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[ANONYMOUS]

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This book has been too widely read to need any elaborate criticism¹ on our part. There are one or two points in it, however, on which we wish to say a word. The book has been loudly complained of as *superficial*, and as vilifying our country and its institutions. ²We do not think that it can fairly be called superficial, (in a derogatory sense,) because it was not intended to be deep³. Mr. Dickens's⁴ philosophy has always been rather of the eyes and heart, than of that higher and more comprehensive kind,

¹ Dickens received a lot of criticism from Americans for this piece of work. He used satire in numerous parts of his book. Americans were enraged because they saw the book as condescending and felt it was mocking their views. (Kupfer).

² Referring back to the criticism note above (1), many Americans saw Dickens's work as superficial and vilifying for its views on Americans and American culture. Dickens's book was not like his other books, in the sense that it was a travelogue meant to hold his accounts of the places he went to and the people he met while in America. (Kupfer). Eight years after the original publishing, the book was published into a "cheap edition", in which Dickens provided a preface regarding the comments Americans had about his work: "I have many friends in America, and feel a grateful interest in the country. To represent me as viewing it with ill-nature, animosity, or partisanship, is merely to do a very foolish thing, which is always a very easy one; and which I have disregarded for eight years, and could disregard for eighty more."

³ Much of Dickens's book focused on social inequity and the poor treatment of people in the lower classes of society. Dickens pointed out what he viewed as injustice, absurd, and cruel. He spends an entire chapter on his disgust with the institution of slavery. Parts of his book also discuss his disagreement with the temperance movement and Americans' "love of 'smart'" in which "smart outweighs all evils". (Kupfer).

⁴ Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a prolific British author of many well-known classics, such as *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations*. In 1842, Dickens and his wife, Kate, went on a five-month lecture tour of the United States, and after his return home is when Dickens wrote *American Notes, for General Circulation* about his experiences while in America. (Charles...).

with which the inner eye and the soul have to do. Such a traveller [sic] as De Tocqueville⁵ is properly expected to give a philosophical analysis of our government⁶ and its operations, and philosophical conjecture as to its ultimate tendencies and results. But we could not rightly expect from Mr. Dickens anything more than the necessarily cursory observations of one who has shown himself to be the keenest and shrewdest observer of his time.

To judge from the tone of a large share of criticisms on this lively *jeu d'esprit*⁷, (for such it may be rightly called,) it would seem that our people imagined that, because they had admired Mr. Dickens's other works⁸, he had no right to do anything but admire everything of theirs in turn. The Americans are the only nation who appear to think that they can say what they please of others, and that others have no right to say what they please of them. Mr. Dickens's remarks on *slavery*⁹ seem to have raised the greatest storm of indignation, and yet the greatest part of his chapter on this system, which (call it crime or misfortune,) is surely the darkest blot on our national character, consisted only of quotations from our own newspapers. If the eyes and mouths of our own countrymen are to be for ever sealed on a question which more nearly concerns their interest and honor than any other, they should thank God for what little light they are *permitted* to gain from an intelligent foreigner, whose vivid exposure of the abuses of his own system of government give him the better right to strike at those of our own. A man of genius, like Dickens, is a citizen of the world, and belongs as much to America as to England. If our narrowness and cowardice in this matter are not outgrown, we might as well publish expurgated editions of Shakspeare [sic], and all others who satirize and revolt at tyranny, (as all great minds must,) - nay, of the Declaration of Independence itself.

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French sociologist and political theorist. He traveled to the United States in 1831 in order to study the prisons. Upon his return, he wrote *Democracy in America* (1835) about his observations stemming from equality and individualism. It was one of the most influential books of the 19th century and was a useful explanation of Americans to Europeans and Americans alike. (Alexis...).

⁶ de Tocqueville's felt that "equality was the great political and social idea of his era" and he believed that the United States people and its government offered the best illustration of equality during his time. American individualism was something he admired, but he feared that the society of individuals would lead to a lack of social structures and a "tyranny of the majority" where individual rights would be compromised. He also admired the economic stability of America and the love Americans had for freedom, but recognized the ironic mistreatment of Native Americans and the institution of slavery. (Alexis...).

⁷[jeu d'esprit] Literal translation: play of spirit; game of the mind. This is also used to mean a work of light playfulness or wit, especially in literature. (jeu d'esprit...).

⁸ Other works included *Oliver Twist*, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge*, and *A Christmas Carol*. (Charles...).

⁹ Dickens traveled to Richmond, Virginia to see slavery firsthand. He was appalled by the treatment of the slaves and the attitudes of the owners. He did not shy away from showing his disgust with slavery in America and devoted an entire chapter to the topic, in which he also cited newspaper articles about slaves who had run away and told accounts of how disfigured they were due to the treatment of their masters.

The greatest and deepest fault we have to find with the book is the too frequent eulogy of brandy and water, and ill-concealed satire of the temperance reform¹⁰ - a reform which had been and is doing incalculable good throughout the land; which is spreading peace and innocence where only degradation skulked before, and which is ensuring stability to our freedom, by teaching men to set free and respect *themselves*, without which they can have no true reverence for anything.



¹⁰ In his book, Dickens does not hide his complaints with the Temperance Movement. The Temperance Movement promoted moderation, and eventually, complete abstinence in the use of intoxicating liquor. It was introduced as early as 1800 and began to spread in 1808. By 1833, over 6,000 local societies in the United States supported the movement. (Temperance...). Dickens complained in his book about the Golden Lamb, a hotel he stayed at during his trip to America that was a temperance hotel. He was denied brandy and in turn was offered tea or coffee. He said "This preposterous forcing of unpleasant drinks down the reluctant throats of travelers is not at all uncommon in America". (Kupfer).

EDITOR'S NOTE

In 1842, the prolific British author, Charles Dickens, traveled from his home in Liverpool to North America with his wife, Kate. They remained in America from January to June of 1842. While there, Dickens observed American society and focused on many aspects of the culture, from the social inequity and treatment of people of lower classes, to cruelties and injustices that he felt went against human nature. Some topics of his book included the Temperance Movement, slavery, and Americans' "love of 'smart'" in which "smart outweighs all evils". His work made many Americans mad, as they felt that his book was a mockery of the American people and American places that Dickens came across. In his conclusion, Dickens says Americans are "by nature, frank, brave, cordial, hospitable, and affectionate." However, he follows this up with more statements that are less than complimentary about American society. He knew that his words would anger Americans, but stated that his readers could judge for themselves whether his views were valid or based on his imagination. Regardless of whether they agree with him or not, he claims that he has reason for everything that he wrote. He further goes on to explain that he has always been in favor of the United States and that he has nothing to "defend or explain away. The truth is the truth, and neither childish absurdities, nor unscrupulous contradictions, can make it otherwise."

Dickens's travelogue managed to create an uproar while also making clear the way other people from different parts of the world might see the U.S coming in as outsiders. His book provided an insight for non-Americans into American society and culture while also giving people today a glimpse into 1840s America. People can look at not only this review, but at Dickens's book, and formulate their own opinions about American society and culture of that time. A simple comparison between 1840s America and today shows that there are still things that are the same or have changed very little, such as the large emphasis people have for certain characteristic traits. Dickens mentions how people had a "love of 'smart'" and discusses how this outweighed all evils. Today, the same is true, especially as seen through the fame and power some people have, like celebrities, that allows them to wiggle their way out of any trouble they may get into. In addition, just as shown by Dickens in the 1840s through his discussion of how one trait, such as being smart, can outweigh other traits, Americans place a massive value on material products rather than on integrity. In today's culture, a person's worth is measured by how much they own. It is almost like a game of keeping up with the Joneses, in which people need the latest iPhone, pair of Air Jordans, car, etc. Unlike the 1840s though, one's self worth is not just based on physical items, but also on social media status. How many likes or retweets can someone amass in one hour, not only from their latest purchase, but also based on other things, such as the meal they are eating or what they are currently doing? Does this number define how great someone is and how much they are worth to society? Despite these questions of conspicuous consumption, the idea of individualism, and its consequences as people become more enraptured with their own self wants and needs rather than those of the collective whole, is still very much present today. Even with an almost two-hundred-year difference in time between the time in which Dickens's

book was written and today, there are many parallels in which American society can pick up on and, more importantly, learn from.

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