

Notes on

*The Glass of Fashion*¹

By a "Gentleman with a Duster"

New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921

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Introduction

Folly, not vice, is the enemy. Our curse is not original sin but original stupidity.²

The object of this book is to convince people of two truths hitherto obscured by tolerance and careless thinking—the danger of folly! The value to a liberal state of a valid aristocracy.

Chapt. I: Principles of the Commonwealth

Not by the triumph of the battlefield and the forum will the Commonwealth seek to be justified, but by the character and the influence, the noble example and the inspiring memory of its men and women.

That is to say, the meaning of England is neither Imperialism nor State Slavery, but Moral Character. She is the very antithesis of Prussianism, and the very antipodes of Bolshevism. Her strength, power, and dominion lie

¹ The envelope with title, "*The Glass of Fashion* by the [pseudonym] 'Gentleman with a Duster,' Notes on" included a manuscript with Earl Davis' hand-written notes—largely quotations from—*The Glass of Fashion: Some Social Reflections*. A separate envelope contained Earl Davis' notes on the earlier book, *The Mirrors of Downing Street*, by the same pseudonymous author.

² Much—but not all—of the text in this document appears to be transcribed by Earl Davis from the book, *The Glass of Fashion*. Direct quotations are indented.

in no machinery of State, but in the moral character of her individual citizens.

England, still far short of her ideal, stands in a world of many diverse doctrines, and a world at many different levels of civilization, for Liberty and Character. (Page 15.)

But how is fashion measuring up to the requirements of Liberty and Character?

Chap II + III: Colonel Repington's Diaries

Chap IV + V: Mrs. Asquith's Autobiography

Both reveal a cynical flippancy, a lack of inward earnestness as compared with Mr. Gladstone or Gladstone of the Victorian period.

Effect of this Life of Fashion on the virtues is very great and very bad. The fault runs deep. See chapter on Manners, Chap. VIII.

We possess in place of an aristocracy of culture a powerful and cynical plutocracy which is as wholly given to the worship of Mammon as any nation of heathen times. (p. 122)

He [the Englishman] calls it very bad manners to dress loudly, to talk at the top of the voice, to make a display of jewelry, to conduct a household ostentatiously, to be pushful, noisy, extravagant, showy, and brazen... [p. 124.]

It runs deep.

Chap XI: Conclusion

In the course of this essay I have advanced certain propositions which may be summarized as follows:

Fashion, because of its conspicuous position in the State, exercises the greatest of all influences on the nation.

The influences of modern Fashion are injurious to the peaceful evolution of the British Commonwealth, being the influences of ostentation, self-indulgence, lawlessness, cynicism, and frivolity.

The influence of Iniquity is not to be so greatly feared by a nation as the influence of Folly.

It is by the domestic door, rather than the economic, that violence enters a State.

The social, political, and moral health of a community depends mainly upon its attitude towards life, that is to say, its theory of existence.

In a rational theory of existence it is impossible to divorce time from its context of eternity, place from its context of infinity, man from his context of evolution.

At the head of a nation there should be an aristocracy of intelligence whose manner of life exhibits the truth of this theory. [pp. 167-168.]

A book with a sense of the reality of the moral values, but confuses moral forms with the moral character. (See Chap. VIII). The forms of a passing generation, the Victorian age, appeal to the author, quite regardless, it would seem, of their real ethical content, and yet he realizes that some form [of] every act, and every person, is measured by ethical standards.

The remaining pages of this manuscript are direct quotations from the book

Mrs. Asquith drew up a summary of her history and her aspirations. The last of those aspirations was for "a crowded memorial service." Will Lady Frances Balfour defend the vulgarity of soul which inspired that aspiration? Is there not in this passion for a last crowd, as it were a last audience, something that shocks us in the depths of our nature more than the sins of the weak and the uneducated?

Much is to be learned from that flippancy. Does it not witness to an immense desolation of the woman's heart? She does not dare to be alone with herself even in the grave. She would have the fashionable world, and the photographers of the

illustrated papers, as near her coffin as burial will permit. As the tree falls, so would it lie. As she has sown, so would she reap. What vulgarity! (page 118-119.)

If there is one great and controlling principle in the behavior of the average good Englishman it is the principle of reserve.

This virtue is not always the higher virtue of modesty, but it makes for that virtue. The characteristic Englishman does not advertise either his position or his possessions. He calls it very bad manners to dress loudly, to talk at the top of the voice, to make a display of jewelry, to conduct a household ostentatiously, to be pushful, noisy, extravagant, showy, and brazen; these things he regards as "bad form." They have no temptations for him. They are distasteful. (Page 124.)

These vulgar people have used money to advertise their wares, and now would use the money made by that advertisement to advertise themselves. The shop window is transferred from commercial to social life. Reserve in business would be ruin; reserve in social life would be suicide. As they attracted the public to buy their goods, so they would attract the aristocracy to a knowledge of their arrival in *Vanity Fair*. They advertise their existence by hanging their women with jewels, by building palatial houses, and by giving entertainments which in every detail flash wealth in the eyes of their parasitic guests. [pp. 124-125.]

[Chapter VIII:] Manners.

Consider these people, then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voices; look at them attentively; observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that

one was to become just like these people by having it? -Matthew Arnold (cited in *The Glass of Fashion*, page 113.)

[Chapter IX: Examples in Love]

It is the unconscious, rather than the conscious, which is the important factor in personality and intelligence. The unconscious furnishes the formative material out of which our judgments, our beliefs, our ideals, and our characters are shaped.-Morton Prince (cited in *The Glass of Fashion*, page 137.)