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The Law of Fashion
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In the following pages I propose to consider one of those separable parts of the human motives which hitherto has received little attention, namely, that which depends upon the imitative impulse in man. It needs but a glance at any society to show us how strong is this motive of imitation; indeed, to it we owe some of the most conspicuous features in human associations. If we could separate ourselves from the influences of custom, we should perceive that the most striking features in society are found in the way in which human beings strive to attain to certain uniformities in action. In speech, in gesture, in garments, in architecture, in literature, in every branch of human endeavor, we see certain motives steadfastly imitated, handed down from generation to generation. The diversifying forces combat with this conservative or imitative tendency; occasionally they prevail over it, and lead men to great changes in the current of thought and action; but if they win, it is rarely an easy victory, and in many cases the imitative motive profoundly modifies, if it cannot arrest, the change which time brings about.

From the manifold examples of hu-

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man development in which imitation operates as an important agent we may select two which can be advantageously studied. These we find in clothing and architecture. The groups of facts included under these heads have the valuable advantage for the student that the phenomena are relatively simple, are well separated from other groups of facts, and are capable of being in a high degree historic. They are either in themselves enduring, or are subjects of enduring delineation.

The influences which in a highly developed society act to diversify dress are very numerous, but at first the conditions which determine the form of habiliment are relatively simple. The desire to meet the dictates of modesty, the needs of protection, and the conditions of the simple materials accessible to the lower classes of men control the variety of costume. But with the progress in the arts, the materials which may serve for clothing and the shape of the garments make a distinction of classes and of sexes more possible. As soon as these distinctions are established we begin to see the influence of custom in regulating the fashion of habiliments. These fashions once

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fixed, they become great permanences, which may survive changes that alter religions and overturn empires. Many slight peculiarities of clothing, features which have no sort of utility and no value as ornaments, are retained for ages. The vigor of the imitative principle is well shown in the case of the clothing now worn by men in all civilized countries.

The changes which, during the last Century, have been brought about in the garments of men have in the main been due to governmental action. A Century ago, stockings and breeches were well affirmed as the covering for the legs of men. It was in time found by the medical authorities that the close - fitting stocking was apt to produce in marching soldiers a diseased condition of the legs. This led to the invention of the trousers, which left the lower leg free. This new custom, thus planted in the army, that part of the Community which of old was the glass of fashion, naturally spread to civil life. In this way, too, the habit of wearing long hair disappeared. The camp is no place for such a fashion; to keep men clean in hard campaigning, cropped polls were a necessity. In many other matters of dress, the military habit has affected the garments of men in civil life. The changes have generally been for the better, but there are some cases in which the influence of custom is harmful. The stiff collar, clearly a remnant of the gorget, is a case in point; the two buttons on the back of the coat, which once served to hold up the sword-belt, is a meaningless survival, maintained by conventionality alone. The divided tail of the ordinary coat, which appears to have been derived from the needs of the horseman, affords another instance of the same nature. Men were once dependent on the saddle for their greater activities, and their coats retain the mark of that time.

In women’s clothing we find custom much more vigorously enforced than

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among men. There is with women nothing like the army to direct fashion in economic channels. Yet within certain limits of change their dress maintains its character far more permanently than that of men. The variations are in detail, while the essentials remain the same. The very great inconveniences of their costume, hindrances which become disabilities in the case of the working classes, have not served to bring about any sensible alteration in the style of their clothing. The observer will find no other such admirable illustrations of the force of custom as may be seen in the dress of women.

While clothing affords an excellent subject for detailed study of the laws of custom, that subject is so varied and the history so complicated that the Student will do well to turn to architecture, where the forms of different periods are better preserved and the individual examples less numerous.

For the purposes of the student of custom, architecture may be made to include the class of ships and vehicles as well as that of the land dwellings. The group of ships affords some of the most beautiful instances of custom that can be found. In the first place, we may notice the singular way in which the shape of the hulls and the form of their rigging are inherited by the seamen of different regions. Each considerable portion of the shore of Europe has some peculiarities of rig or model which separate its boats from those of other districts. It is true that the creation of a science of ship-building has brought the great vessels of all nations to a certain general type; but the home-built boats of the European coast are as characteristic and as varied as the dialects, and more varied than the costumes, of the people who use them.

The influence of custom in maintaining differences in the fashion of boats is seen not only in Europe, but in America as well. In this country, if anywhere,

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we would suppose that the constant intercourse of the people of the shorelands, the mingling of the fishery fleets, and the intercommunication of the coasters would have checked the tendency of local custom to perpetuate variations. Yet, though less pronounced than the differences of the European coast, the peculiarities of the American sea-boats from different districts is still so marked that the well-trained Seaman can recognize their geographical origin as far as he can read their flags. In the small boats the divergence is even greater than in the ordinary coasters and fishermen; in them the influence of local peculiarities is so strong that any one who knows their varieties may tell his latitude within a few degrees by the boats of the shore. The persistence of fashion in the rig of small vessels is probably greater than that of any other feature in architecture. The felucca rig of the Mediterranean coasters has come down from very ancient times; and despite the fact that for centuries the Mediterranean has been the resort of vessels with the northern types of form and rigging, it holds its place in an enduring way. The same is the case with the smaller boats of this region; they retain the form which belonged to them in the first century of our era. Even to their curious bow-posts, which may have been phallic emblems, they remained unchanged. If we could revive a Roman citizen of the first century, he would probably find less alteration in the small vessels of the shore than in any other objects of human art.

There can be no doubt that the relative permanence of form in sea craft is due in part to the unchanged conditions of marine life, and in some cases the persistence of otherwise disadvantageous types of construction may be due to peculiar circumstances of the lo-cality; but in a general way this endurance of types must be taken as a measure of the conservative effects of custom.

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The recent trial of American and British pleasure-boats has served to show how strong is this conservative inertia even among the most cultivated peoples. Both the contending boats were the product of a long series of inheritances.

Very interesting examples of the effect of the law of fashion may be found in the various forms of land carriages which exist in different parts of this and other countries. In Europe the traveler may observe that vehicles of particular pattern have a distribution in general conterminous with the peoples of the several states.

The English carriages differ in nearly all cases so distinctly from those of France, Germany, or Italy that it is easy for the trained eye of an observer who has attended to the matter to say from which side of the Channel any special specimen has come. In Great Britain, the carriages as a whole exhibit everywhere a common type. In Ireland, however, they pretty generally differ from those of the greater isle.

The first settlers of this country were for a considerable period without roads accessible to wheels. The period during which they were without vehicles usually lasted for such a time that the memory of the home contrivances of this nature was in good part lost. Even in the new-made settlements of the West, especially those which were planted in the last century or in the early part of this, the folk composing them were for the most part for a long time without carriages, and so had occasion, when they had advanced to that stage of civilization where ways for wheels were demanded, to invent their own type of wagons. The only European carriage, if such it may be termed, which was ordinarily imported into this country was the pack-saddle. This ancient instrument of transportation, which had almost passed out of use in Great Britain was universally revived in this country at the time of its settlement, and has held a certain place in our civilization ever since the landing of Euro-

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peans in this country. To this day it survives in some of the isolated Valleys of the Alleghanies as well as in some parts of the far West.

The distribution of the types of wheeled vehicles in this country would afford a very interesting subject for study in a detailed way. The present writer has been able to give it only a most cursory examination. The result of this imperfect inquiry has been to show that the wheeled vehicles of the United States are more localized in their character than any other contrivances which are used in the arts of the country, except perhaps the boats of the seashore. The range in variety of the facts concerning our types of wheeled vehicles is so great that only a very general statement can be given of them in this writing.

The most interesting fact concerning the distribution of this class of contrivances in the United States is found in the wide difference in the law of form which holds in carriages for pleasure and those for economical purposes. The carriages for pleasure have a curious likeness in all parts of this country. In their general form, relatively little difference can be traced in them, whether we select our examples from Texas or Maine. On the other hand, the carriages for profit or for a purely economical use are singularly diversified in different regions. The reason for this difference is readily apprehended. Vehicles which are for luxury, like clothing which is for purposes of decoration, are freer to follow the impulses which are given from the seats of fashionable life than those which have an economic purpose. Pictures of pleasure-carriages, like those of dress, are widely disseminated and closely copied by constructors. In them utility is sacrificed to the desire for securing the particularities dictated by the mode. The implements of Utility are necessarily much less under the control of fashionable caprice. Still, we may find certain local variations in the shape of carriages

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which, although complying in the main with the type set by dictation, are yet modified to suit particular needs. Thus, in the region about our great cities the light carriages have their wheels much closer together than it is convenient to have them in the great part of the country districts. If any one essays to drive from Boston to Cape Cod, he will find his Boston carriage ceases to be practicable after he passes Plymouth, for the reason that beyond that point the ruts of the little-traveled roads are formed by farm wagons, the opposite wheels of which are a foot further apart than those of his vehicle. It will be necessary for him to change his carriage for one that fits the roads, unless he is willing to be subject to very grave discomfort, and indeed at times to danger of being over-turned.

We will now proceed to note a few of the peculiar vehicles which exist in different parts of the United States, selecting as examples only those which are most conspicuous, and which most clearly indicate the persistence or invention of local peculiarities.

In the region west of the Alleghanies, and at some few points to the east of that ethnic barrier, the traveler will observe that the ordinary farm wagons retain certain features proper to the Englishman. There is a solid, well-framed body, designed to insure its structure against the peculiar strains which rough roads or heavy burdens impose upon it. This is covered by white canvas, sup-ported by bows of bent hickory wood. This ancient type of wagon is fitted for the use of those who need to make long journeys. Under its tent the westward movement of our population has taken place. Whoever of old is familiar with this great march of people towards the setting sun has seen trains of these wagons, with their freight of household goods, women, and children, creeping across the Western plains. When our armies, during the civil war, had to be

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provided with transportation, this was the type of the vehicles which were made to serve their needs. In the eastern part of the United States, the necessity for protection over night does not exist. Where wagons are to be housed in, the condition of the roads permits the adoption of a heavier and more enduring covering than canvas, and so our black-topped vans take the place of the picturesque moving tents of the immigrants. In the Southern States, we often notice yet another type of vehicle devoted to ordinary form purposes. This is the two-wheeled wagon; the principles of its structure being essentially that of the parson’s gig. This seems to have been a local invention, and on the whole has been limited to a very distinct field. So far as the present writer’s observations go, it does not extend to any point west of the Alleghanies, being confined to the Carolinas, Virginia, and Georgia.

In the Western and Southwestern States, and in some places in the Northwest, we find in the towns a vehicle of excellent type, known as a dray. The word which designates this wagon is one of the most ancient of those which have been applied to any form of vehicle, but the construction itself is eminently peculiar; it has but faint likeness to any European vehicle. In the American dray we have two wheels; a long slender platform, without permanent sides, terminating at the rear end in two stout beams extending several feet. When in position to receive or discharge its freight, the projections form a perfect inclined plane leading down to the level of the walk. This admirable contrivance has been adjusted with reference to the barrel and bale, the two great methods of packing in use in the Western country. On the platform there are a number of cylindrical openings, in which what are called dray-pins are placed. The work of loading or discharging cargo is greatly facilitated by the use of these pins,

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which, moreover, afford excellent implements for the active discussions which frequently take place between the contentious drivers. The dray-pin is a very conspicuous element in the police records of the Southern States. The Southern and Western dray, of all American carriages the one which is most completely „reconciled to its environment,“ has never found a place in the Eastern States, for the reason that the barrel and the sub-cylindrical cotton bale are not so common in those parts, and perhaps for the better reason that the streets of our Eastern cities are too narrow to permit the evolution of this very long carriage, which must be turned athwart the street when it is receiving or discharging its load. A certain modification of the form in a four-wheeled vehicle is not uncommon in some of our Eastern cities, but it has not the most characteristic advantages of the dray.

Almost every city and many country districts in the United States have certain peculiar types of vehicles, or modifications of well-known forms, which serve to mark the inventive impulse and the imitative humor of the particular place. In the cities, the limitations of these vehicles are generally very distinct. In the country districts, the circumstances of distribution are less clearly marked, unless it should happen that the region is sharply bounded by some geographic barrier.

The islands along the coast of New England afford some interesting instances of these localized motives. The carts of Nantucket are absolutely peculiar to that island; the farm wagons of Martha's Vineyard, though of late very much affected by the importation of vehicles from the mainland, still preserve in many instances a peculiar type. At Mount Desert we may note that the rapid settlement of that island as a summer resort has led to the invention of a somewhat Special form of wagon. The bent axle, by which the bed of the vehi-

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cle is brought very near the ground, has been accepted as the type for all wagons designed for heavy carriage. In many parts of the Alleghanies we could note the invention of curious vehicular types. Thus the present writer found in Harlan County, Ky., many years ago, a domestic wagon constructed with stone wheels, each shaped like a grindstone, and fixed firmly upon the axle, which turned as in our railway carriages, or in the vehicles of ancient Rome. In the Rocky Mountains, the high price of labor has led to the invention of a System in which two wagons, the rear one with but a short pole, are fastened one behind the other. Thus one driver, with his ten horses and two wagons, can manage the train.

A careful study of American vehicles would show not only the influence of custom in perpetuating local inventions, but at the same time the exceptional ingenuity possessed by our people in creating contrivances to meet their local needs. Furthermore, we may find in the facts evidence of the extent to which our folk tend to develop their motives in a local way. At first sight, the careless observer, and even the careful student, is apt to conclude that our American population is singularly uniform. The literature of travel abounds in misplaced judgments as to the essential unity of our people. There can be no question that circumstances have unified our folk in a remarkable manner in certain and very important particulars. In language, and in the general sense of human relations, there is a noticeable uniformity in the American people; but, masked by that uniformity in conspicuous features we have among our folk a wonderful degree of provincialism in many essential as well as in many unessential things. In various respects, both moral and material, our life is singularly localized.

The extension of customs depends upon the existence of a desire to imitate and the concurrent capacity to effect the

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imitation. Thus, while in many cases the desire may exist to reproduce the work done by others, the capacity to effect the result may be wanting. At the present time, the organization of manufactures has gone so far that it is not easy to find examples of this combination of imitativeness and incapacity in our ordinary commercial products. It may be seen, however, along our sea-shore, in the coast ships, which still retain to a great extent the characteristics of domestic manufactures. I can illustrate the nature of the limitation by a short anecdote. Many years ago there was a very great difference in the beauty and shapely qualities of the ships constructed by the builders of Cape Ann and those which were built in Nova Scotia. The Gloucester boats were the subject of great commendation on the part of many Nova Scotia builders. I asked an old shipwright, who was expressing his admiration for the form of a Gloucester schooner, why his people did not build the like. He answered that every year they built ships which were to their eyes exactly like the Yankee boats; but when the Gloucester men came back to that neighborhood, they turned out to be not in the least like them. Gradually the provincials are acquiring the power to memorize form. Nowadays it is not always so easy to separate, at first sight, the Nova Scotia vessels from those built about Massachusetts Bay as it was of old.

The mental model on which the actual structure is to be framed is often of very difficult acquisition; such models constitute the artistic store of a people. There seems to be a certain inheritance, if not of the very shape of ships, at least of a capacity to conceive of the forms and to bring them into being. Not only in the case of ships, but in all other arts whatsoever, such capacities, when not inherited, are acquired with difficulty; and so, until systematic manufacture takes the place of domestic art, the spread of architec-

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tural and other artistic models must necessarily be slow. Beautiful instances of this may be seen in the arts of all primitive people, in which the tribal divisions create bounds to the inherited capacities.

When we study buildings, we see the influence of custom even more clearly than in ships or other Instruments of carriage. Ships and vehicles are temporary structures, rarely enduring more than half a Century, while the life of houses is many times as great. In old countries, we can easily trace the mode of building, even in relatively frail dwellings, for a period of five hundred years or more.

The careful observer can see in any European country abundant evidence of local custom in the fashion of the architecture. The greater buildings, those designed for monumental purposes, have something of the uniformity which belongs to the larger structures on the seas. In the domestic dwellings, where the uniforming influence of the architect has not been felt, we find the clearest effects of local custom. These architectural dialects, as we may term them, are as distinctly bounded and as permanent as are the forms of expression in speech.

The instances of this fact are extremely numerous; hardly a country or a province in Europe but will show its peculiar architectural influences. They are perhaps more striking in the countries which have been characterized by strong local histories than in the more unified lands. Tuscany, for example, affords excellent instances of long-continued architectural motives. No one familiar with the rural districts of that region can have failed to notice the charm which comes from the grace and simplicity of the rustic architecture. There is but one style, and this is absolutely direct in all its motives; but the work, though done by present builders, is pervaded by a simple spirit and improved by noble traditions. It is not improbable that these motives are direct

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inheritances from the Etruscan civilization; that this elegant sense of archi-tectural beauty has come down directly from that ancient people.

The most remarkable feature in American buildings is the extreme instability of the motives represented in their construction; the inconstant whims of the professional constructor of houses has taken the place of the natural architectural motives. The observer might fairly conclude that the American people are incapable of inventing an architecture, - are incapable of accumulating traditions of beauty in structures, until they develop the assemblage of harmonious relations which constitute an architectural style; but this judgment would be ill-founded. It is true that the spread of ready-made architecture in the form of house plans has given a monotonous variety to buildings in most parts of America; but wherever a corner of the land can be found where the people are too primitive to be influenced by the Harper's Bazar spirit, a little attention will show that the localizing and inventing motive is at work there as well as on older lands. There is hardly an old town in New England, which has been so fortunate as to escape the modern house-builder, where the observer cannot find abundant evidence of the spirit of architectural invention. The colonial days, with their brief century of quietly accumulated traditions, carried us far towards the development of a worthy domestic architectural style in the stately mansions of that day, which managed to combine domesticity and dignity in a simple but effective way.

Even in the present day, any one who watches closely will see that the inventive American has a style-developing power which is vigorous, even though the products are not very satisfactory. All architectural styles of importance have been derivations from some primitive utility; they have arisen in the way in which all beauty in art and nature

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seems to have arisen, - by the affectionate decoration of the needful, by the idealization of the Utilities inherited from the past. The capacity to create a beautiful architecture, if not all the power to develop any succession of beauty-giving impulses, depends upon the existence of a keen sense of the past, together with a strong desire to give beauty to the work on hand. The sense of custom, that desire to do the thing as others have done it, must be the dominant motive. The historic sense, without which art cannot exist, must cooperate with the impulse which leads to mere decoration.

Imitation, or the custom - following. motive of the American people, is clearly very strong. A curious instance of its strength has recently fallen under my notice. The case seems to illustrate so many points concerning the origin of architecture that it may advantageously be given in detail. About twenty years ago there was a camp-meeting place on the eastern shore of Martha’s Vineyard. This religious meeting-place was found to combine many advantages of situation: the bathing was good, the air delightful, and the site wholesome, so it became a favorite place of summer resort. At first the dwellings of this camp consisted altogether of tents, which were removed at the end of the season. The ground was divided into little lots, about twenty feet in width and sixty or so in depth, - just large enough for a family tent, with the necessary out-houses. The first advance on these imperfect dwelling-places was made by having a permanent floor to the canvas house, which floor projected some feet beyond the front of the tent, affording the foundation for an awning-covered porch. The next step was to support the tent by a timber frame, which also was a permanent structure. Further experience led to the covering of the sides of the structure with plank, the canvas roof being retained. Very soon the canvas was abandoned; a timber structure took

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its place, and thus the tent was transformed into a house. This house imitated the tent so far as it was possible to reproduce its features in the new material. In front, the portal of the tent was represented by a very large folding door, with a small window on either side. In a short time these simple, tent-like houses became the established type of the structures erected on the campground.

Soon after the establishment of this custom of building, the resort to this settlement of Oak Bluffs became greater, and larger dwellings began to arise on the ground outside of the camp; but almost without exception these structures were built in the general form of those within the fold. Now the spirit of ornament began to show itself: the original simple lines of the little house were decorated with cornices and scroll-work, often of very *bizarre* forms, but the original motives of construction were closely adhered to, so that a glance will show the derivation of their architecture.

When firmly planted in this summer resort, this fashion of building spread to other parts of the shore; but the origin of the architectural motives of these houses can be traced in their general outline, by the gable end set against the roadway, the large central portal opening immediately into the main room of the house, and in the broad porch occupying the whole front of the building. The plan of the structure is distinctly different from any other form of dwelling which has ever been used in this country. Thus, in a quick succession of changes, we see how readily the foundations of an architectural fashion may be laid; how by the constant adaptation of means to the end, together with a clinging to the existing traditions of form, we may pass from one mode of construction to another without any sudden break in the succession of motives which guide the builder. This incident seems to show us that the

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American of to-day, despite the tendency which his life has to part him from the past, still retains the essential impulses which guided his ancestors in their passage from the earliest constructions to the higher and more settled forms of architecture.

This interesting instance of the rapid evolution of a new architectural type may profitably be compared to the steps which led from the wooden temples of the early Greeks, with their rude ornaments made of the heads of cattle from the sacrificial altar, to the gracious structures of stone which came in their place. It is a comparison of great things with small, but the manner in which men are bound by the deeds of their race is shown alike in both instances.

Against this interesting example of cottage architecture, where the spontaneous evolution of a type has been accomplished in a few years, we may set the singular fixedness of form of our American log cabin. In all the backwoods regions of America, that is to say in all the Southern States, and, except in New England, in the Northern as far west as Illinois, the log cabin has been the prevailing house ever since the settlement of the country. Yet there is hardly a trace of Variation in the form of these structures. These buildings, it would seem, would lend themselves to variety and to the accumulation by tradition of conventionai ornament. Although in Switzerland, and in many other countries, the house of massive timber has been made the basis of a great deal of architectural decoration, to which its structure well lends itself, no such development has taken place in the similar houses of America. The cause of

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this seems to be that the frontiersman is peculiarly separated from tradition, and rigidly bound by the needs of his conditions, which are of the most immediate necessity (1) There is no time for the spirit of adornment on which architectural development depends. When the region about the pioneer becomes civilized, and the log cabin is to be replaced, a frame house comes in its stead, which, from its nature, can preserve nothing of the earlier type of structure. It is only when people pass beyond the frontier state that the possibilities of architectural development begin, and with that passage they generally come under the foreign yoke of the architects, and so are deprived of the chance of developing any local customs in their building art

The tendency of modern days is to take the control of architecture from the people, and lodge it in the hands of specialists. There can be no doubt that this change will prove very profitable in many ways, but it will irresistibly bring about the destruction of those spontaneous motives which give one of the greatest charms to the aspect of an old civilized country.

The foregoing very general considerations concerning the effect of custom in the greater constructive arts should be largely extended in order to afford a firm basis for a closer study of the imitative motives of society. Brief as they are, however, they must needs serve to illustrate the general conclusions concerning the origin and value of these motives, of which we propose now to speak.

First let us notice that this imitative motive is by no means limited to man;

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(1) The Separation of our frontier folk from their race traditions is well shown by their entire loss of all the folklore which their race once possessed. I have been unable to find a trace of the songs and fairy-tales of the old English people among: the folk of the Southern Alleghanies, who, in their customs and character, are more closely related to the British yeomanry of the seventeenth Century than any other part of our population. It would be interesting to inquire into the causes which have led to the destruction of these race traditions, which were retained through all the wide migrations of the various folk in the eastern continent, but such an inquiry would lead us far from our subject matter.

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it may be seen among very many of the lower animals. It is true that among most of these inferior creatures, where an architectural impulse exists, it is under the direction of a mental machinery which probably acts without any conscious intelligence; but for all that, we are not entitled to regard this motive as essentially different from that which impels man to imitate the actions, or the structures of his fellows, at least where the action is not purely instructive. Among the elephants, the monkeys, and the dogs, although there may exist an inherited predisposition to the imitative act, the way in which the impulse operates shows us plainly that it is essentially akin to the faculty as we find it in man. In the web-building spiders, in the wasps and bees, where the construction of complicated contrivances is carried out by creatures which have never seen the work of their ancestors, the imitative process is less clearly allied to that of men.

In the constructive work of the nest-building birds, as has been well shown by Mr. Wallace and others, there is a combination of an instinctive impulse, which compels them to prepare a place for their eggs and young, with an imitative faculty, which leads them to shape these nests by a direct process of copy-rag from the work done by their kindred of the same species. Certain varieties, if reared apart from others of their kind, have been observed to change the fashion of their nests, and to proceed in a way of their own with their work of construction, making mistakes which were clearly due to the lack of a chance to profit by their race traditions. We observe the influence of the imitative motive in a yet more striking way in the case of the song-bird, when the creature seeks to copy that which it may hear.

Thus we are driven to the belief that the imitative impulse is not limited to man, bat is a quality common to animals

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in the lower yet kindred life about us. It is clearly a product of the social condition, one which comes to intelligent beings when they are subjected to that quickening of the mind which is the result of the social habit.

This leads us to see that the production of the imitative motive clearly lies in the sympathy which prevails between the several members of a society. Each social being is, by the very fact that it is social, keenly alive to all the actions of its fellows. The usual acts of the herd or flock are instinctively adopted as the acts fit for each individual among human beings. Culture may hedge the individual about, and place him in a critical position towards the motives of his fellows, - this is indeed the first and greatest function of culture; but the impulse to do as his fellows do remains even in the most isolated of men. Under conditions of excitement, especially when brought closely in contact with his fellows, culture is apt to be a frail bar to the imitative impulse. The individuality given by education, though it may be strong enough to secure the person against the access of what we may term the mob spirit, as long as the circum-stances are those to which he has been accustomed in his isolated action, is likely to vanish as soon as these circumstances are changed. Under novel conditions, the restraint which custom puts on the ancient imitative motive is usually not strong enough to overcome that impulse.

The influence of fashion or custom on all human actions thus appears to be a mode of expression of that sympathy with the fellow-being, that strange sense of relation to the kindred life, which is the product of society in man and brute. This sense of sympathy is best shown in the more direct relations between fellow-beings; it is well exhibited in the impulse to mutual help, which Springs instinctively to activity at the appeal of suffering; though it is seen in less

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marked bat still important ways in the tendency to imitate the constructions which have come from the activity of the kindred life.

The imitative motive is evident in the following of fashions, in dress, deportment, and ornament, which with many people is a blind and unreasoning impulse. It is the less manifest in the matter of architecture, but even here it is seen operating as a powerful motive, in accumulating and affirming local peculiarities of construction. It is yet fainter in the matter of national actions, but there also we may see the impulse to imitation, at times acting with singular power, though not often with much persistency. A sense of ancestral history, a desire to be like noble, or traditionally noble, ancestors, has decided many a battle-field, and shaped the course of many a nation's policy in time of trial. The recent history of Japan has shown us a State suddenly aroused to an almost absurd desire to put on the shape of distant peoples, who by some evidences of power have come to seem worthy of imitation.

Those who are interested in forecasting the future of our social System will find abundant room for conjecture in the changes which are coming over the imitative motives in the swift alterations of our modern life. It is evident that some of the greater modifications of the social machinery are to be brought about by the changes of these motives, which now seem to bind the individual man to his fellows, and the living generations to those which have gone before. The so-called progress in the arts is gradually separating mankind from all domestic industries whatsoever, thereby destroying one of the strongest of the old bonds between the generations. Formerly the body of practical learning which concerned men came down in the traditional path from generation to generation. Men felt that the wisdom of their fathers was a precious and saving

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heritage. They cherished and advanced these inherited traditions, and transmitted the store to their children. The family house was not encumbered with the commercial products of a hundred different factories, but was a school of the arts of life, a place of many industries, inherited from the forefathers. The modern innovations have spared labor, and opened to men and women the way to a wider life, but they are destroying the strongest bonds that link them to the past.

Our modern System, it is true, offers a new bond in place of the old basis of allegiance to the past. It offers us a historic knowledge of ancestors, a critical estimate of their deeds and motives. Undoubtedly, this new method of considering the past is more learned than the old; but it clearly is at present less sympathetic, less calculated to unite the successive generations in the common bond of motives and deeds. By it we cannot expect to preserve the old unity of peoples, as it was preserved by the traditional methods which it is now displacing.

The value of the unconscious allegiance to ancestry, which is shown in the perpetuation of customs, to the unity of the State is hard to measure. It evidently varies greatly in different peoples: it has its fullest expression in the society of China and of other Asiatic states, where the living generation is fettered to the dead; it is strong in almost all the old societies of Europe; it appears weaker in Britain than elsewhere in the Old World, but it is at its mini-mum in America, where many circumstances have served to make the living singularly independent of those who have gone before.

The open-minded critical observer will undoubtedly find in our American life much of profit which has come from the ablation of custom. The American, self-centred, with none of the bürden of the past life upon him, is a more agile

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creature than the older type of man, who has a heavy load of the past to hamper him in his accommodation to the living moment. The very inventiveness which is the most striking intellectual mark of the American is a measure of his independence of the past; the best use he can make of the ancestral traditions is to get his foot upon them, that he may mount to a higher plane of action. From his church to his barn, from his State to his family, he makes the thing fit his own immediate needs. When he follows the ancestral path, it is with no reverence nor even with an unreverential respect for the better know-ledge of his ancestors, but only because of habit, - because he has not yet found, in the pressure of his incessant labor, the time to make a new and better way. His golden age is in the future, and, with his face towards the glowing east, he cares little for the shadows where his fathers lie. Such is the man of innovations, and from his labor the world may expect a rich harvest of good. All this and more may be said for this new kind of man, the first of his species to be so emancipated from the past. The world has never seen his like before, and will view his actions with mingled curiosity and fear.

The student of men, who has gained a sense of the place which the law of custom has had in the history of man-kind, will watch the emancipated man of the New World, to see how he fares with his new motives. Even now, at the outset of the American experiment of doing without ancestral customs as far as that may be possible, he may fancy that he discerns certain interesting results, both of good and evil, which are arising from this change in the relations of the American man. In the first place, the change has not in the least degree served to diminish the emancipated man's interest in his fellow-men; on the contrary, the concentration of the interests and affections in actual

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ife has perhaps intensified the sympathies with his brother. Certainly, in no other age and in no other country have the sympathies been so quick as in our land and day. We can end discussion on this point by the evidence which the reconciliation of the North and South affords. This is an instance of sympathy almost beyond belief; those who have seen it have beheld one of the most marvelous incidents in history. It would doubtless be unreasonable to attribute all of this to the Separation of the American man from the past, but the whole history of the civil war, and especially the treatment of the subjugated, was possible only with a people who had severed themselves from the traditions which have guided societies in similar exigencies.

In almost any Situation of life, we can conceive that the man can best act his own nature by having little bondage with the past; but the question will arise as to how far this entire independence in action may gain in rationality by the severance from traditions. There can be no doubt that the *ismatic* humor of the American people, the tendency to try impossible social and religious experiments, is a product of this decay of custom. How far this expenditure of force in unprofitable lives, which end in moral failure and a hopeless wrecking of motives and of men, may go to countervail the advantage which arises from the greater flexibility which our people secure by their severance from the past is a debatable question.

Last of all, the observer may ask whether this new-won freedom will endure; whether it is not the product of the life in unhampered conditions, where the monuments of the past were wanting. Will not the consolidation of the national structure change this sportive, past-forgetting youth into a manhood which will have the motives of the older civilizations? There are not wanting signs that such a change is coming

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to our people. As the past of our own country gathers about its firesides, it may reassert its old claim upon the life of the day, and new ways may be found to return to the natural worship of ancestors. At present the trend of all modern life in civilized countries is rather against the bondage of ancestral custom. There have been several periods in the history of European peoples where there was the same revolt against the control of custom, such as that of the renaissance and the revolu-

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tion of the eighteenth Century; but the end has shown that the power of custom in men is too strong for them to break. It may well be that the American experiment will end in the same manner.

The strength of custom, and especially of its expression in the following of ancestral traditions, lies in the nature of the mind itself. Temporary causes may weaken its control, but it will require a change of an organic kind permanently to overthrow its power.

N. S. Shaler.