

CHAPTER XVII.

PUBLIC OPINION—THE NEWSPAPER PRESS—
BOOKS — LECTURES — AMUSEMENTS — CON-
CLUSION.

INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION.—JUST LAWS ARE SUPPORTED
BY IT.—PUBLIC OPINION NOT ALWAYS JUST.—WHO SHOULD
LEAD PUBLIC OPINION.

Most people are less influenced in their ordinary conduct by the laws of the land than by what is called **public opinion**. It is natural and right for all of us to desire the good opinion of the people among whom we live. Many men and women are restrained from doing wrong by the thought of the disgrace that crime would bring upon them, far more than by the fear of the police and the judge. Many people, too, are prevented from doing foolish things by the fear of being laughed at. Children are particularly afraid of being laughed at by their schoolfellows. If a thing is right, we should have the courage to do it, whoever may laugh; but it is often easier to face our enemy on the field of battle than to endure ridicule from our friends.

If the laws of the land are just and reasonable, they help to make public opinion also just and reasonable, and then all good citizens help to carry them out. If the laws are cruel and partial, it becomes hard to carry them out. Honest men would often rather help a thief to escape than have him hanged for theft. When the English criminal law was so severe that if a man stole a shilling's worth of anything from a house he might be hanged, witnesses would not give true evidence, and juries would find the accused "not guilty" in spite of evidence. If people have confidence that the

accused man will have a fair trial, and a reasonable punishment, the bystanders support the police when he apprehends him, the witnesses give true evidence, and the jurymen return a true verdict.

The public opinion which has most effect upon people is that of their companions and equals, and it may be good or bad, wise or foolish. The public opinion on board a **pirate ship** would be in favor of their own business; the public opinion on board a **merchant ship**, which the pirates might plunder and sink, would be very much against that particular calling. The public opinion of the mass of **children** at school is in favor of easy lessons, easy discipline, and long holidays—but sometimes the industrious and the orderly take the lead, and support the authority of the teachers, and raise the tone of the school. The public opinion of the **work people** in a large workshop or factory is generally in favor of short hours and high wages. The public opinion of the class of **employers** is for as much to be done as cheaply as possible, and for large profits; while the public opinion outside is for cheap goods, without the same interest in the high wages or the high profits.

The large public opinion of the world should be led by the wisest and the best people whom the common folk can understand. This wise public opinion should give fair consideration to the rights and the wishes of all classes of honest people—children and teachers, masters and servants, rich and poor.

NEWSPAPERS.—A FREE PRESS THE SIGN OF A FREE COUNTRY, AND THE BEST CHECK ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT.—NEWSPAPERS PUBLISH VARIOUS KINDS OF NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENTS.—THEY COMMENT ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS, BUT DO NOT GIVE THE NAMES OF THE WRITERS.—LIBEL.—CORRESPONDENCE COLUMNS IN A NEWSPAPER.—DUTIES OF A GOOD CITIZEN WITH REGARD TO NEWSPAPERS.

We see the general public opinion of a country perhaps best in its **newspapers**. If newspapers did

not print what people generally could understand, and what they agreed with, they would not be bought and read. Though the writers in newspapers should be wiser than most of their readers, if they are a very great deal wiser people cannot follow them. In all free countries, newspapers and books are allowed great freedom in expressing opinions even the most unfavorable to the government and other established authorities. And if the newspapers did not publish the speeches in parliament, the electors would not know what their representatives were saying, and how they were voting.

There are many other things published by the newspapers which are very important to know. We have mentioned some of them already, but we may go over them again; the revenue and the expenditure of the government; the proceedings of corporations and district councils; the half-yearly balance-sheets of the banks; the statements of accounts of building societies and other joint stock companies. News not only of South Australia, but from the other colonies, from Great Britain, and all the rest of the world; some sent by telegraph, and some by ships. The proceedings in the Supreme Court, the Local courts, and the Police courts. The reports of the boards who undertake certain duties under government. Reports of public meetings, and what was said and resolved on. The public news of the day, the accidents that happen, the amusements that are going on, races, regattas, and cricket matches. Some people like one kind of news, and some another.

There is not only news in the newspapers; there are advertisements, too. If anyone has anything to sell, he generally advertises it in the newspaper. Things lost and found, situations wanted, houses to let or sell, sales by auction, and a great variety of other things are advertised in the newspapers where a great many people will see them. In old times, when few people could read, a man with a bell was sent round a town

advertising anything lost and found, or a sale by auction, with his voice. But now, instead of paying a man for doing this, they pay the newspaper something for printing an advertisement according to its length; and if anyone wants anything he can generally find in these columns where to get it. Births, deaths, and marriages are advertised in this way, which is a very convenient one for letting a thing be generally known.

But newspapers do more than collect news, and give reports, and print advertisements. They **comment on public affairs** -- that is to say, they point out what, in the writer's opinion, is good or bad in any public proceedings. They praise or blame the ministry or the government of the day. They criticise any new law that may be brought forward, and give their reasons for thinking it good or bad, or one part good and another part bad. They may urge a new law, or a new way of conducting the country's business, on the attention of the parliament. They may comment on the trials of criminals, and say that a punishment was too light or too heavy. They may criticise the proceedings in the Supreme Court, or the police courts, or the insolvency court. They may find fault with any government officer who does not do his duty.

Newspaper writers do not sign their names to what they write, so that no one knows exactly who has written these comments. They are allowed freely to praise or find fault with all **public men in their public work**, but not to bring their private affairs or any private person's affairs into notice in their columns. The proprietors of the newspapers are answerable for what they allow to be printed without a signature in their columns. If any person supposes that he is injured by anything that they have printed against his character, he may bring an action against these proprietors for **libel**. The person libelled is the **plaintiff**, and the newspaper owners are the **defendants**. If the jury consider that the remarks of the newspaper were false or unjustifiable, they make the defendants pay

damages to the plaintiff and bear the costs of both sides. There are often letters in the newspapers signed by real names, and often by fancy names; but the writer must give his real name to the editor or the manager of the newspaper, for he is responsible for what is printed in the paper unless he gives up the real name of the writer.

A newspaper is a great convenience to everybody, and the free criticisms which it makes on public affairs is of the greatest importance to the liberties of the country. The newspaper **partly leads and partly follows** public opinion, and it is the duty of a good citizen to discourage newspapers that deal in scandalous stories or abusive articles. The great expense of furnishing the news is paid for partly by the price of the paper, and partly by the price paid for advertisements. The first newspaper printed in Adelaide was a very little sheet, and it cost a shilling, because there were few to buy and few to advertise.

MAGAZINES, REVIEWS, AND BOOKS.—INFLUENCE OF GOOD BOOKS.—SMITH'S "WEALTH OF NATIONS."—LECTURES.—AMUSEMENTS.—AMUSEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE CRUEL OR INDECENT.—SOME THINGS SHOULD NOT BE MADE FUN OF.—PRACTICAL JOKES SOMETIMES VERY DANGEROUS.—PEOPLE SHOULD NOT LIVE ONLY FOR AMUSEMENT.—OUT-OF-DOOR SPORTS HEALTHY AND INNOCENT.

There are other publications besides newspapers in which we may get information and learn the public opinion of the world. There are magazines, and reviews, and books. Many things are proposed and recommended in books for many years before they find their way into newspapers, or are carried out in parliaments. It is more than a hundred years since Dr. Adam Smith published a book called "The Wealth of Nations," which has perhaps had a greater effect on public opinion than any book written for a thousand years. But it took seventy years before its arguments led the English people to do away with the protective duty on

corn, and many of its principles are but imperfectly comprehended by ordinary people even at the present day.

Sometimes people learn a good deal from lectures, in which the voice of the speaker makes the information more impressive, as in your oral lessons at school. Lectures on scientific subjects should, if possible, be accompanied by diagrams and experiments to show clearly what the lecturer explains.

There are also books which are only meant to amuse, and concerts, and other entertainments, from which you may not learn anything, but which makes a cheerful break in work. The tired body and the tired mind sometimes need to be refreshed or recruited. As a change from bodily labors and hard study, innocent amusement is a very good thing. A hearty laugh is the most natural, the most refreshing, and the most infectious thing in the world. Once raise a laugh, and how it spreads among those who hear it! And there are so many absurd things and absurd people in the world that we may have plenty to laugh at. There are many witty turns of speech and funny stories in books and in talk that are really and innocently amusing, but **some amusements are cruel.** The deadly combats of the gladiators with each other, and the setting wild beasts to fight with criminals and with Christians (who were accounted as criminals) which were the favorite amusements of the Roman people under the empire, were barbarously cruel. The bull fights of Spain are cruel. The old English sport of cock fighting was cruel.

Amusements should not be indecent, either in action or language. **We should not turn into ridicule any thing which we know to be sacred or honorable.** We should not play practical jokes for fun which are dangerous to our neighbour's life, or limbs, or reason. Many persons have been killed, and maimed, and driven mad by people playing tricks upon them. **We should not laugh at poverty, or old age, or infirmity, or**

sorrow, for that is cruel laughter. Our power of enjoying what is really witty and funny is destroyed if we laugh at everything for the sake of laughing. Although amusement is a good thing, we should not live for amusement alone, for a life all made up of merriment is as wearisome as a life that is all made up of hard work. If all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, all play and no work makes Jack not only a useless boy, but generally a very discontented one. The happiest people in the world are the busy people, whose work interests them and whose play refreshes them.

Out of door sports and games, such as cricket, football, and athletic sports, are healthful and interesting to all young people.

BETTING.—CAUSES OF THE LOVE OF GAMBLING.—NO GAIN TO SOCIETY FROM BETTING WITH HONEST PEOPLE.—GREAT LOSSES FROM BETTING WITH DISHONEST PEOPLE.—DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENTS.—MUCH GOOD DONE BY INNOCENT AMUSEMENTS.

Some amusements which are in themselves quite innocent are made mischievous by the common practice of betting money on them. There is no harm in a horse-race in itself; it is interesting to see how fleetly these beautiful highly-trained creatures can clear the course. But the betting upon which horse will win the race is not so harmless. Neither is the staking of a sum of money on which cards will be dealt out of a pack, or which number will be thrown with dice. Indeed, even games of pure skill, and trials of strength in running and jumping, may be made subjects for wagering and winning and losing money. The love of gambling in every shape which is so common arises from two chief causes. One is the desire for unearned money; the other is that everyone believes his judgment is rather better than that of the man he bets with. But even in betting with honest people, if one man wins five pounds the other man loses it, and

the transaction does no good at all. If a man earns five pounds, he does work for it that the person who employs him thinks is worth more than five pounds to him. In betting, however, particularly on races and walking matches, there are many dishonest people who understand far more about the chances than the ordinary bettor. These make it their business to profit by their knowledge, and therefore, in the long run, they gain a great deal more than they lose, and the ordinary honest bettors lose much more than they can possibly gain.

Another kind of amusement, the *theatre*, or what is called **dramatic entertainment**, is in itself both natural and innocent. Even little children like to pretend to be somebody else, and act a little story, trying to keep up the pretence by dressing up and speaking as they think these other people would do. Some of the greatest writers in the world have written plays to be acted, which are very interesting, amusing, and instructive. Many of these plays have a very good influence on the mind, and when they are acted by people trained to speak beautifully, and to move gracefully and naturally, they give a great deal of innocent pleasure. But theatres should be kept clear from drinking-bars, and should not be such a resort for low characters as they are. Though they may be innocent in themselves, their surroundings are often very bad. It is in the power of the legislature to do away with these bad surroundings, but the manner in which many good people have kept altogether away from the theatre has prevented public opinion from reforming it by this time.

If we have a liking for innocent amusements, we can have no pleasure in cruel or coarse ones. It helps to empty the public-houses, the jails, and the lunatic asylums when people have cheerful homes and occasional public amusements that are pure and wholesome. Some grave conscientious people think that all amusements are dangerous, but the desire for them is natural

to all young people, and to most of those who are grown up. A good citizen should try to improve the faults of the amusements that are in fashion, or to put something better in their place. It would be impossible to forbid them altogether, and even if it were possible it would be very unwise.

PEOPLE ARE NOT ALL EQUALLY CLEVER.—HAPPINESS DEPENDS ON GOODNESS.—AIM OF THIS LITTLE WORK.—CONCLUSION.

People are not all equally clever, any more than they are equally tall or equally handsome; but if everyone turned to the best account the abilities God has given him, this would be a happier and a better world.

Even in this world the observance of the **moral laws is the cause of our happiness**, and helps to make the observance of all other laws the more easy and pleasant. Obedience to the golden rule, to do to others as we would be done by, and temperance in eating and drinking, would give our judges and juries less to do in punishing crimes and settling disputes. These things, if carried out, would empty the jails and the hospitals, and the asylums, and make many homes that are now unhappy bright and cheerful. They would secure for helpless childhood tenderness and care from their parents, and for feeble old age reverence and love from their children and grandchildren.

This little book is not meant so much to lay down the law, as to interest all the young people in South Australia in the things which promote order, goodness, and happiness.

Many past generations have built up so far the knowledge of the world, but it is left to those who succeed us, to build on the old foundations, with new materials and with added experience. Let us hope that the children who are now learning **the laws they live under, and the duties of citizens**, will do something towards raising a still nobler and loftier structure.