



Society in America

Harriet Martineau

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This historic book may have numerous typos and missing text. Purchasers can download a free scanned copy of the original book (without typos) from the publisher. Not indexed. Not illustrated. 1837 Excerpt: ... temporary avail. Prudence is now reigning supreme over the elderly classes of Boston generally, and too many of the young. Independence is animating the rest. It remains to be seen which will have succumbed when the present youth of the city shall have become her legislators, magistrates, and social representatives. ' As a specimen of the thoughts and feelings of some on the spot, I give the following. " Liberty of thought and opinion is_ strenuously maintained: in this ppoud land it has become almost a wearisome cant: our speeches and journals, religious and political, are made nauseous by the vapid and vain-glorious reiteration. But does it, after all, characterise any community among us? Is there any oneto which a qualified observer shall point, and say, There opinion is free? On the contrary, is it not a fact, a sad and deplorable fact, that in no land on this earth is the mind more I fettered than it is here? that here what we call public opinion has set up a despotism, such as exists nowhere else? Public opinion,--a-tyrant, sitting in the dark, wrapt up in mystification and vague terrors of obscurity; deriving power no one knows from whom; like an Asian monarch, unapproachable, nnimpeachable, undethronable, perhaps illegitimate,--but irresistible in its power to quell thought, to repress action, to silence conviction,---and bringing the timid perpetually under an unworthy bondage of mean fear to some impostor opinion, some noisy judgment, which gets astride on the popular breath for a day, and controls, through the lips of im_p-udent folly, the speech and actions of the wise. From this influence and rule, from this bondage to opinion, no community, as such, is free; though doubtless individuals are. But your community, brethren, based on the p...

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