

LONDON, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1849.

As far as it is possible to estimate a design of almost formidable novelty and magnificence, we are of opinion that the country is indebted to Prince ALBERT for an important move in the development of its genius and resources. The pacific congress which he has proposed to the world is, on many accounts, the very thing we are in want of. Supposing it to be conducted with ordinary judgment, and to meet with moderate patronage and success; supposing also that other nations take up the idea, and that every year sees a great congress of arts in one metropolis or another, we anticipate benefits peculiarly fitted to our national deficiencies. We are an island and want international communication. Our merchants and gentry go abroad upon business or pleasure; but the great bulk of the people know the nearest nation of the continent only by name. Industrious and ingenious as our countrymen are, they want some of the qualities which contribute not only to intellectual elevation, but even to commercial success. Large sums are annually lavished in the vain attempt to create a school of taste, yet at this moment our manufacturers are obliged to pilfer French patterns, and think themselves eminently successful when they disguise the inventions of Paris and Lyons without spoiling them. As a general rule, our native manufacturers have no resources except a beggarly dependence on foreigners, a servile adherence to classic and other conventional forms, and the merest imitation. Our position, our mineral wealth, our machinery, our commerce, and the inexhaustible energy of our race, enable us to carry all markets before us, and to force our commodities on the world; but the want of native taste is a continual drag on our efforts, and entails severe losses in a market continually affected by the caprices of fashion. Now, just as manners are learnt in good society, and morals among the virtuous, so taste in all its branches can only be acquired by communication with those who possess the precious gift, and by familiarity with their works and ideas. No amount of solitary thought, no effort of unassisted industry, can make a man a good Christian, a good poet, a good artist, or a good anything else. He must condescend to be helped; and if this is true of the relation between man and man, it is not less true of the intercourse of nations.

There is scarcely an article that could be mentioned in which our sterling qualities do not turn to less account than they should do—all for want of the graces. Our manufactures are cheap and good—often too good, as they only perpetuate ugliness. Our furniture is calculated to last for centuries, but is generally insipid and heavy. The wood may be well seasoned, the lines may be straight, and the corners right angles. The drawers may fit, and doors may be well hung. What is more, the lock and key may do their duty. But the whole is a mere stupid repetition, line for line, of some vulgar model, of which there are ten thousand too many in the world already. In any third-rate French town there are dozens of cabinet-makers whose politics may be rather loose, and whose workmanship may not be always trustworthy, but who at the price of the London article will turn out a real work of imagination. For comfort and for use we might prefer the home goods, but if we wish for the occasional refreshment of an agreeable object, or covet a poetical air for our apartments, we should find it much cheaper to import. It is the same with

every other sort of manufacture. From millinery to men of war, from rockets to lighthouses, from cookery to tactics, from *bon bons* to triumphal arches, our neighbours surpass us in the science and the taste necessary to bring these things to perfection. As for us, it must be confessed that we live by "sucking their brains." The tortoise beats the hare. Our dogged resolution serves us for genius, and we reap the crop which others have sown. Such we say is our case for the most part. We have amongst us extraordinary instances of science, genius, and taste; but as a general rule, there is more of these qualities in a French operative than in an English employer.

It is evident, however, that the gain will not be only on our side. The Frenchman has more to learn than the Englishman. Why is the Frenchman, in spite of his science, driven to import our machinery? Why is the smallest article of English manufacture a treasure in France? There cannot be a more acceptable present to a Frenchman than an English penknife or corkscrew; or to a Frenchwoman than a paper of English pins. When an English lady residing in France sends her dress to a milliner the latter carefully abstracts every English pin she can find in the dress, in order to use it in the process of dress-making and fitting, for which its superior sharpness and smoothness render it invaluable. Whatever can be done by machinery, whatever requires steady industry, capital, or the co-operation of numbers, is better done here than in France. Our fields of iron and coal have given an extraordinary development to our mechanical faculties. Our insular position and command of the seas have made us good practical navigators. Our climate, our soil, and our social state have made us good agriculturists. On all these points France can easily repay herself for the advantages we derive from her artistic superiority. Such is the prospect of mutual gains suggested by the comparison of this country with its nearest neighbour. Our relation with Germany, Italy, and other countries promises only a less degree of the same useful results.

It is with great delicacy and even hesitation that we advert to the political benefits of such international reunions. The causes of war are too deep-seated, too permanent under the surface, and too ready to start above it, that we are forced to look with little faith on the mutual civilities of *savans* or manufacturers as the means of averting the beginning of war. Such is the proneness of mankind to grasp at shadows, that it is oftener our duty to expose the flimsy devices of the peacemongers than to encourage the hope of a universal pacification. Thus much, however, we may say with confidence:—It is in the nature of peace to be forwarded by indirect and unobtrusive means. He is no real peacemaker who rushes in between two jealous and sensitive neighbours, and cries out, "Good neighbours, pray do not quarrel. What reason have you to hate one another? Pray tell me what are your differences. I will set you all right." Such a man only keeps the sore open, if any exists. The tendency to war is an insanity which requires not so much direct argument—for who thinks of arguing with a madman?—as diversion to other pursuits. Bring the nations of Europe to a joint exhibition of their several works in Hyde-park or the Champs Elysées and they will be all the more likely to forget their old grudges. They will, in fact, be thinking of something else, and entertain another sort of rivalry—the rivalry of civilized art, instead of the old rivalry of strategic skill and brute force.