

**THE AMERICAN DEMOCRAT;
OR, HINTS ON THE SOCIAL
AND CIVIC RELATIONS OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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BY

J. FENIMORE COOPER.

COOPERSTOWN

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INTRODUCTION.

This little work has been written, in consequence of its author's having had many occasions to observe the manner in which principles that are of the last importance to the happiness of the community, are getting to be confounded in the popular mind. Notions that are impracticable, and which if persevered in, cannot fail to produce disorganization, if not revolution, are widely prevalent, and while many seem disposed to complain, few show a disposition to correct them. In those instances in which efforts are made to resist or to advance the innovations of the times, the writers take the extremes of the disputed points, the one side looking as far behind it, over ground that can never be retrod, as the other looks ahead, in the idle hope of substituting a fancied perfection for the ills

of life. It is the intention of this book to make a commencement towards a more just discrimination between truth and prejudice. With what success the task has been accomplished, the honest reader will judge for himself.

The Americans are obnoxious to the charge of tolerating gross personalities, a state of things that encourages bodies of men in their errors while it oppresses individuals, and which never produced good of any sort, at the very time they are nationally irritable on the subject of common failings. This is reversing the case as it exists in most civilized countries, where personalities excite disgust, and society is deemed fair game. This weakness in the American character might easily be accounted for, but, the object being rather to amend than to explain, the body of the work is referred to for examples.

Power always has most to apprehend from its own illusions. Monarchs have incurred more hazards from the follies of their own

that have grown up under the adulation of parasites, than from the machinations of their enemies ; and, in a democracy, the delusion that would elsewhere be poured into the ears of the prince, is poured into those of the people. It is hoped that this work, while free from the spirit of partizanship, will be thought to be exempt from this imputation.

The writer believes himself to be as good a democrat as there is in America. But his democracy is not of the impracticable school. He prefers a democracy to any other system, on account of its comparative advantages, and not on account of its perfection. He knows it has evils ; great and increasing evils, and evils peculiar to itself ; but he believes that monarchy and aristocracy have more. It will be very apparent to all who read this book, that he is not a believer in the scheme of raising men very far above their natural propensities.

A long absence from home, has, in a certain degree, put the writer in the situation of

a foreigner in his own country ; a situation probably much better for noting peculiarities, than that of one who never left it. Two things have struck him painfully on his return ; a disposition in the majority to carry out the opinions of the system to extremes, and a disposition in the minority to abandon all to the current of the day, with the hope that this current will lead, in the end, to radical changes. Fifteen years since, all complaints against the institutions were virtually silenced, whereas now it is rare to hear them praised, except by the mass, or by those who wish to profit by the favors of the mass.

In the midst of these conflicting opinions, the voice of simple, honest, and what, in a country like this, ought to be fearless, truth, is nearly smothered ; the one party effecting its ends by fulsome, false and meretricious eulogiums, in which it does not itself believe, and the other giving utterance to its discontent in useless and unmanly complaints.

It has been the aim of the writer to avoid both these errors also.

No attempt has been made to write very profound treatises on any of the subjects of this little book. The limits and objects of the work forbade it; the intention being rather to present to the reader those opinions that are suited to the actual condition of the country, than to dwell on principles more general. A work of the size of this might be written on the subject of "Instruction" alone, but it has been the intention to present reasons and facts to the reader, that are peculiarly American, rather than to exhaust the subjects.

Had a suitable compound offered, the title of this book would have been something like "Anti-Cant," for such a term expresses the intention of the writer, better, perhaps, than the one he has actually chosen. The work is written more in the spirit of censure than of praise, for its aim is correction; and virtues bring their own reward, while errors are dangerous.