

PROFESSOR F. W. NEWMAN ON AMERICA

Speech

*Delivered by Professor F.W. Newman,
in St. James's Hall, London, on the 23rd Feb., 1863,*

*At the banquet to celebrate the
Anniversary of Washington's Birthday.*

Reprinted from the "Manchester Examiner and Times."

Published for the Union and Emancipation Society of Manchester.
Offices: 51, Piccadilly, Manchester

Alex. Ireland & Co., Printers, Pall Mall Court, Manchester.

Pamphlet owned by the Boston Athenaeum, 10 ½ Beacon St. Boston, MA 02108.
Transcribed by Rachel Jirka, May 2009,
for publication by

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen,—This is a festive meeting, but the toast on which I am to speak is a serious one, and the speeches of those who have preceded me have been deep-hearted and earnest. I am sure, then, that you wish me to vent my heart. Glozing flatteries will do no good now, nor at any time. My toast declares that the United States and Great Britain are “Compeers in the march of civilisation.” You are aware that many of our great men think them not to be compeers, but rivals. This would be well enough if they meant that we are rivals in the sense that any two great powers are rivals. But they do not mean this. It is because you are republican, and we are monarchical, that properly antagonistic between us; the very idea savours of a bygone philosophy, which a new state of things has superseded. Are, indeed, two monarchies always natural friends? Were France and England for four centuries together in tender amity? The earliest speculators on politics taught that there were three forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, democracy. But with them monarchy meant despotism; and to Greeks and Romans alike this appeared almost necessary; for in those days all experience had made men despair of effectually limiting monarchy, especially over an extended country. Aristocracy in modern times hardly exists, except in the worst of all forms, that of the government of race by race. We need now a totally new classification. In fact, we easily see the spirit of institutions is more important than their form. The great question is: At what do they aim? Is it at general justice and general welfare? The moderns have invented the word constitutional, as discriminative of wise governments. Practically there are still three forms:

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1. The despotic, or rule of personal will, whether in a man or in an order of men. 2. The rule of routine of mortmain, as in China or Turkey, where the law is unchangeable, being made by dead men, at accounted sacred. 3. The rule of a living constitution, where law is indeed supreme, yet is changeable after public deliberation. To have this principle in common is nearer bond than to have or not to have a kind. I claim that England and your great Union are closely allied. So we ought to be, when, in my lifetime, three millions of our nation are computed to have emigrated to you. You are well aware on what the excellence of polity depends. It must lay down the rights of individuals and give securities for those rights. It must enable the law to be enforced, and it must provide for full, mature, orderly deliberation, before a law is changed. Equality before the law; publicity of the law courts, of the budget, of debate; fair representation of men and orders;—such, and other such, are the elements. But I check myself, lest I seem to think that you can now listen to a lecture on politics. I wish merely to insist, that while England and America have such elements in common, there is nothing antagonistic in the fact of republicanism and monarchy. One constitution may be far better arranged in details than another; one may provide magistrates more efficient, or organisation more thorough; but this is equally true of monarchy as compared to monarchy, or democracy as compared with democracy. Few Englishmen doubt that the monarchies of the Bourbons in France, Sicily, and Spain have been bad; you will confess that the democracy of South Carolina is not good. But I go further, and must, add, that you of the Union have shown gloriously the possession of precisely that quality which the English confess to by of chief moment; a quality wholly lacking in your rebels; I mean that which Mr. Grote, our great historian of ancient Greece, calls constitutional morality. You have shown marvelous power to abide the process of law. Sincerely, I saw, it has given me a new view of you. I look back with admiration at the terrible four months which intervened from the manifesto of secession by South Carolina to President Lincoln's calls for troops to defend Washington. When I remember how President Buchanan allowed traitors in office to empty your arsenals, docks, and treasury, to

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seize your fortresses, to act and propagate treason and refused to put out a finger to stop them; that this went on for three months of his government, and that you endured it patiently, solely because you waited till Mr. Lincoln, your elect, should legitimately assume power, and because you would do nothing illegally, even when illegally assailed and betrayed, I do admire you. Louis XVI. had his head cut off for an inaction against the public enemy, and a conspiracy of his queen with that enemy, far less in magnitude than the deeds of Mr. Buchanan. So great was your patience, that we here supposed you were going to make a shameful and disastrous compromise. I was myself all but dismayed, before your glorious uprising, when the President made his call for troops. Then, first I understood the suppressed fire which lay deep in your hearts, but flamed out when the hour and the man called you. So again, when you were justly indignant at our conduct and had become violently agitated by our ministers arming against you, most wonderfully did you lay aside, in twenty-four hours, all your wrath, when your own rulers pronounced that you were wrong in the matter of the *Trent*. You bowed at once to the law, though you were only lashed into frenzy by our display of force. I had been used to think you a more excitable people than we: the conduct of our upper classes during the Indian mutiny and *Trent* affair, make me now doubt it. Be this as it may, I find you to be pre-eminently law-abiding; and a people which has this quality is well fitted to be our friend, even if, in other respects, it were widely different from us. The high development of mechanism and all practical science among you, fits you to be out compeers in the march of civilisation. Whether in the inventions of industry or the dreadful engines of war; in steamships or telegraphs, or sewing machines, the American yields to none. In the organism of society, in the regulation of provinces, districts, parishes, schools, prisons, church-unions, you never fall below us; and you always proceed in that spirit and with that aim which we deliberately approve. In international affairs I expect from you high service. In literature and high art you appreciate whatever is best from us, and in a single century have produced noble originals. Fitly, then, are you counted our compeers, if, as an Englishman,

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I may make sure that we are your compeers. Undoubtedly there are great differences in our positions and in the elements of society, especially as to land and aristocracy. We are cramped for land; you have enough, and to spare. May I not even say that you have too much? For, I understand, in your Eastern States large masses of land, though excellent, cannot be cultivated because there is so much land far better in the west. As to aristocracy, again, you have on one side a great advantage over us. The power which resists the change is with us in excess, so that all our reforms come a quarter of a century or half a century too late. Society from within moves rapidly; the shell of society refuses to expand and adapt itself proportionably; hence, great suffering and bitterness of heart. But you are plastic, and speedily adjust the machine of society to the life within. Such a constitution as you struck off for California in the 30 days it might have taken an English colony 30 years to win. Nevertheless, I venture to think that you have also suffered from the want of aristocracy. Gentlemen of the South have become statesmen of the Union in very disproportionate numbers in part because you of the North have had no hereditary class free from the cares and pre-occupations of private business. It may be my English error; but I nourish the hope that, in the future, our aristocracy, after we have reformed it (for we shall have to reform, certainly not destroy it), will give us a high advantage. I cannot assent to those who, on principle, grudge to see the nobility in high office and their sons in Parliament. What else is a nobility for, but for such service? and what but corruption and degeneracy can come on them, if they be excluded from it? What more certain than that they will become disaffected, mischievous, dangerous citizens? The grievance is that they should be a caste apart, with interests and pride not those of the nation. But it is a grand thing to know that a certain family has trustworthy hereditary qualities; nor do I say that your nation will not to a certain extent learn to honour special families, though the name of nobility be not lawful. The name Adams is honoured by you now in a third generation. I would suggest to every lady of that family to superadd the name Adams to every son. In such ways you may, like those inventors of family names, the old Romans, propagate a real aristocracy.

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In my belief, the two nations are destined more and more to act and react upon one another, by peaceful and healthful means. There will be a rivalry, no doubt. We shall be a mutual restraint. That is much to be desired. No one in private life could wish to be without control; and for nations also it is ruinous. Our calamity in Asia has been the want of equals, and of prohibition from without. You likewise have been too superior to the States on your Southern borders. In fact, I see in all history a painful phenomenon, that the very virtues of a people are apt to make it a curse to its neighbours, unless its government be held in sharp check by foreign power. Virtue, industry, frugality, mutual trust, obedience to the law, patriotism, lead to rapid increase in population and wealth; put into the hands of rulers great revenues, great armaments, and into their hearts great ambition. We ought, therefore to be thankful for having powerful rivals. But I do reject and denounce, as monstrous folly, that petty jealousy which dreads that you are going to be too powerful for us, if your great Union retain its vast territory unimpaired. I said I would speak freely. I do not deny that many of our upper classes wish you to be broken in pieces; but I will rebut their argument from a totally opposite side. Look at the map of Europe. Can any rational man expect, that by mere bulk of population and wealth England will in the future exercise as great influence as in the past? Of course, Germany, when united and free, will be a mighty power. What will Poland be? What Russia? What Italy and Spain? After they are well governed, they will increase far more rapidly than we can, except in Ireland. A century hence, many great states will outweigh us in Europe. Our influence, if it continue great, will be true moral influence; not, what is spuriously so called, the influence of covert threats. If we are notoriously disinterested lovers of humanity, excellently governed, oppressors of none, and abounding with valuable traditions, these things may give us high influence. But if severe quarrels are still destined to arise, to whom are we to look for congenial allies,—for supporters in every cause of justice, freedom, and humanity,—but to our own flesh and blood in our great colonies, having a common language, common literature, substantially the same form of religion,

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eminently the same in sentiment, the same zeal for civil and social freedom? All colonies unless affronted by tyranny, look back with affection to the mother country. For England to be jealous of America or Australia, would be as absurd as for old Peleus to look with an evil eye on the prowess of his son Achilles. England in the future will be always strong enough to hold what is strictly her own. For aid in establishing right through the world, what better can she hope or wish than the powerful support of scores of millions of English descent, speaking the English tongue? I am well aware that there is among you a party which is ordinarily hostile to us; and that of late many of you may feel that you have something to revenge. But we have lately had a beautiful symbol of reconciliation. When the half starving workmen of the North sent their first warm salutation to your President, it was crossed on the ocean by a ship of yours bearing a bountiful gift of food for their needs. These ships of kindly humanity will be long remembered. But if you must have some revenge on our aristocracy, your surest as well as noblest revenge will be in governing your own country well, and making us envy your good laws and your broad fields. That will bring a bitter pang to jealous hearts. And, after contracting a national debt judiciously, as you have done, show that you can pay it off judiciously, as we have not done. And, in revenge for our outcry against your repudiation, reproach us for our perpetual unpaid debt. I have yet a serious remark and argument. For one gloomy fortnight I did think it possible that we might be precipitated into a horrible war with you, so bent upon it did some appear to be. At that time a deputation from the Peace Society waited on Earl Russell; and, reciting the promises made at the peace of Paris in 1856, which had been adopted by the leaders of both parties in each House of Parliament, implored him, come what might, to seek arbitration before taking up war against you. Earl Russell is said to have replied that this was a case affecting our honor, and therefore (!) arbitration was impossible. Yet, surely, of all possible cases, this is the one which most needs and most admits of arbitration. Such an answer is utterly to nullify pretended principle. When I consider all that was then pending—the horrors of our fighting in such a cause, and the certain

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moral results to the world—I dare not in this company say all that I feel; I might displease some of my countrymen here present; but I will most emphatically say, that that reply of Earl Russell was very astonishing. In fine, I implore you to insist on the principle of arbitration, as the commencement of real international tribunals. Our two nations have but one heart. Let us put a bridle on the pettiness of public men, and our future shall be, as my toast declares, that of warm goodwill and peace.

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