

Thursday, August 25

Our excommunicated ship-mate thinking proper to comply with the sentence the court passed upon him, and expressing himself willing to pay the fine, we have this morning received him into unity again. Man is a sociable being, and it is for aught I know one of the worst of punishments to be excluded from society. I have read abundance of fine things on the subject of solitude, and I know 'tis a common boast in the mouths of those that affect to be thought wise, *that they are never less alone than when alone*. I acknowledge solitude an agreeable refreshment to a busy mind; but were these thinking people obliged to be always alone, I am apt to think they would quickly find their very being insupportable to them. I have heard of a gentleman who underwent seven years close confinement, in the Bastile at Paris. He was a man of sense, he was a thinking man; but being deprived of all conversation, to what purpose should he think? for he was denied even the instruments of expressing his thoughts in writing. There is no burden so grievous to man as time that he knows not how to dispose of. He was forced at last to have recourse to this invention: he daily scattered pieces of paper about the floor of his little room, and then employed himself in picking them up and sticking them in rows and figures on the arm of his elbow-chair; and he used to tell his friends, after his release, that he verily believed if he had not taken this method he should have lost his senses. One of the philosophers, I think it was Plato, used to say, that he had rather be the veriest stupid block in nature, than the possessor of all knowledge without some intelligent being to communicate it to.

What I have said may in a measure account for some particulars in my present way of living here on board. Our company is in general very unsuitably mixed, to keep up the pleasure and spirit of conversation: and if there are one or two pair of us that can sometimes entertain one another for half an hour agreeably, yet perhaps we are seldom in the humour for it together. I rise in the morning and read for an hour or two perhaps, and then reading grows tiresome. Want of exercise occasions want of appetite, so that eating and drinking affords but little pleasure. I tire myself with playing at draughts, then I go to cards; nay there is no play so trifling or childish, but we fly to it for entertainment. A contrary wind, I know not how, puts us all out of good humour; we grow sullen, silent and reserved, and fret at each other upon every little occasion. 'Tis a common opinion among the ladies, that if a man is ill-natured he infallibly discovers it when he is in liquor. But I, who have known many instances to the contrary, will teach them a more effectual method to discover the natural temper and disposition of their humble servants. Let the ladies make one long sea voyage with them, and if they have the least spark of ill nature in them and conceal it to the end of the voyage, I will forfeit all my pretensions to their favour. The wind continues fair.

Franklin, Benjamin, *Journal of a Voyage* (1726) in *Franklin Papers*, Vol. 1, p. 72 (<https://franklinpapers.org>)

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ANOMALIES. SPIRIT OF ASSOCIATION AND SPIRIT OF EXCLUSION
{30th May 1836}

I see many things in this country which I cannot yet completely understand, among others this: Two spirits which, if not altogether contrary, are at least very diverse, seem to hold equal sway in England. The one prompts people to pool their efforts to attain ends which in France we would never think of approaching in this way. There are associations to further science, politics, pleasure, business. . . . The other prompts each man and each association to keep all advantages as much as possible to themselves, to close every possible door that would let any outsider come in or look in. There is a story that a collector owned a very precious antique vase ; he heard there was another like it. Having bought it at a very high price, he had it broken before his eyes, so that he could say that he possessed the only marvel of this sort in the world. He must have been an Englishman, exclusive proprietorial jealousy being so far developed here that it counts as one of the main national characteristics. To come back to the subject of this note. I cannot completely understand how 'the spirit of association' and 'the spirit of exclusion' both came to be so highly developed in the same people, and often to be so intimately combined. Example a club; what better example of association than the union of individuals who form the club? What more exclusive than the corporate personality represented by the club? The same applies to almost all civil and political associations, the corporations. . . ,

See how families divide up when the birds are able to leave the nest! On reflection I incline to the view that the spirit of individuality is the basis of the English character. Association is a means suggested by sense and necessity for getting things unattainable by isolated effort. But the spirit of individuality comes in on every side ; it recurs in every aspect of things. Perhaps one might suggest that it has indirectly helped the development of the other spirit by inspiring every man with greater ambitions and desires than one finds elsewhere. That being so, the need to club together is more generally felt, because the urge to get things is more general and stronger (a clumsy, obscure sentence, but I think the idea is right and needs looking into again). I suppose that if the French could become more enlightened than they are, they would take to clubbing together more naturally than the English.

Tocqueville, Alexis (de), *Journeys to England and Ireland*, Ed. by J.P. Mayer, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958, p. 87-88.

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