New York

James Fenimore Cooper

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THE increase of the towns of Manhattan, as, for the sake of convenience, we shall term New York and her adjuncts, in all that contributes to the importance of a great commercial mart, renders them one of the most remarkable places of the present age. Within the distinct recollections of living men, they have grown from a city of the fifth or sixth class to be near the head of all the purely trading places of the known world. That there are sufficient causes for this unparalleled prosperity, will appear in the analysis of the natural advantages of the port, in its position, security, accessories, and scale.

The State of New York had been steadily advancing in population, resources, and power, ever since the peace of 1785. At that time it bore but a secondary rank among what were then considered the great States of the Confederacy. Massachusetts, proper and singly, then outnumbered us, while New England, collectively, must have had some six or seven times our people. A very few years of peace, however, brought material changes. In 1790, the year in which the first census under the law of Congress was taken, the State already contained 340,120 souls, while New England had a few more than a million. It is worthy of remark that, sixty years since, the entire State had but little more than half of the population of the Manhattanese towns at the present moment! Each succeeding census diminished these proportions, until that of l830, when the return for the State of New York gave 1,372,812, and for New England 1,954,709. At this time, and for a considerable period preceding and succeeding it, it was found that the proportion between the people of the State of New York and the people of the city, was about as ten to one. Between 1830 and 1840, the former had so far increased in numbers as to possess as many people as ALL New England. In the next decade, this proportion was exceeded; and the late returns show that New York, singly, has passed ahead of all her enterprising neighbors in that section of the Union. At the same time, the old proportion between the State and the town−−or, to be more accurate, the TOWNS on the Bay of New York and its waters−−has been entirely lost, five to one being near the truth at the present moment. It is easy to foresee that the time is not very distant when two to one will be maintained with difficulty, as between the State and its commercial capital.

Bold as the foregoing prediction may seem, the facts of the last half century will, we think, justify it. If the Manhattan towns, or Manhattan, as we shall not scruple to term the several places that compose the prosperous sisterhood at the mouth of the Hudson−−a name that is more ancient and better adapted to the history, associations, and convenience of the place than any other−−continue to prosper as they have done, ere the close of the present century they will take their station among the capitals of the first rank. It may require a longer period to collect the accessories of a first−class place, for these are the products of time and cultivation; though the facilities of intercourse, the spirit of the age, and the equalizing sentiment that marks the civilization of the epoch, will greatly hasten everything in the shape of improvement.

New York will probably never possess any churches of an architecture to attract attention for their magnitude and magnificence. The policy of the country, which separates religion from the state, precludes this, by confining all the expenditures of this nature to the several parishes, few of which are rich enough to do more than erect edifices of moderate dimensions and cost. The Romish Church, so much addicted to addressing the senses, manifests some desire to construct its cathedrals, but they are necessarily confined to the limits and ornaments suited to the resources of a branch of the church that, in this country, is by no means affluent. The manner in which the Americans are subdivided into sects also conflicts with any commendable desire that may exist to build glorious temples in honor of the Deity: and convenience is more consulted than taste, perhaps, in all that relates to ecclesiastical architecture. Nevertheless, a sensible improvement in this respect has occurred within the last few years, to which we shall elsewhere advert.

It will be in their trade, their resources, their activity, and their influence on the rest of the world, as well as in their population, that the towns of Manhattan will be first entitled to rank with the larger capitals of Europe. So obvious, rapid, and natural has been the advance of all the places, that it is not easy for the mind to regard anything belonging to them as extraordinary, or out of rule. There is not a port in the whole country that is less indebted to art and the fostering hand of Government than this. It is true, certain forts, most of them of very doubtful necessity, have been constructed for defence; but no attack having ever been contemplated, or, if

contemplated, attempted, they have been dead letters in the history of its progress. We are not aware that Government has ever expended one cent in the waters of Manhattan, except for the surveys, construction of the aforesaid military works, and the erection of the lighthouses, that form a part of the general provision for the safe navigation of the entire coast. Some money has been expended for the improvement of the shallow waters of the Hudson; but it has been as much, or more, for the advantage of the upper towns, and the trade coastwise, generally, than for the special benefit of New York.

The immense natural advantages of the bays and islands at the mouth of the Hudson have, in a great degree, superseded the necessity of such assistance. Nature has made every material provision for a mart of the first importance: and perhaps it has been fortunate that the towns have been left, like healthful and vigorous children, managed by prudent parents, to take the inclination and growth pointed out to them by this safest and best of guides.

London is indebted to artificial causes, in a great degree, for its growth and power. That great law of trade, which renders settling places indispensable, has contributed to her prosperity and continued ascendency, long after the day when rival ports are carrying away her fleets and commerce. She is a proof of the difficulty of shaking a commercial superiority long established. Scarce a cargo that enters the ports of the kingdom that does not pay tribute to her bankers or merchants. But London is a political capital, and that in a country where the representation of the Government is more imposing, possessing greater influence, than in any other Christian nation. The English aristocracy, which wields the real authority of the state, here makes its annual exhibition of luxury and wealth, such as the world has never beheld anywhere else, ancient Rome possibly excepted, and has had a large share in rendering London what it is.

New York has none of this adventitious aid. Both of the Governments, that of the United States and that of the State, have long been taken from her, leaving her nothing of this sort but her own local authorities. But representation forms no part of the machinery of American policy. It is supposed that man is too intellectual and philosophical to need it, in this intellectual and philosophical country, PAR EXCELLENCE. Although such is the theory, the whole struggle in private life is limited to the impression made by representation in the hands of individuals. That which the Government has improvidently cast aside, society has seized upon: and hundreds who have no claim to distinction beyond the possession of money, profit by the mistake to place themselves in positions perhaps that they are not always exactly qualified to fill. Of all social usurpations, that of mere money is the least tolerable−−as one may have a very full purse with empty brains and vulgar tastes and habits. The wisdom of thus throwing the control of a feature of society, that is of much more moment than is commonly supposed, into the chapter of commercial accidents may well he questioned

Some crude attempts have been made to bring the circles of New York within the control of a code prepared and promulgated through the public press. They who have made these abortive attempts have been little aware of the power with which they have to contend. Napoleon himself, who could cause the conscription to enter every man's dwelling, could not bring the coteries of the Faubourg under his influence. In this respect, society will make its own laws, appeal to its own opinions, and submit only to its own edicts. Association is beyond the control of any regular and peaceful government, resting on influences that seem, in a great measure, to be founded in nature−−the most inflexible of all rulers. Tastes, conditions, connections, habits, and even prejudices, unite to form a dynasty that never has yet been dethroned. New York is nearer to a state of nature, probably, as regards all its customs and associations, than any other well−established place that could be named. With six hundred thousand souls, collected from all parts of Christendom−−with no upper class recognized by, or in any manner connected with, the institutions, it would seem that the circles might enact their own laws, and the popular principle be brought to bear socially on the usages of the town−−referring fashion and opinion altogether to a sort of popular will. The result is not exactly what might be expected under the circumstances, the past being intermingled with the present time, in spite of theories and various opposing interests; and, in many instances, caprice is found to be stronger than reason.

{conscription = the military draft; the Faubourg = the fashionable neighborhoods of Paris; the popular principle = democracy}

We have no desire to exaggerate, or to color beyond their claims, the importance of the towns of Manhattan. No one can better understand the vast chasm which still exists between London and New York, and how much the latter has to achieve before she can lay claim to be the counterpart of that metropolis of Christendom. It is not so

much our intention to dilate on existing facts, as to offer a general picture, including the past, the present, and the future, that may aid the mind in forming something like a just estimate of the real importance and probable destinies of this emporium of the New World.

It is now just three−and−twenty years since, that, in another work, we ventured to predict the great fortunes that were in reserve for this American mart, giving some of the reasons that then occurred to us that had a tendency to produce such a result. These predictions drew down upon us sneers, not to say derision, in certain quarters, where nothing that shadows forth the growing power of this republic is ever received with favor. The intervening period has more than fulfilled our expectations. In this short interval, the population of the Manhattan towns has more than trebled, while their wealth and importance have probably increased in a greatly magnified proportion. Should the next quarter of a century see this ratio in growth continued, London would be very closely approached in its leading element of superiority−−numbers. We have little doubt that the present century will bring about changes that will place the emporium of the Old World and that of the New nearly on a level. This opinion is given with a perfect knowledge of the vast increase of the English capital itself, and with a due allowance for its continuance. We propose, in the body of this work, to furnish the reasons justifying these anticipations.

{another work = James Fenimore Cooper, "Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor" (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1828)−−a detailed description, in the guise of letters written by a fictitious Belgian traveler, of the geography, history, economy, government, and culture of the United States}

Seventeen years since, the writer returned home from a long residence in Europe, during which he had dwelt for years in many of the largest towns of that quarter of the world. At a convivial party in one of the most considerable dwellings in Broadway, the conversation turned on the great improvements that had then been made in the town, with sundry allusions that were intended to draw out the opinions of a traveller on a subject that justly ever has an interest with the Manhattanese. In that conversation the writer−−his memory impressed with the objects with which he had been familiar in London and Paris, and Rome, Venice, Naples, etc., and feeling how very provincial was the place where he was, as well as its great need of change to raise it to the level of European improvement−−ventured to say that, in his opinion, speaking of Broadway, "There was not a building in the whole street, a few special cases excepted, that would probably be standing thirty years hence." The writer has reason to know that this opinion was deemed extravagant, and was regarded as a consequence of European rather than of American reasoning. If the same opinion were uttered to−day, it would meet with more respect. Buildings now stand in Broadway that may go down to another century, for they are on a level with the wants and tastes of a capital; but none such, with a single exception, existed at the time of which we are writing.

{seventeen years since = Cooper had returned to New York in November 1833, after a seven year sojourn in Europe}

In these facts are to be found the explanation of the want of ancient edifices in America. Two centuries and a half are no very remote antiquity, but we should regard buildings of that, or even of a much less age, with greater interest, did the country possess them. But nothing was constructed a century since that was worth preserving on account of its intrinsic merits; and, before time can throw its interest around them, edifice after edifice comes down, to make way for a successor better suited to the wants and tastes of the age. In this respect New York is even worse off than the other ancient places of the country−−ancient as things can be regarded in America−−its great growth and commercial spirit demanding sacrifices that Philadelphia and Boston have as yet escaped. It is quite within the scope of probable things, that, in a very few years, there should not be standing in the old town a single structure of any sort, that was there previously to the Revolution. As for the new towns, Brooklyn, Williamsburgh, etc., they had no existence worth alluding to anterior to the commencement of the present century. If any dwelling is to be found within the limits of either, that can claim a more remote origin, it is some farmhouse that has been swallowed up by the modern improvements.

That which is true of the towns, in this respect, is equally true of the whole country. A dwelling that has stood half a century is regarded as a sort of specimen of antiquity, and one that has seen twice that number of years, of which a few are to be found, especially among the descendants of the Dutch, is looked upon with some such reverence as is felt by the modern traveller in gazing at the tomb of Cecilia Metella, or the amphitheatre of Verona.

{tomb of Cecilia Metella = the most famous monument on the Appian Way outside Rome, commemorating

the wife of Crassus (d. 53 BC), who as member of the First Triumvirate, joined with Caesar and Pompey to end the Roman Republic; amphitheatre of Verona = built by the Emperor Diocletian about 290 A.D. to stage gladiator combats, it is one of the largest surviving Roman amphitheaters}

The world has had a striking example of the potency of commerce as opposed to that of even the sword, in the abortive policy of Napoleon to exclude England from the trade of the Continent. At the very moment that this potentate of unequalled means and iron rule was doing all he could to achieve his object, the goods of Manchester found their way into half of his dependent provinces, and the Thames was crowded with shipping which belonged to states that the emperor supposed to be under his control.

{abortive policy = in the early years of the 19th century the French Emperor Napoleon had sought, largely unsuccessfully, to blockade England from trade with Europe}

As to the notion of there arising any rival ports, south, to compete with New York, it strikes us as a chimera. New Orleans will always maintain a qualified competition with every place not washed by the waters of the great valley; but New Orleans is nothing but a local port, after all−−of great wealth and importance, beyond a doubt, but not the mart of America.

New York is essentially national in interests, position, and pursuits. No one thinks of the place as belonging to a particular State, but to the United States. The revenue paid into the treasury, at this point, comes in reality, from the pockets of the whole country, and belongs to the whole country. The same is true of her sales and their proceeds. Indeed, there is very little political sympathy between the places at the mouth of the Hudson, and the interior−−the vulgar prejudice of envy, and the jealousy of the power of collected capital, causing the country to distrust the town.

We are aware that the governing motive of commerce, all over the world, is the love of gain. It differs from the love of gain in its lower aspects, merely in its greater importance and its greater activity. These cause it to be more engrossing among merchants than among the tillers of the soil: still, facts prove that this state of things has many relieving shades. The man who is accustomed to deal in large sums is usually raised above the more sordid vices of covetousness and avarice in detail. There are rich misers, certainly, but they are exceptions. We do not believe that the merchant is one tittle more mercenary than the husbandman in his motives, while he is certainly much more liberal of his gains. One deals in thousands, the other in tens and twenties. It is seldom, however, that a failing market, or a sterile season, drives the owner of the plough to desperation, and his principles, if he have any, may be preserved; while the losses or risks of an investment involving more than the merchant really owns, suspend him for a time on the tenter−hooks of commercial doubt. The man thus placed must have more than a common share of integrity, to reason right when interest tempts him to do wrong.

Notwithstanding the generally fallacious character of the governing motive of all commercial communities, there is much to mitigate its selfishness. The habit of regarding the entire country and its interests with a friendly eye, and of associating themselves with its fortunes, liberalizes its mind and wishes, and confers a catholic spirit that the capital of a mere province does not possess. Boston, for instance, is leagued with Lowell, and Lawrence, and Cambridge, and seldom acts collectively without betraying its provincial mood; while New York receives her goods and her boasted learning by large tran{s}shipments, without any special consciousness of the transactions. This habit of generalizing in interests encourages the catholic spirit mentioned, and will account for the nationality of the great mart of a great and much extended country. The feeling would be apt to endure through many changes, and keep alive the connection of commerce even after that of the political relations may have ceased. New York, at this moment, contributes her full share to the prosperity of London, though she owes no allegiance to St. James.

The American Union, however, has much more adhesiveness than is commonly imagined. The diversity and complexity of its interests form a network that will be found, like the web of the spider, to possess a power of resistance far exceeding its gossamer appearance−−one strong enough to hold all that it was ever intended to inclose. The slave interest is now making its final effort for supremacy, and men are deceived by the throes of a departing power. The institution of domestic slavery cannot last. It is opposed to the spirit of the age; and the figments of Mr. Calhoun, in affirming that the Territories belong to the States, instead of the Government of the United States; and the celebrated doctrine of the equilibrium, for which we look in vain into the Constitution for a single sound argument to sustain it, are merely the expiring efforts of a reasoning that cannot resist the common sense of the nation. As it is healthful to exhaust all such questions, let us turn aside a moment, to give a passing

glance at this very material subject.

{Calhoun = Senator John C. Calhoun (1782−1850} of South Carolina}

At the time when the Constitution was adopted, three classes of persons were "held to service" in the country−−apprentices, redemptioners, and slaves. The two first classes were by no means insignificant in 1789, and the redemptioners were rapidly increasing in numbers. In that day, it looked as if this speculative importation of laborers from Europe was to form a material part of the domestic policy of the Northern States. Now the negro is a human being, as well as an apprentice or a redemptioner, though the Constitution does not consider him as the equal of either. It is a great mistake to suppose that the Constitution of the United States, as it now exists, recognizes slavery in any manner whatever, unless it be to mark it as an interest that has less than the common claim to the ordinary rights of humanity. In the apportionment, or representation clause, the redemptioner and the apprentice counts each as a man, whereas five slaves are enumerated as only three free men. The free black is counted as a man, in all particulars, and is represented as such, but his fellow in slavery has only three fifths of his political value.

This is the celebrated clause in which the Constitution is said to recognize slavery. To our view the clause is perfectly immaterial in this sense, making the simple provision that so long as a State shall choose to keep a portion of her people in this subordinate condition, she shall enjoy only this limited degree of representation. To us, it appears to be a concession made to freedom, and not to slavery. There is no obligation, unless self−imposed, to admit any but a minority of her whites to the enjoyment of political power, aristocracy being, in truth, more closely assimilated to republicanism than democracy. Republicanism means the sovereignty of public THINGS instead of that of PERSONS; or the representation of the COMMON interests, in lieu of those of a monarch. There is no common principle of popular sway recognized in the Constitution. In the government of the several States monarchy is denounced, but democracy is nowhere proclaimed or insisted on. Marked differences in the degrees of popular control existed in the country in 1789; and though time is lessening them, are still to be found among us.

The close consideration of all these facts, we feel persuaded will give a coloring to some of the most important interests of the country, differing essentially from those that have been loosely adopted in the conflicts of parties, and many heresies appear to us to have crept into the political creed of the Republic, purely from the struggles of faction. When men have a specific and important purpose in view, it is but natural they should bend most of its collateral connections to the support of their own objects. We conceive that the Constitution has thus been largely misinterpreted, and they who live at the epoch of the renowned "equilibrium" and of the "rights of the people of the Sovereign States," will have seen memorable examples of the truth of this position.

The first popular error, then, that we shall venture to assail, is that connected with the prevalent notion of the sovereignty of the States. We do not believe that the several States of this Union are, in any legitimate meaning of the term, sovereign at all. We are fully aware that this will be regarded as a bold, and possibly as a presuming proposition, but we shall endeavor to work it out with such means as we may have at command.

We lay down the following premises as too indisputable to need any arguments to sustain them: viz., the authority which formed the present Constitution of the United States had the legal power to do so. That authority was in the Government of the States, respectively, and not in their people in the popular signification, but through their people in the political meaning of the term, and what was then done must be regarded as acts connected with the composition and nature of governments, and of no minor or different interests of human affairs.

It being admitted, that the power which formed the government, was legitimate, we obtain one of the purest compacts for the organization of human society that probably ever existed. The ancient allegiance, under which the Colonies had grown up to importance, had been extinguished by solemn treaty, and the States met in Convention, sustained by all the law they had and backed in every instance by institutions that were more or less popular. The history of the world cannot, probably, furnish another instance of the settlement of the fundamental compact of a great nation under circumstances of so much obvious justice. This gives unusual solemnity and authority to the Constitution of 1787, and invests it with additional claims to our admiration and respect.

The authority which formed the Constitution admitted, we come next to the examination of its acts. It is apparent from the debates and proceedings of the Convention, that two opinions existed in that body; the one leaning strongly toward the concentration of power in the hands of the Federal Government, and the other desirous of leaving as much as possible with the respective States. The principle that the powers which are not

directly conceded to the Union should remain in first hands, would seem never to have been denied; and some years after the organization of the Government, it was solemnly recognized in an amendment. We are not disposed, however, to look for arguments to the debates and discussions of the Convention, in our view often a deceptive and dangerous method of construing a law, since the vote is very frequently given on even conflicting reasons. Different minds arrive at the same results by different processes; and it is no unusual thing for men to deny each other's premises while they accept their conclusions. We shall look, therefore, solely to the compact itself, as the most certain mode of ascertaining what was done.

No one will deny that all the great powers of sovereignty are directly conceded to the Union. The right to make war and peace, to coin money, maintain armies and navies, in themselves overshadow most of the sovereignty of the States. The amendatory clause would seem to annihilate it. By the provisions of that clause three fourths of the States can take away all the powers and rights now resting in the hands of the respective States, with a single exception. This exception gives breadth and emphasis to the efficiency of the clause. It will be remembered that all this can be done within the present Constitution. It is a part of the original bargain. Thus, New York can legally be deprived of the authority to punish for theft, to lay out highways, to incorporate banks, and all the ordinary interests over which she at present exercises control, every human being within her limits dissenting. Now as sovereignty means power in the last resort, this amendatory clause most clearly deprives the State of all sovereign power thus put at the disposition of Conventions of the several States; in fact, the votes of these Conventions, or that of the respective legislatures acting in the same capacity, is nothing but the highest species of legislation known to the country; and no other mode of altering the institutions would be legal. It follows unavoidably, we repeat, that the sovereignty which remains in the several States must be looked for solely in the exception. What then is this exception?

It is a provision which says, that no State may be deprived of its equal representation in the Senate, without its own consent. It might well be questioned whether this provision of the Constitution renders a Senate indispensable to the Government. But we are willing to concede this point and admit that it does. Can the vote of a single State, which is one of a body of thirty, and which is bound to submit to the decision of a legal majority, be deemed a sovereign vote? Assuming that the whole power of the Government of the United States were in the Senate, would any one State be sovereign in such a condition of things? We think not. But the Senate does not constitute by any means the whole or the half of the authority of this Government; its legislative power is divided with a popular body, without the concurrence of which it can do nothing; this dilutes the sovereignty to a degree that renders it very imperceptible, if not very absurd. Nor is this all. After a law is passed by the concurrence of the two houses of Congress it is sent to a perfectly independent tribunal to decide whether it is in conformity with the principles of the great national compact; thus demonstrating, as we assume, that the sovereignty of this whole country rests, not in its people, not in its States, but in the Government of the Union.

Sovereignty, and that of the most absolute character, is indispensable to the right of secession: Nay, sovereignty, in the ordinary acceptation of the meaning of the term, might exist in a State without this right of secession. We doubt if it would be held sound doctrine to maintain that any single State had a right to secede from the German Confederation, for instance; and many alliances, or mere treaties, are held to be sacred and indissoluble; they are only broken by an appeal to violence.

Every human contract may be said to possess its distinctive character. Thus, marriage is to be distinguished from a partnership in trade, without recurrence to any particular form of words. Marriage, contracted by any ceremony whatever, is held to be a contract for life. The same is true of governments: in their nature they are intended to be indissoluble. We doubt if there be an instance on record of a government that ever existed, under conditions, expressed or implied, that the parts of its territory might separate at will. There are so many controlling and obvious reasons why such a privilege should not remain in the hands of sections or districts, that it is unnecessary to advert to them. But after a country has rounded its territory, constructed its lines of defence, established its system of custom−houses, and made all the other provisions for security, convenience, and concentration, that are necessary to the affairs of a great nation, it would seem to be very presumptuous to impute to any particular district the right to destroy or mutilate a system regulated with so much care.

The only manner in which the right of secession could exist in one of the American States, would be by an express reservation to that effect, in the Constitution. There is no such clause; did it exist it would change the whole character of the Government, rendering it a mere alliance, instead of being that which it now is−−a lasting

Union. But, whatever may be the legal principles connected with this serious subject, there always exists, in large bodies of men, a power to change their institutions by means of the strong hand. This is termed the right of revolution, and it has often been appealed to to redress grievances that could be removed by no other agency. It is undeniable that the institution of domestic slavery as it now exists in what are termed the Southern and South−Western States of this country, creates an interest of the most delicate and sensitive character. Nearly one half of the entire property of the slave−holding States consists in this right to the services of human beings of a race so different from our own as to render any amalgamation to the last degree improbable, if not impossible. Any one may easily estimate the deep interest that the masters feel in the preservation of their property. The spirit of the age is decidedly against them, and of this they must be sensible; it doubly augments their anxiety for the future. The natural increase, moreover, of these human chattels renders an outlet indispensable, or they will soon cease to be profitable by the excess of their numbers. To these facts we owe the figments which have rendered the Southern school of logicians a little presuming, perhaps, and certainly very sophistical. Among other theories we find the bold one, that the Territories of the United States are the property, not of the several States, but of their individual people; in other words, that the native of New York or Rhode Island, regardless of the laws of the country, has a right to remove to any one of these Territories, carry with him just such property as he may see fit, and make such use of it as he may find convenient. This is a novel co−partnership in jurisdiction, to say the least, and really does not seem worthy of a serious reply.

The territory of the United States is strictly subject to the Government. The only clause in the Constitution which refers to this interest conveys that meaning. But, were the instrument silent, the power would remain the same. Sovereignty of this nature is not determined by municipal law, but by the law of nations. Thus, for instance, the right to make war, which is inherent in every state of FOREIGN RELATIONS, infers the right to secure its conquests; and that clause of the Constitution which declares that the war−making power shall abide in Congress, says, at the same time, by an unavoidable implication, that the national legislature shall have all authority to control the consequences of this war. It may dispose of its prisoners and its conquests according to its own views of policy and justice, subject only to the great principles that modern civilization has introduced into public concerns.

One can understand why a different theory is in favor at the South. It would be very convenient, no doubt, to the slaveholder to be permitted to transfer his slaves to the gold diggings, and gather the precious metal in lieu of a crop of cotton. But this, the policy of the whole country forbids. Congress has very justly left the decision of this very important matter to the people of California itself; and they have almost unanimously raised their voices against the measure. This, after all, is the really sore point in controversy between the South and the North. The fugitive slave has been, and will be given up to the legal claims of his master; and, in a vast majority of the people of the North, there is no disposition to disturb the legislative compromise that has been made of this matter. It is true that the North still owes the South a great deal more, though it may be questioned if the machinations of demagogues and the ravings of fanaticism will permit it to discharge the obligation. Penal laws should be passed, punishing those who meddle with this grave interest out of the limits of the State in which the parties reside; and energy should be shown in rendering such an act of justice effective and sure. Good−neighborhood, alone, would exact some such provision from every well−disposed community, and there cannot be a doubt that good policy coincides. The abolitionists, beyond a dispute, have only had a tendency to rivet the fetters of the slave, and to destroy the peace of the country. Emancipation has not been extended a single foot by any of their projects; while the whole South has been thrown into an attitude of hostile defiance, not only towards these misguided persons, but to their innocent and disgusted fellow−citizens. There might be a hope that the well−intentioned portion of these people, and it is both numerous and respectable, could be induced to adopt a wiser mode of procedure, were it not that dissolute politicians, who care only for the success of parties, and who make a stalking−horse of philanthropy, as they would of religion or patriotism, or any other extended feeling that happened to come within their influence, interpose their sinister schemes to keep agitation alive for their benefit. This, then, is the actual state of things, as between the North and the South; and we will take a hasty view of its probable consequences on the growth and commerce of the towns at the mouth of the Hudson.

{California = California, newly conquered from Mexico and where gold had been discovered in 1848, had in 1849 adopted a Constitution banning slavery, at the same time that it applied for admission to the Union as a free State; it was admitted in 1850 as part of the so−called Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave

Act empowering the Federal Government to seize and return slaves fleeing from slave to free States}

It is undeniable that any serious derangement of the political institutions of the country, would produce a very injurious effect on its prosperity generally; and perhaps in its immediate influence, primarily on its commerce. But the first reverses of such a calamity overcome, we do not see reason for believing that the well−established principle, that trade will make its own laws, should not apply to these towns as well as to any other place known in the history of the world. New York, as has already been intimated, at this moment contributes quite as much to the prosperity of London, as it would probably have done had the political connection between England and her colonies never been severed. Making allowances for the greater prosperity induced by the political independence of America, it is not improbable that she even contributes more. Society and trade enact their own laws. The first is found to be mainly independent of the influence of political power, and the same, with certain qualifications, may be said to be equally true of the last.

But we see little to apprehend from this source of danger. If the slave−holding interest would be rendered really more secure by separation or secession, then, indeed, such a result might be looked for with some degree of confidence. But it is very certain that the measure would lead to an escape of most of the slaves near the northern frontiers of the Southern Confederacy, as well as of a vast number of those who live at a greater distance from what would probably be the dividing line. The North has been aroused to the necessity of being just, and of adhering to the conditions of the Constitution; and the recent measures of the country go to prove there is no real disposition, in the masses, to do otherwise. The attachment to the Union is very strong and general throughout the whole of this vast country, and it is only necessary to sound the tocsin to bring to its maintenance a phalanx equal to uphold its standard against the assaults of any enemies. The impossibility of the North−western States consenting that the mouth of the Mississippi should be held by a foreign power, is in itself a guaranty of the long existence of the present political ties. Then, the increasing and overshadowing power of the nation is of a character so vast, so exciting, so attractive, so well adapted to carry with it popular impulses, that men become proud of the name of American, and feel unwilling to throw away the distinction for any of the minor considerations of local policy. Every man sees and feels that a state is rapidly advancing to maturity which must reduce the pretensions of even ancient Rome to supremacy, to a secondary place in the estimation of mankind. A century will unquestionably place the United States of America prominently at the head of civilized nations, unless their people throw away their advantages by their own mistakes−−the only real danger they have to apprehend: and the mind clings to this hope with a buoyancy and fondness that are becoming profoundly national. We have a thousand weaknesses, and make many blunders, beyond a doubt, as a people; but where shall we turn to find a parallel to our progress, our energy, and increasing power? That which it has required centuries, in other regions, to effect, is here accomplished in a single life; and the student in history finds the results of all his studies crowded as it might be into the incidents of the day.

A great deal that has been done among us of late, doubtless remains to be undone; but we are accustomed to changes of this nature, and they do not seem to be accompanied by the same danger here as elsewhere. The people have yet to discover that the seeming throes of liberty are nothing but the breath of their masters, the demagogues; and that at the very moment when they are made to appear to have the greatest influence on public affairs, they really exercise the least. Here, in our view, is the great danger to the country−−which is governed, in fact, not by its people, as is pretended, but by factions that are themselves controlled most absolutely by the machinations of the designing. A hundred thousand electors, under the present system of caucuses and conventions, are just as much wielded by command as a hundred thousand soldiers in the field; and the wire−pullers behind the scenes can as securely anticipate the obedience of their agents, as the members of the bureaux in any cabinet in Europe can look with confidence to the compliance of their subordinates. Party is the most potent despot of the times. Its very irresponsibility gives it an energy and weight that overshadows the regular action of government. And thus it is, that we hear men, in their places in the national legislature, boasting of their allegiance to its interests and mandates, instead of referring their duties to the country.

All large commercial towns are, in their nature, national in feeling. The diversity and magnitude of their interests are certain to keep them so; and, as we have already said, New York forms no exception to the rule. She belongs already more to the country than she does to the State, and every day has a tendency to increase this catholic disposition among the votaries of commerce.

That some extravagant notions, in which interest has thrown its mists before the reason of our people, exist, is,

we think undeniable; and we concede that the two recently promulgated figments of the equilibrium and the rights of persons over the property and Territory of the United States have a character of feebleness and obvious delusion that would excite our wonder, did we not have so many occasions to observe and comment on the frailty of human judgment when warped by motives of this nature. To us it would seem, that the people of any particular State have just the same claim to use the ships of war, and forts, and public buildings of the United States, as they have, unpermitted by the sovereign power, to occupy any of its lands. That which is the property of the public is no more the property of individuals, in law or reason, than the estate of any one man is the estate of his neighbor. Carry out the doctrine in spirit, and it would lead to general confusion, and a state of things so impracticable as to disorganize society. If the people are thus intrinsically masters and owners of all around them, why are they not the proprietors of the banks and other corporations created by themselves? They made the government, if you will, though in a very limited capacity; and they made these corporations, much more directly and unequivocally; and, admitting the truth of this copartnership principle, in which every man is so far a member of the firm that he may take his share of the assets, we cannot see that he is not equally entitled to lay his hands on all the other progeny of the popular will. In a word, the doctrine would seem to be not only weak, but absurd; and we find a difficulty in believing that any cool−headed and reflecting man can feel the necessity for refuting it.

{just the same claim = Cooper is again ridiculing John C. Calhoun's assertion that, because the new Territories of the West acquired from Mexico belonged to the people rather than the Federal Government, Southerners had an inherent right to bring and keep their slaves in them regardless of Federal law}

But other dangers undeniably beset the country, that have no connection with this question of Slavery. However repugnant it may be to the pride of human nature, or the favorite doctrines of the day, there can be little question that the greatest sources of apprehension of future evil to the people of this country, are to be looked for in the abuses which have their origin in the infirmities and characteristics of human nature. In a word, the people have great cause to distrust themselves; and the numerous and serious innovations they are making on all sides, on not only the most venerable principles in favor with men, but on the divine law, must cause every reflecting man to forbode a state of things, far more serious than even that which would arise from a separation of the States into isolated parts.

The particular form in which this imminent danger is now, for the first time seriously since the establishment of the Government, beginning to exhibit itself, is through the combinations of the designing to obtain a mercenary corps of voters, insignificant as to numbers, but formidable by their union, to hold the balance of power, and to effect their purposes by practising on the wilful, blind, wayward, and, we might almost add, fatal obstinacy of the two great political parties of the country. Here, in our view, is the danger that the nation has most to apprehend. The result is as plain as it is lamentable. In effect, it throws the political power of the entire Republic into the hands of the intriguer, the demagogue, and the knave. Honest men are not practised on by such combinations; but, with a fatality that would seem to be the very sport of demons, there they stand, drawn up in formidable array, in nearly equal lines of open and deriding hostility, leading those who no longer conceive it necessary to even affect the semblance of respect to many of the plainest and most important of the principles of social integrity that have ever been received among men.

Anyone familiar with the condition of Europe must know, that under the pressure of society in that quarter of the world, and toward which we are fast tending by a rapid accumulation of numbers, the present institutions of America, exercised under the prevalent opinions of the day, could not endure a twelvemonth. That which is now seen in France rendering real political liberty a mere stalking−horse for the furtherance of the projects of the boldest adventurers, would inevitably be seen here; the bayonet alone would be relied on for the preservation of the nearest and dearest of human rights. There could and would be no other security for the peace of society, and that circle of power which, rising in the masses, ends in the sceptre of the single despot, would once more be made as it might be in derision of all our efforts to be free.

{now seen in France = following the French Revolution of 1848 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808−1873), nephew of the first Emperor Napoleon, had been elected as President of France and was consolidating his power−−in December 1851, shortly after Cooper's death, he would proclaim himself Emperor Napoleon III}

If the existence of nations resembled that of individuals, it would not be difficult to foretell the consequences of this state of things; but communities may be said to have no lives, and are ever to be found occupying their places, and using the means assigned to them by Providence, whether free or enslaved, prosperous or the reverse.

No one can foretell the future of this great country, in consequence of the extent and number of its outlets, each a provision of Providence to put a check on revolutions and violence.

The elements of a monarchy do not exist among us; the habits of the entire country are opposed to the reception of such a form of government. Nor do we know, bad as our condition is rapidly getting to be, strong as are the tendencies to social dissolution, and to the abuses which demand force to subdue, that anything would be gained by the adoption of any substitute for the present polity of the country to be found in Europe. The abuses there are possibly worse than our own, and the only question would seem to be as to the degree of suffering and wrong to which men are compelled to submit through the infirmities of their own nature. There is one great advantage in the monarchical principle, when subdued by liberal institutions, as in the case of the government of that nation from which we are derived, which it would seem a republic cannot possess. We allude to the transmission of a nominal executive power that spares the turmoil, expense, and struggles of an election, and which answers all the purposes of the real authorities of the State in designating those who are to exercise the functions of rulers for the time being. It has often been predicted that the periodical elections of the chief magistrate of this country will, at no distant day, destroy the institutions. It would be idle to deny that the danger manifestly increases with the expedients of factions; and that there are very grave grounds for apprehending the worst consequences from this source of evil. As it now is, the working of the system has already produced a total departure from the original intention of the Government; a scheme, probably, that was radically defective when adopted, and which contained the seeds of its own ruin. Recourse to electors has become an idle form, ponderous and awkward, and in some of its features uselessly hazardous. We are in the habit of comparing the cost of government in this country with that of other nations in the Old World. Beyond a question, the Americans enjoy great advantages in this important particular, owing to their exemption from sources of expenses that weigh so heavily on those who rely for the peace of society solely on the strong hand. But confining the investigation simply to the cost of Executives it may well be questioned if we have not adopted the most expensive mode at present known among civilized nations. We entertain very little doubt that the cost of a presidential election fully equals the expenditures of the empire of Great Britain, liberal as they are known to be, for the maintenance of the dignity of its chief magistracy. Nor is this the worst of it; for while much of the civil list of a monarch is usefully employed in cherishing the arts, and in fostering industry, to say nothing of its boons to the dependent and meritorious in the shape of pensions, not a dollar of the millions that are wasted every fourth year among ourselves in the struggles of parties, can be said to be applied to a purpose that has not a greater tendency to evil than to good. The simple publication of documents, perhaps, may form some exception to these abuses; but even they are so much filled with falsehoods, fallacies, audacious historical misstatements, exaggerations, and every other abuse, naturally connected with such struggles, that we are compelled to yield them our respect and credulity with large allowances for caution and truth. Were this the place, and did our limits permit, we would gladly pursue this subject; for so completely has the hurrah of popular sway looked down everything like real freedom in the discussion of such a topic as to render the voice of dissent almost unknown to us. But our purpose is merely to show what probable effects are to flow from the abuses of the institutions on the growth of the great commercial mart of which we are writing.

{recourse to electors = the Electoral College}

We certainly think that even the looseness of law, legislation, and justice, that is so widely spreading itself over the land, is not exactly unsuited to sustain the rapid settlement of a country. No doubt men accomplish more in the earlier stages of society when perfectly unfettered, than when brought under the control of those principles and regulations which alone can render society permanently secure or happy. In this sense even the abuses to which we have slightly alluded may be tolerated, which it would be impossible to endure when the class of the needy become formidable from its numbers, and they who had no other stake in society than their naked assistance, could combine to transfer the fruits of the labors of the more industrious and successful to themselves by a simple recurrence to the use of the ballot box. We do not say that such is to be the fate of this country, for the great results that seem to be dependent on its settlement raise a hope that the hand of Providence may yet guide us in safety through the period of delusion, and the reign of political fallacies, which is fast drawing around us. Evil is so much mixed with good in all the interests of life, that it would be bold to pretend to predict consequences of such magnitude in the history of any nation. But we feel persuaded that radical changes must speedily come, either from the powerful but invisible control of that Being who effects his own purposes in his own wise ways, or

the time is much nearer than is ordinarily supposed when the very existence of the political institutions of this country are to be brought to the test of the severest practical experiment. The downward tendency can hardly proceed much further with the smallest necessary security to the rights of civilized men. When a legislative body can be brought solemnly to decide by its vote that because the principles of law leave them the control of the rules for the descent of property, therefore, whenever a landlord may happen to die, his tenant shall have the privilege of converting his leasehold estate into a fee on which the debt is secured in the shape of mortgage, there is little left in the way of security to the affluent and unrepresented. They must unite their means to prevent destruction; and woe to that land which gives so plausible an excuse to the rich and intelligent for combining their means to overturn the liberties of a nation, as is to be found in abuses like those just named. We very well know that the idea is prevalent among us of the irresistible power of popular sway; but he has lived in vain who has seen the course of events in other nations for the last half century, and has not made the discovery that men in political matters become the servants of money as certainly and almost as actively as the spirits of the lamp were made to do the bidding of Aladdin. To us, it would seem that the future of this country holds out but three possible solutions of the tendencies of the present time−−viz. the bayonet, a return to the true principles of the original government, or the sway of money. For the first it may be too soon; the pressure of society is scarcely sufficient to elevate a successful soldier to the height of despotism, though the ladder has been raised more than once against the citadel of the Constitution by adventurers of this character, through the folly and heedless impulses of the masses. Fifty years hence, and a condition of society will probably exist among us that would effectually have carried out the principle of despotic rule which is beginning to show itself in the bud amongst us, and which is nothing more than the shadowing out of coming events.

{legislative body can be brought = the New York State legislature had enacted laws giving certain tenant farmers the right to purchase the land they occupied, thus ending one of the causes of the so−called "anti−rent wars" of the 1840s in upstate New York}

Notwithstanding all these obvious tendencies and the manifest dangers that beset the real liberties of the country, we do not see that any material influence will be brought by them to bear upon the fortunes and ascendancy of the particular place of which we are writing. Even political despotism in this age would necessarily respect the ordinary rights of commerce, and quite probably the greater security that would be given to property, the increased dignity and authority of the courts of justice, and the visible control of a vigilant and efficient government might rather have a tendency to build up than to check the progress of the capital of any country.

Civil war, in our view, can alone produce any material checks to the prosperity of these towns of Manhattan. Against the malign influence of so great a source of evil no one can with discretion venture to predict the consequences. But we do not think that it enters into the spirit of the true American character, so remarkable for its mildness and disposition to mercy, in carrying out the powers of government, to permit such a struggle as would be likely to produce long−continued, or very withering local distress. Compromises in some form or other would be resorted to, to restore the course of the commerce of the country; and although it might be, and probably would be, that this could only be accomplished in the midst of the triumph of disorder, irresponsibility, and the derangement of most that is necessary to permanent security and quiet, a set of laws would arise for the control of the affairs of the towns that would exercise their sway, without any appeal to regularly constituted authority, beyond that of the law of necessity. At this very moment, when we have all the machinery of an efficient government around us, and one has a right to look to the courts for the protection of his rights, a thousand dollars of debt are secured and paid in a place like that of New York, by the sole influence of commercial opinion, where one dollar is secured and paid by the process of law. Trade issues its own edicts, and they are ordinarily found to be too powerful for resistance, wherever there are the concentrated means of rendering them formidable by the magnitude of the interests they control.

We see, then, nothing in the future that is very likely seriously to disturb the continued growth and increasing ascendancy of the great mart of the country. A trading people will pursue its interests under any conceivable or tolerable condition of things. It would require a generation or two, indeed, to obliterate, or even sensibly to diminish the habits and opinions now in existence among the people; and it must ever be remembered that society pursues its regular course more or less successfully, according to circumstances, even in the midst of revolution, war, and rapine. A battle is fought to−day, and a month hence it becomes difficult to discover its traces, over which the p{l}ough has already passed, and among which the husbandman is resuming his toil, as he replaces his

fences, and clears away his fallen trees after the passage of the whirlwind. It follows from these views, and this course of reasoning, which might be greatly extended and much more satisfactorily developed, that political changes have less direct influence on the ordinary march of society than is commonly supposed. The spirit of the age is and must be respected by rulers of every shade of character; and the fourth estate, as opinion is commonly termed, enters largely into the ordinary action of every form of government or combination of social organization that the accidents of history have produced, or the sagacity and wants of men have more ambitiously paraded before the eyes of their fellow creatures. When we couple with these facts the certainty that there are undercurrents which enable ordinary society, trade, and all the other active and daily recurring interests of life, to manage their own affairs more or less in their own way, it is not easy to foresee any material consequences to the progress of a place like this at the mouth of the Hudson, that can trace their rise to the future course of political events in the country. We do not anticipate any apparent dissolution of the ordinary ties of society, for we know that nations will bear burdens of this nature for a long period of time, without struggling or making the effort necessary to remove them; and that it is only when they are felt to be intolerable to the great body of the people that one may confidently hope for redress and reformation. Petty wrongs are never repaired by the masses; they sometimes vindicate their rights by means of the strong arm, when seriously required to do so, but in general the wrong is endured, and the victim immolated without awakening attention or leaving any regrets among those who escape its immediate consequences.

It has long been a subject of investigation among moralists, whether the existence of towns like those of London, Paris, New York, is or is not favorable to the development of the better qualities of the human character. As for ourselves, we do not believe any more in the superior innocence and virtue of a rural population than in that of the largest capitals, perfectly conscious of the appalling accumulation of vice, and sin, and crime that is to be found in such places as London and Paris, and even in New York. We cannot shut our eyes to the numberless evils of the same general character of disobedience to the law of God, that are to be found even in the forest and the most secluded dales of the country. If there be incentives to wrong−doing in the crowded population of a capital town, there are many incentives to refinement, public virtue, and even piety, that are not to be met with elsewhere. In this respect we apprehend that good and evil are more nearly balanced among us than is commonly supposed; and we doubt if it were possible to render the laws a dead letter in the streets of New York, as has been done around the bell of the Capitol at Albany, and strictly among its rural population, directly beneath the eyes of the highest authority of the State. The danger to valuable and movable property would be too imminent, and those who felt an interest in its preservation would not fail to rally in its defence. It is precisely on this principle that in the end property will protect itself as against the popular inroads which are inevitable, should the present tendencies receive no check. Calm, disinterested, and judicious legislation is a thing not to be hoped for. It never occurs in any state of society except under the pressure of great events; and this for the very simple reason that men, acting in factions, are never calm, judicious, or disinterested.

{around the bell of the Capitol = Cooper is alluding to the public ferment in upstate New York, during the "anti−rent wars" of the 1840s, resulting in laws infringing, in Cooper's view, on the legal contractual and property rights of landowners}

Nevertheless, the community will live on, suffer, and be deluded: it may even fancy itself almost within reach of perfection, but it will live on to be disappointed. There is no such thing on earth, and the only real question for the American statesman is to measure the results of different defective systems for the government of the human race. We are far from saying that our own, with all its flagrant and obvious defects, will be the worst, more especially when considered solely in connection with whole numbers; though we cannot deny, nor do we wish to conceal, the bitterness of the wrongs that are so frequently inflicted by the many on the few. This is, perhaps, the worst species of tyranny. He who suffers under the arbitrary power of a single despot, or by the selfish exactions of a privileged few, is certain to be sustained by the sympathies of the masses. But he who is crushed by the masses themselves, must look beyond the limits of his earthly being for consolation and support. The wrongs committed by democracies are of the most cruel character; and though wanting in that apparent violence and sternness that marks the course of law in the hands of narrower governments, for it has no need of this severity, they carry with them in their course all the feelings that render injustice and oppression intolerable.

We think that the towns of America, generally, will suffer less from these popular abuses than the rural districts. As has been already said, associated wealth will take care of itself. It may make, and probably will make,

in the earlier stages of these political changes, some capital mistakes; and there cannot be a question that in the rapacity of private efforts to accumulate, some of the most obvious and natural expedients of protection will be overlooked, until the neglect compels recourse possibly even to the use of the strong hand. Still property will eventually protect itself. For, in an age like this, when even the bayonet must be carried ordinarily in its sheath, and when men get to be accustomed from infancy to the inbred recognition of many of the most important principles of government, society starts, as it might be, far in advance of the point which it reached in the ages of pure military and arbitrary sway. The celebrated saying of Napoleon, "L'Europe sera, dans cinquante ans, ou republicaine ou cossaque," has a profound signification; yet it must be greatly qualified to be received with safety. The "cossaque" of the close of the nineteenth century will be a very different thing from the "cossaque" of the days of Paul. It now means little more than conservatism, and this, too, a conservatism that is not absolutely without that principle of concession to the spirits and wants of the passing moment. These quarrels and bitter conflicts of which we hear so much in the Old World, like some of our own, have their rise in abstractions quite as much as in actual oppression; and the alternative offered by change half the time amounts to but little more than the substitution of King Stork for King Log. It may not be agreeable to the pride, recollections, and national traditions of the Hungarian, or the Italian, to submit to the sway of a German; but it may well be questioned if the substitutes they would offer for the present form of government would greatly tend to the amelioration of the respective people.

{L'Europe sera.... = Europe will, in fifty years, be either republican or cossack [French]; Paul = Paul I, Tsar of Russia from 1796 to 1801; King Stork for King Log = from Aesop's Fables}

What is true in the Old World will, in the end, be found to be true here. To us, it would seem that the portion of the people of this country, whom we should term the disinterested, or those who have no direct connection with slavery, on the one hand, or with fanaticism, and its handmaid demagogism, on the other, should turn their attention solely to the achievement of a single object. They have the strength to do it, if they only had the will. By compelling the disturbers of the public peace to submit to the control of the government, and to cease their meddling and wanton invasion of the security and property of their brothers and neighbors, the question of slavery would soon take care of itself. A single generation would, probably, see it confined in a great measure to the extreme Southern and Southwestern States; for, under the present emigration from Europe, it cannot be long before the upper counties of even the Carolinas and Georgia will make the discovery that the introduction of a single white man will be really of more importance to them than that of a dozen negroes. Could Virginia be made to see her true interests in this behalf, the glory of the Old Dominion would speedily revive, and her fine population of gentlemen would shortly take its place again where it so properly belongs, in the foremost ranks of the nation. We require an exchange with that quarter of the country, for we could give that which she greatly needs, and receive in exchange that which would probably not a little benefit ourselves. Puritanism, most especially when it breaks out of bonds by the process of emigration, does not always produce the most acceptable fruits; while, on the other hand, the descendants of the Cavaliers might obtain homely lessons, of great practical benefit, from the utilitarian spirit of the whole North.