by slavery. At the same time it released the North from the political bondage which for decades they had accepted as the price of peace and quiet.

Despite the struggles and sacrifice among the original States for unity, and despite the Constitution which was assumed to have effected it, there was never any real unity in the country till produced by the War of the Rebellion. The Constitution left in the Southern half of the Republic an institution alien to the genius of our people and form of government—a Republic with an absolute and irresponsible despotism within it—a system at war with the spirit of modern civilization; offensive to justice and violative of the moral sense of mankind; an institution which could not from its nature and the necessities of its existence be content even to be let alone much less subjected to gradual extinction; a living and active antagonist to free society; a constant and growing provocative of the irrepressible conflict which could never end but by the overthrow of one or other of the irreconcilable systems. Mason and Dixon's line was as real a division as if it had been a frontier between foreign peoples. It came at last to the point where the deadly issue could no longer be postponed, disguised or compromised. The South driven by the logic of their attitude as promoters of slavery had to make war for its extension. The result was the removal forever of this ele-
ment of dissension and the emergence of a Republic with one supreme vindicated authority and a compact citizenship embracing the hitherto subject race. Perhaps this result ought to be stated with some qualification, for the irritation still lingers in the South and the result is there only submitted to under protest. But we are yet not half a century away from the convulsion, and time and commerce will ultimately allay the surviving race irritation. Bryce in his "American Commonwealth," remarks that "the Southern States will long retain the imprint of slavery, not merely in the presence of a host of negroes but in the degradation of the poor-white population and in certain attributes, laudable as well as regrettable, of the ruling class." Dr. Draper, on the other hand, regards the existing alienation in the South as transient. "There is a great difference," he remarks, "between civil and foreign wars as respects the permanence of the feelings that engender. History is full of examples how speedily the feuds of a Civil War die away. Man is so constituted that he spontaneously resigns to oblivion his unsuccessful undertakings. The vanquished in a civil strife avoids a recollection of his disappointed hopes. The victor abstains from a contemplation of his success; he feels that he can afford to forget even glory; and so the memory of such events speedily passes away. New objects, new motives, new pursuits are presented and society starts again on a new basis. How brief a space it took in the old times to obliterate all memory of the awful civil wars of the Roman Empire—in later times, of those of England. It will take a still shorter period to do the same in the activity of human life in America."
The phrase that helps make the caption of this chapter is not my own, as the reader knows. It was Charles Sumner who held up before the world the "barbarism of slavery;" and his famous philippic brought swift proof of its truth in the bludgeon of "Bully Brooks." As the result of Brooks' argument, Mr. Sumner was absent from his place in the Senate for four years. When, after his return, he first rose to speak in the Senate his opening words were: "Time has passed, but the question remains." Time has passed again. Sumner is gone; slavery is gone; the lesson only remains.

Slavery was a monstrosity—at once crime and blunder. The shadow of it fell with baleful umbrage on the minds of men throughout the republic. It was not alone the planter's neighbor, under the palmetto or beside the cane or cotton field, who was constrained of his liberty of speech. The politician in New England, in the Northwest, in the Border States and the Middle Free States, in the National Capital, on the Pacific Coast — wherever he might be under the Constitution which was invoked to vivify this political monster, and under the base statute which undertook to make every citizen its servant—found the same shadow fall athwart his path; and through him, with its power to make or mar his political fortunes, its chill extended to all his friends. Now men are able to see with clear eyes and unconstrained minds, in the light of truth which they are no longer afraid of, what cowards and slaves they themselves used to be. It is hard to realize in the nobler political freedom of today how great conventions used to be held, and spectacular tableaux prepared, expressly to convince the truculent slave-masters in
the South that Northern merchants and manufacturers—and politicians—were but too happy to be door-mats for them. The specter of slavery sat in every National Convention of every party, like the skeleton at the feast; and none dared forget its presence for a moment.

The case in the South is far from hopeless. The revolution left its sequela there in new industrial problems, with the race problem in new shape, acute and trying; but it left the white people, as well as the dark, on a new level, dependent on their own energies, freed in their new relationship to the world from the old trammels; no longer bound by the caste of race, ready to rise above it as time and development of both races prepare the way. The intellectual vision of the Southern white people is broadened, their thoughts lifted to a nobler future; and in time, one must have faith, the new problems they are compelled to meet will be solved adequately and worthily, however unpromising may seem from time to time the old race antipathy. The white people there have been emancipated as well as the black. Their thought is no longer limited by the needs of an institution upon which the light of knowledge must not be permitted to shine. The younger generation are growing up in forgetfulness, if not ignorance, of the things that constrained their fathers. They are learning business, taking a place in the world's commerce; becoming nationalized; no longer citizens of a section devoted to special aims and interests, they have become citizens of the Republic. It is true, with a numerous class there still rankles the old race hatred and sense of injury; but it is also true that the educated class, with a broader and better outlook, are growing up to their new
responsibilities; and this higher stratum, with its higher morality and worthier aims, will ultimately give direction to Southern thought and find a way to an endurable relation with the dark race.

The influence of American slavery was not confined to the morals and politics of the United States. Public men in other countries, through commercial interests involved, were brought into subservience to it. In England, whose commercial relations with the Cotton-States were important and dependent, this deference was most pronounced. The need of cheap cotton made England the apologist and partisan of slavery in America though abolished in her own colonies; and by easy logical sequence made Englishmen hostile to the anti-slavery North. The manufacturers and aristocracy were friendly to the rebellion; the common people, the working people, friendly to the North; the Liberals generally for the Union, the Tories against. John Bright declared that "secession was high treason against popular suffrage; that refusal to submit to the election of Lincoln was a violation of the principle that the majority shall rule." Gladstone, professing to be liberal, ought to have been our friend but was not. His sympathies were limited by British interests. If he had any convictions regarding slavery, he was ready to sacrifice them to the needs of British trade. His liberalism did not reach out like Bright's across seas and take in the brotherhood of free peoples wherever he found them. He resented American protection of her own industries. To judgments not overawed by a name it is clear enough that Gladstone was incapable of seeing any excellence outside his own island. With ample leisure and abundant wealth, he never found
time or inclination to visit America to examine the development of the English plant in the soil of the New World. He was an eminent scholar, and few monks knew as much about the musty ecclesiasticism of his church; but he was not a statesman of the world's largest pattern.

Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton in an address to the Hertz Agricultural Society in September, 1861, had this to say:

That separation between North and South America I have long foreseen and foretold to be inevitable; and I venture to predict that the younger men here present will live to see, not two but at least four—and probably more than four—separate Southern commonwealths arising out of those populations which a year ago united their Legislature under one president and carried their merchandise under one flag.

Lord Lytton's wish was probably father to this remarkable foresight. If he had been a profound economist, he might have perceived even then the centripetal tendency of the age, stimulated by increasing popular intelligence and by the growth of scientific knowledge; a tendency which a generation later was to produce centralizations and concentration in political organization and in commerce which amaze and terrify publicists at the present hour. Unity, not disruption, was in the air even as long ago as 1861. Its first great victory was in the vindication of the American Union. Its first striking manifestation in Europe came ten years later in the unification of Germany. The division and subdivision of the American Republic was a vain dream of British greed. The South and North, reunited, continue to "unite their Legislature under one President and carry their merchandise under one flag;" and out of their new unity has arisen a power which disputes markets with the British flag in every port in the
world—which sells prints in Manchester and steel in Sheffield; which challenges the industries of every country in Europe at its own doors; a power to which—it is well to remember—England is now as deferential as she was insolent in 1861.

The average view held by the educated Tory classes in Great Britain during the American Rebellion was fairly expressed ten years before by Thomas Carlyle in a letter written by him to Hon. Beverly Tucker, of Williamsburg, Virginia, in October, 1850, in the course of which the Scotchman said:

I find it a settled conviction among rational Englishmen, which they frequently express in a careless way, that the Southern States must ultimately feel driven to separate themselves from the Northern; in which result there is not felt here to be anything treasonous or otherwise horrible.

But he closes his letter to Mr. Tucker with this word of warning:

I shall say only that the Negro Question will be left in peace when God Almighty's law about it is (with tolerable approximation) actually found out and practiced; and never till then.

The British Tories during the Rebellion, so far from seeing anything "treasonous or horrible" in the dissolution of the American Union, would have been pleased with such a consummation; and the attitude of Gladstone shows the feeling was not confined to the Tories. The English government did all it dared to help disunion. In the subsequent settlement with the United States, they paid somewhat roundly for this, though not adequately.
It may seem to the reader—and it may be true—that I have had more to say in these pages than was fitting or necessary about slavery. But, in extenuation, let it be considered that it was slavery which lay at the root of the agitations which divided this country for three-quarters of a century and culminated in the calamities that overwhelmed us in 1861. It was truly what Wesley called it, "the sum of all villainies." Out of it grew the inequalities and injustice which we in Western Virginia suffered for more than fifty years, and it was slavery which brought the proud old State down from its ancient grandeur to its later humiliation. In all the history of the republic, there has never been an issue which in morals or economic importance rose to the greatness of this. Even the struggle for independence did not involve such issues for weal or woe as lay in the later controversy that grew with the growth of the nation and cost a million lives and thousands of millions of treasure to compose.