

PROBLEMS IN HUMAN NATURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'MORNING CLOUDS,'
'THE AFTERNOON OF LIFE,' 'THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE,'
AND 'A NEGLECTED LINE OF STUDY.'

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THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED,
NEEDING INDULGENCE,
AND, FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH, CLAIMING IT.

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THE SOURCE OF VANITY.

‘ Sue cagioni ha natura, in se frammiste
D’ alti Principi d’ ogni luce schivi,
E di volgari — a cui veder tu arrivi
Se pazienza e brame in te persiste.’

ALFIERI.

‘ Most people dislike vanity in others, whatever share they may have of it themselves; but I give it fair quarter wherever I meet with it, being persuaded that it is often productive of good to the possessor, and to others who are within his sphere of action; and therefore in many cases it would not be altogether absurd, if a man were to thank God for his *vanity* among the other comforts of life.’—B. FRANKLIN.

THE SOURCE OF VANITY.

I ONCE entertained the happy thought, that I had made an observation on human nature which would throw new light on one of its most perplexing characteristics; and for some months I ruminated upon what seemed to me an original discovery—the fact that all human beings desire and attempt to take effect upon each other, and that their social happiness is in proportion to their success in this endeavour.

I ceased to think myself a discoverer, on finding my notion anticipated, and perfectly expressed, by one whose opinions have not only the originality of genius, but the weight of caution and extreme solicitude for truth: Mr. Bain says, in one of his papers upon phrenology, ‘It is a great and characteristic pleasure of our nature to exert influence, and produce telling effects upon our fellows, by ordering them about, pleasing them, paining them, terrifying them, or drawing out their admiration and esteem. The strong delight in the company of the weaker, on whom they can exercise their might. A talker wants to have listeners, a jester must have his butt.’ *

* Bain on the Propensities.—*Fraser's Magazine*, 1860.

In trying to place this truth in fuller light, and bringing it to bear upon various problems which have hitherto wanted a key, I no longer lay claim to any novelty of idea, and I only hope to prove the invariableness of a beneficent law.

An instinctive desire to take effect has been continually noticed as a phenomenon of frequent occurrence; but, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been sufficiently examined as the mainspring of human action. No part of our nature has given so much trouble to thinkers and moralists as vanity. Philosophers hardly know what to make of it—how to account for the inexhaustible, multiform follies of the impulse which bears the dubious name of vanity; and teachers cannot attack it with any certain aim, because of its inconvenient relationship to some of the most amiable virtues; vanity being, as Dr. A. Carlyle has said, ‘a passion that is easy to be entreated, and that unites freely with the best affections.’

We can safely declaim against the ball-room manifestations of this passion, but when we find it luxuriating in the guarded retreats of piety, and combining easily with the noblest efforts of benevolence, we are at a loss; and unless we admit some taint of falsehood into our strictures and admonitions, I doubt if we can call vanity wholly a sin. The parent of many it certainly is, but what is its own source? Is it anything worse than this—a wish to take effect upon other minds? Why, that is just what the teacher wishes, too; only his ultimate aim is to do good. It may be a heresy to say so, yet I firmly believe that the poor heart fluttering with vanity would be equally desirous to do good, if it had learned to think it as possible to be of use every day, as to be admired now and then.

It will be worth while to look as closely as we can into the sources of vanity. Proteus-like in habit, in origin it is always the same; and perhaps, if we better understood its first prompting motive, we should be more able to reduce the fantastic outgrowth which wastes so many lives. We need not be afraid of facing the inward foe; human nature always gains *respect* from a profound research into its windings — *contempt*, if we stop short at generalizations upon what lies on its surface. In this enquiry, 'to reach the law within the law' is our only chance of discovering the outlines of the Divine image in the defaced ruin of human nature.

The utmost fearlessness of research and honesty of confession will not endanger its dignity—half admissions and partial investigation cannot fail to do so; and those who fear to see the lens of thought applied to anything so corrupt, so obscure, and self-deceiving as man's heart, may be assured, that if they can endure a slight shock at the first glance into its hidden depths, a steady gaze will discern good in much which before appeared inscrutably evil, and will reconcile many of its most astonishing contradictions.

With such insight we shall find ourselves unable to deny that the heart is 'desperately wicked,' and that none but the Omniscient can know it truly; but, at the same time, we shall be met with overwhelming proof of our divine origin and exalted destiny. We shall confess that we are indeed the children of the Most High, though acknowledging with renewed conviction that in us *dwelleth* no good thing.

If I was not persuaded that all frank and fair investigation of human nature, in its least workings, led to these wholesome results, I would not add to the public stock my small but careful observations. I must

apologise in advance for any straining of my theory, if such a charge can be justly made against me, although nothing will be here stated which does not appear to me undeniably true.

A few common examples of the wish to take effect will suggest a variety of proof. Everyone has felt anger or seen it in others, and many, I suppose, have observed, that as soon as the angry person has provoked another into an ill temper, his own irritation begins to subside; the sense of having taken effect soothes the temper. It is not that we long, like mad dogs, to communicate the *virus* that torments us, but that the chagrin which some temporary loss of power occasioned, is relieved by this trifling proof of influence. On the other hand, nothing more aggravates an ill temper than being met with coolness or indifference of manner; for it proves that our agitation takes no effect upon our companions.

Children soon find this out, and, without reason or theory to guide them, will employ sullenness or silence, when blamed, to show how little they are impressed; and when this is the case, to continue to rebuke, remonstrate, or implore, is only to prolong their pleasurable consciousness of the strong effect wilfulness takes upon those who are trying to influence them; and even without the sanction of Solomon's wisdom, it is clear that the rod has the advantage of prompt and certain efficacy, and will take effect just at a crisis when a child rejoices in its own perverse strength, and defies every other argument. I speak of little children, and to those only who would never make punishment an outlet for their own ill tempers.

What is more universal and seemingly causeless than the falsehoods which children indulge in? Almost

as soon as they can speak, they will say the most daring untruths, and apparently see no harm in them. It is easy to say that this is a lamentable sign of the depravity of human nature, but that does not explain the fact to my mind; nor do I believe in any wickedness flowing from within us, without a determining motive. The child has seen emotion caused by this or that announcement; he has observed surprise, anger, or pleasure to follow upon certain statements of fact; he can now exercise the faculty of speech, and would fain try his own power in the same way. He will therefore unblushingly tell you that the dog got upon the table and ate three mutton-chops; and though he sees that the dish is untouched, and might know, if he could put the ideas together, that the fib would soon be made manifest, he enjoys the temporary excitement of seeing an older person hurry to the table, blame the servant for leaving a dish uncovered, and sift his prattling story for evidence:—and the after-reproof for falsehood, and, too often, the misapplication of the example of Ananias and Sapphira, only *then* avail to convince the little fellow that the consequences of that kind of effectiveness are undesirable. By degrees, he learns to observe more carefully, in order that he may report more truly, and take effect without future forfeit.

It is much the same with grown-up men and women: a tendency to exaggeration infects all conversation. Very few escape it by conscientious attention to their words; and this universal tendency arises not only from heedlessness, but, unless I am much mistaken, from the natural wish to make a stronger impression than with unvarnished truth we can. Quite unconsciously, the heightening colour is added. Sometimes this seems

almost necessary, if we want to give another person any notion of what has strongly impressed ourselves; and, with something like perspective in drawing, we are obliged to place facts or feelings in an artificial way in order to convey truth to one who sees from another point of view (a hazardous venture for truth!). And sometimes, again, we are urged by sudden nervousness to justify by slight exaggeration the mention of matters that first show their insignificance when put into words. Like the child's story, these little exaggerations may for a moment succeed, but no less surely they defeat their object; and in the long run, nothing makes such a deep and lasting impression as the simplest transfer of uncoloured truth.

All gossip (except the cruel poison of malice) has this same source, this same end. People meet together without having business to transact, or pleasure to communicate by their society; of course they wish to take some effect, — and what is more sure with the common run of minds than the power of gratifying curiosity? and what so certainly stimulates common curiosity as the sayings and doings, and, if possibly they can be had, the feelings of neighbours? At any rate, approximations to truth in such things can be gained by shrewd conjecture, and these with a very small mixture of knowledge will soon take place among facts, and will be then no unwelcome contingent to the confused data gradually collected, about those of whom little is really known.

And with all reverence to women, let it be said, that being less able to take effect by their *action* on the minds of their fellow-creatures, they are generally more addicted to exert the influence of the tongue than men, who, in their busy lives, cannot find time for such transitory exercise of power. A gossiping man is

allowed to be an exception to the common rule of masculine character.

Again, in the cruelty of children, 'cruel more from ignorance than will,' we find the same impulse at work; the young creature feels its strength and tries to take effect upon beings weaker than itself; to prove its power by ways more in accordance with the natural man, than with the cultivated feelings and graces of riper years. A knowledge of the far greater power of gentleness and kind treatment is very gradually acquired; and for many years the sense of animal force inclines boys to rough treatment of all that come within their reach.

Flirting falls under the same class of follies: it is but a merciless endeavour to impress another mind with the charms that are practically powers. The vain woman who has tacitly convinced her admirer that he has taken some effect upon her, knows — though generally far too thoughtless to reflect upon it — that she has thus greatly intensified her influence with him; and, as long as she is sufficiently unoccupied by anyone else to take pleasure in this influence, she will keep it up by a hundred wiles of look, and speech, and manner — by deceit that has far more excuse in real life than in cold reason can be offered for it, because so much that is wrongly done in this way is done unconsciously and instinctively, and because the giddy heads that have lured many an honest man into bitter sorrows were incapable of forethought, and led on from one folly to another by excitement which hid from them their own insincerity, and almost warranted the usual formula of being 'sure they never thought what it would have come to.' Those who *have* thought, and yet have misled, must answer for it at a higher tribunal than that of human judgement. Would they but consider the lasting good

effects of charity and truth in all social relations, they might find exercise for their bewitching influence that would soothe, and not terrify conscience, in those last hours when conscience alone will speak, and the voice of the Infallible Judge is expected with helpless fear.

Again, who has not seen, and felt perhaps surprised by, the buoyant happiness of a very industrious woman, deprived, it may be, of any external means for taking effect, except her cheerful activity? It is often cheerful, even when mere drudgery of manual work, because it is taking certain effect upon divers useful things.

The desire for conscious power explains in some degree the curious fact of 'superior' people being, for the most part, disliked and dreaded by average human nature. 'Go from us, for thou art mightier than we' (Genesis xxvi. 16), sounds rather inconsequent when virtually expressed towards mental and moral power, which in itself is far more calculated for *aid* than for *offence*. But regarding the instinct with reference to the wish to take effect, it is perfectly intelligible. Beside one who takes a far stronger and more lasting effect than ourselves, our own powers seem crushed — all but annihilated; and, forgetting the peculiar virtues of *every* original power, we succumb to the erroneous feeling that when greater force is exhibited, the lesser can take no effectual part in adjacent life.

We see the process, in a small scale, in every household where any one strong character habitually dominates; we know it has been going on in a scale much larger, but in nature identical, among savage tribes, when brought in contact with our more civilised Anglo-Saxon race. We say the poor savage is disheartened by his manifest inferiority, and droops, and dies out: alas! England's well-ordered homes contain many a diffident character,

undergoing daily discouragement, and in danger of consequent deterioration, from setting too high a value on powers witnessed, and on powers possessed, too little. If such people cannot be removed from contiguity so unfavourable to moral health, every effort should be made to give them a truer estimate of the inalienable wealth of their own resources. They must, by all means, learn to take effect in whatever direction Nature opens to them and duty permits.

The preference of elderly people for the companionship of the young is mainly attributable to the feeling that they can still bestow benefits upon the inexperienced, who need advice, protection, and encouragement at an age when every influence is comparatively strong,—when ignorance requires to be guided, and untested powers crave for suitable direction. And perhaps young people may take almost as much effect on the old, by their freshness of thought and joyous recklessness of consequences, bringing back to a time-worn spirit the pleasant stimulants of memory;—for certain it is that the old are often the favourite companions of childhood and youth.

But the point most deserving our consideration on which this love of influence bears, is the too common difficulty of family affection. Attachment is more general among relations than affection.

If my reader's experience should contradict this assertion, and condemn it eagerly as a cold-hearted misstatement, I would only offer my congratulations, and pass on. But not until a family of grown-up brothers and sisters are more frequently found *wishing* to live together; not until sisters who attempt it, do keep up not only outward harmony, but inward enjoyment of each other's society, shall I believe myself

mistaken, and think those happy exceptions who delight in living among grown-up relations, less singularly blessed than I now suppose them to be.

The belief that they are exceptions no longer pains me : it seems to me in the nature of things unlikely that those who probably share the same turn of defect, the same feebleness or stubbornness of will, should enjoy lifelong fellowship. They may be truly and tenderly attached, and yet the real inability to impress or to be strongly impressed by characters that have been known, and acting upon each other from childhood, makes it improbable that with them there would be such pleasant conjunction as with newer acquaintance.

A well-known chemical fact affords an illustration of what appears to be equally true with regard to human opposites. 'It seems to be a general law that bodies most opposed to each other in chemical properties evince the greatest tendency to enter into combination ; and conversely, bodies between which strong analogies and resemblances can be traced, manifest a much smaller amount of mutual attraction.' 'Acids are drawn towards alkalies, and alkalies towards acids, while union among themselves rarely, if ever, takes place.' *

When members of one family have lived long together, they have generally imbibed from each other all that they can assimilate ; and 'Nature, the Vicar of Almighty God,'† eager to establish new relations, and form new homes, often flags while submitting to the tedium of unstimulating society. Introduce a stranger of average ability, and every power of thought and

* Fowne's *Manual of Elementary Chemistry*.

† Chaucer.

speech will be refreshed; the pulse of life quickens; for here is a recipient to whom the well-known family ideas may have the charm of novelty, and the same observations which in the family circle everyone knew the drift of, before they were fully worded, will be heard by the guest with more than polite attention: it is a new stock in the social market, and a pleasing barter of new impressions will begin. In this process there is no proof of deficiency in family love, no sign that the guest is better loved or better treated; but it cannot be denied that the new-comer is more gladly entertained than those who, through life, have shared the same circumstances, and habitually exchanged ideas.

The cheerfulness of hypochondriacs with anyone but their own home companions, is commented upon as a distressing anomaly; according to my theory, nothing is more natural. If all mental disease is, as has been said, the result of 'a fading personality,'* what is more likely to revive its energies than the presence of a stranger, on whom the poor worn instrument may yet take effect, though its finest tones are gone — by whom may be witnessed and acknowledged those powers which have fallen into disrepute or suspicion among familiars,

* 'An insane idea has its origin in a loss of healthy action in the mental faculties, and is established and continued through defect in the will, just as much as a morbid propensity is. Abnormal excitement, depression, apathy, stupidity, folly and delusion, are phenomena of defective control of thought and action. They are all traceable to a fading personality. The individualism of the subject is less apparent, its limitation less distinct, the ego less asserted, the person is less himself, less a king over his thoughts, which are more and more impressible by external causes, and less and less the reagents of the personal mind. Thoughts possess the man; his organisms are becoming the playthings of sensational influences, so that instead of possessing his ideas, he is, as Coleridge said, possessed by them.' — ROBERT JAMIESON.

because *they* know the morbid tendency that weakens, or the hallucination that distracts them ?

I suppose that nothing is better calculated to relieve mental disorder, even in an advanced stage, than the company of a new acquaintance. Whatever power of sane volition remains to the afflicted sufferer will probably be exercised, and thereby strengthened, by the effort to hide a malady that nullifies influence; and in trying to affect the stranger as a sane person, sounder conditions of thought may intervene, and break for a time the false association of ideas.

A superficial observer of human nature is scandalised to see the eagerness with which a stranger is often assisted — the evident pleasure that is felt in pleasing one who has, so to speak, no claims upon consideration — when, at the same time, little alacrity, and no excess of readiness, can be traced in our mode of helping near relations. It is an ugly fact, and we have but to bring in the charge of ingratitude to give it blackness. But what folly so to regard it ! Look to the roots of the matter, and you will find nothing very poisonous : you *may* call it vanity which loves to exhibit self in a fair light to every one whom it can attract ; yet, if you wish for truth, I believe you *must* call it a simple pleasure in taking effect wherever it is possible.

Now, with familiar companions, it is seldom possible that any kindness shown, or help offered, could make a very lively impression, because it is expected, and no more than due ; the gratified surprise of the stranger testifies more strongly to the impression made by our benevolence, and offers besides a pleasing probability of our being brought into agreeable relations with *unexplored* powers in some one else. And this no doubt explains the phenomenon so often ridiculed, and so often

too severely blamed, of a very catholic philanthropy combining with a charity that does not begin at home.

There is an exception to be noticed here; some very affectionate natures shrink from new acquaintance, and are never so happy or so demonstrative towards them as towards those to whom habit, as much as preference, has attached them: this is true, but does not invalidate my theory; for are such natures *able* to take effect upon strangers? Seldom: we may say without unkindness that they are for the most part too slow, too dull, or too reserved to combine readily with any new acquaintance. They are warm partisans, tender lovers, constant friends; but though singularly amiable in their own circle, they are not very agreeable in general society. A contrary disposition may be more vain and less amiable, but condemnable I cannot think it: ardent natures will justly long to take effect, to stimulate, to impress, and when they deal with minds long used to their agency, it is almost as impossible as for a ball or spike which has long lain in a bed of clay, to make a new and sharp impression; move it to a fresh layer of earth, and it will.

If enthusiastic lovers would or could reason during the warm excitement of their feelings, they might anticipate the change from ecstatic joy to sober contentment with little fear and no chagrin: rapture is soon over, and love ceases to engross, *not* because the affection is slight, but because human nature *cannot* be vehemently affected by any habitual pleasure. While the beloved object is distanced either by absence or any social barrier, and while reciprocal affection is uncertain, the feelings and procedure of that one must be of the greatest interest, and every word and look cannot fail to take strong effect upon the lover: and

to this, in great measure, do we owe the exquisite charm of love, which justifies the expression of the poet when speaking of the beloved, 'The lifting of whose eyelid is my lord.' *

But when the goal of so many ardent wishes is once gained, and the delightfulness of that companion, and the return of that devoted affection secured, and every day enjoyed, love ceases to respond with trembling susceptibility to each trifling incident. It does much better, for it calms and hallows every passing day with the composure of a thankful peace; and the united hearts, though no longer *agitated* by the delight of mutual influence, feel it—think and speak and act from it so continually, that in each self is lost sight of, and each would rather feel the powers of the other than care to test its own. This is the perfection of love; and for affection of another kind—for friendship—the same rule holds good. While it is new it *must* be more evidently impressive and exciting: firmly established, it may seem to be cooling down, when, in reality, it has only reached the sure ground of a thorough good understanding which needs no external pledge to guarantee our confidence. One of two friends, probably the weakest, may regret this, the visible sign of having taken effect upon the other seeming dearer than the knowledge that everything that concerns one now touches both; but if either party express the weak regret, a result will follow very different from what is desired; for there is thus danger of goading natural quiescence to artificial vivacity; and whoever constrains us to a forced expression of feeling, diminishes its strength and greatly endangers its duration.

* *The Princess.*

This notice of the causation of love is unpleasant: we do not like to subject our best feelings to a chilling scrutiny, which may be said to do away with romance: but what is all romance better than richly-coloured ignorance? and since all romance is doomed to annihilation by the hand of Time, and the world is full of lamentation for its short-lived bliss, is it wise to shrink from knowing what is the secret of its decay?

It would take too long to give all the examples one might of the love of taking effect, so comprehensive and undying is the motive; in the child's delight in making a little present a surprise — in the feeblest attempt of senile vanity — at every age the same un-eradicable tendency is revealed; and, to my mind, what seem the exceptions offer the strongest proof.

Proud natures, eager to make an impression as profound as their overweening self-estimates would lead them to expect, refuse to try and make any, till a fitting occasion; they disdain a slight effect, but are just as desirous as the vainest for a strong one. And of great minds we say, they are careless of appearances, and for the most part not vain;—careful about realities, careless as to the impression they produce on other people: it is true, but when examining it closely, I find small merit in this high indifference. Being quite sure of their powers, conscious that they *can* in a certain way take very strong effect upon their fellow-creatures, why should they be anxious for the smaller proofs of efficacy?

In early years, while the mental calibre is as yet unascertained, I think genius is as sensitive to approbation or blame as the most frivolous youth: farther on in life it smiles at both, and thinks of the approval of unseen peers in the populous world of spirits.

Pride believes it can take effect—potentially successful it is not always displeasing, for it leaves its pretensions in modest obscurity; but conceit offends us because it takes for granted and proclaims the success that vanity only craves for—often with imploring submissiveness; consequently, people are much quicker to suspect, and sharper in accusing conceit than vanity; the one makes light of *their* estimates; the other propitiates their favour. The amusing thing is to hear conceit repro-bated disdainfully by censors who have apparently no notion that it is their own vanity which is loudest in protesting against it. No wonder if conceited or even independent characters are disliked; on such the protective or monitory, or encouraging powers of their fellow-creatures fail to take any effect; but nothing is so generally pleasing as one so humble that *we* can give it encouragement; raising or depressing at pleasure.

Those who have least vanity seldom, I believe, feel much annoyed by the conceit of another person. It does not arrogate the prize they covet, and so they are content to let assumption gain as much or as little as it can. It never can intrude upon the domain of real merit; and the consciousness of real merit is too calm and happy to leave room for any irritation against pretenders.

Now this general desire to ‘impressionise’ (as Captain Burton has it) could scarcely prevail in a world created by infinite love and infinite wisdom, unless there was also given to human nature an almost equally strong delight in being impressed. When felt in a high degree, it is perhaps a stronger delight to be profoundly affected than to make a profound impression; but it is a condition which requires passive *receptiveness*, and the human mind, being active and

restless, necessarily knows less about it. Seeking out strong emotions is, in the nature of things, a failure; they must take us by surprise, and no endeavour can help us to attain them; therefore it is that for once that we feel ourselves deeply affected, we shall a hundred times strive to affect other people.

A little reflection will, I believe, prove this to be so: if we analyse a good deal of the conversation passing around us, we shall be convinced of it. We shall find it composed, for the most part, of attempts equally fruitless and innocent for making mutual impressions; fruitless, because minds are seldom impressible on the same point; innocent, because all alike wish to be impressed, interested, and amused.

Why is the conversation of many people so tedious, but because they still think to take effect upon us and cannot; because their weapons are either too feeble or too blunt? And in what does the folly of vain children and frivolous women consist, with regard to this instinct, except in this, that with the very same desire that actuates us all, their ignorance of the right means to gratify it allows them to weary us with a hundred paltry tricks, which neither please, nor excite more attention than the fly of which we can sooner be rid? These are eminently vain, because they hope to make an impression while their empty minds have not weight enough for the purpose. Beauty and grace are in such cases either lacking or ineffective, from the silly manners that make them distasteful.

It is possibly a deep chagrin at finding oneself still unimpressed, that originates the common antagonism of feeling when the *wish* to strike is detected; the grave look when people obviously try to make one laugh; and the inclination to laugh when they speak as if they

would fain make one cry. Nothing exhausts so much as undergoing the process of ceremonies or sayings that are intended to take effect upon one, and fail to do so: wit that does not amuse; benefits that excite no spontaneous gratitude; solemnities that do not solemnise, all bring on a deadly languor or acute exasperation.

What we call a horror of scenes in daily life, is simply an aversion to seeing preparations made for taking effect upon our minds. Much is said, and much done in social life of a purely dramatic character; that is, the feeling or thought expressed has no relation to any truth in the mind of the speaker, or doer, beyond this, that he or she wishes to take effect upon the feelings of other people. It is a pity, for nothing produces such coldness and such contempt as this when it is perceived. And the exactness with which we detect *any* intention to take effect upon us is curious; effect unconsciously taken delights, but when designed it deeply offends; probably because it argues the belief that our nature is commanded by another; an assumption which even children resent, and I think justly.

The evil surmises of our own vain hearts make us very suspicious of preparations where there are none; very intolerant of vanity where there is but a little. Self-admiration is an unpardonable crime, which attracts the most censorious notice; and candour will hardly be forgiven if it fulfils what Montaigne thought a duty. 'Je tiens qu'il fault estre prudent à estimer de soy, et pareillement conscientieux à en tesmoigner, soit bas, soit hault, indifféremment.'

A remarkable anecdote is told showing the great presence of mind, or great skill of some one not in the company; it interests, and we are pleased. With the

same guileless intention of pleasing, another speaker relates a somewhat similar accident that happened to himself, and how he acted, cleverly and bravely; and good taste doubts if such self-illumination is well. Should he thus refer to his own doings often, though it be for public benefit, he is considered disagreeably full of himself; and very likely he may be so; or in other words, so narrow in experience and cold to public interests, from deficiency of thought or information, as to suppose his own little excitements striking or singular enough to impress other people.

Mr. Bain's axiom 'that the peculiar effect that we ourselves are most sensitive to is the effect that we are most gratified in causing in others,' is universally true. The frivolous, who are strongly influenced by external show, like to strike their neighbours' imaginations with fine appearances of one sort or another; the tasteful to exhibit taste; the admirers of mere rank to speak of their own pedigree, or friendly acquaintance with a title; and the most lofty minds are exhilarated by conversation which gives release to *their* finest powers and displays the acquisitions *they* think glorious. And though experience must convince them that on average minds acuteness of thought, depth of information, and subtle eloquence seldom take effect, yet is nature too strong for calculations of prudence; and to a man who loves no book half so well as his banking-book or 'Peerage,' will the philosopher with child-like ostentation talk of his rare editions, and new hopes of a scientific discovery.

Captain Burton witnesses to the same tendency when he speaks of some of his poor Africans as 'having that curious mania for command which seems part of servile nature.' It is natural, for nothing affects a coward so powerfully as authoritative command; and nothing

does he more enjoy than exercising the sway of a bully.

We must now look into the counterpart of this love of 'power, which in all action is the end of all,'* and give due attention to our *love of being acted upon*—of feeling strong powers impress us. Just in proportion to the emotional passivity of one nature will be its delight in the energizing activity of another; and happily human society contains every variety of both. The almost adoring love of woman is deeply gratified by witnessing the world-influencing energies of man; and so much she loves to admire, to reverence, to accept a leader, that, for the most part, she is very tolerant of the self-seeking and willfulness of masculine character—far less easily will she pardon in it a want of will and inability to command. And on man's side a dislike to energizing women is notorious; they may be all that is good and estimable; may distinguish themselves by rare talents or singular virtues, and yet, with few exceptions, do they please as much as the more passive?

Is not man's jealousy of superiority (which so named, sounds such incomprehensible folly) an unconscious instinct that with the strong-minded, wide-acting woman he cannot take so much effect as with the common run, who being on a lower level of mind than himself must needs look up to him? A really superior man will not feel this jealousy, he will find his powers more effective with her than with women who would only be puzzled by them,—though women seldom wait to admire till they understand;—but in using the hacknied word 'superior' in its accurate sense we imply an unfrequent ability.

* Tennyson's *Enone*.

Yet, in thus attributing to women more delight in being impressed, than is usually found in men, I do not exclude them, in any degree, from the universal law that *all human beings strive to be effective*. On the contrary, being constitutionally more excitable, they manifest this instinct with striking vivacity, and are more impatient for *immediate* results of power than men.

Women are hardly won from avocations which tend to make immediate impression on other people, to those pursuits which have no present effect on any minds but their own. Dressing, ornamental works, and visiting the sick and poor, are more welcome to their tastes than the slow toil of grounding themselves thoroughly in any art or science: and we say rightly that active employment, or handiwork of any kind suits woman better than abstract study; it does so, not only because her duties and physical constitution make work preferable to study, but because work enables her to feel at once the results of her activity. This, however, cannot supply the joy of impressions *received*, and where these are faint and few in early life we may observe a curious inversion of power. Unless the nature is altogether too languid to attempt to repair deficiency, a lonely girl will turn to study as a means for acting upon herself; and slowly learning to produce strong impressions internally by thought and imagination, she will thus become more independent for life of those that can be received from without.

Just the reverse happens when much social excitement, with many opportunities of exercising power, or being influenced by it, is enjoyed by young people. The acknowledged contrast of English and French manners will fairly illustrate the difference.

A Frenchwoman who has analysed vanity with

unsurpassed subtlety of observation, tells us that vanity was evidently at work in the terrible times of the French Revolution. 'C'est dans la marche intérieure de la révolution qu'on peut observer l'empire de la vanité, du désir des applaudissemens éphémères, du besoin de faire effet, de cette passion native de France, et dont les étrangers comparativement à nous n'ont qu'une idée très imparfaite.*' One might suppose that the greater excitability of the French would keep the wish to take effect in constant exercise; and that consequently there would be in French society the utmost precision and graceful rapidity in making impression. And so I believe it is found to be by those who have enjoyed its peculiar charm; though this charm has the drawback of an unstable disposition, liable to levity, sudden heats, and hazardous excess of passion.

But in England we are inclined to disdain overmuch the acknowledged endeavour to please; we think a profound and lasting impression alone worth caring for, and willingly forfeit quick returns of social stimulus in favour of more enduring results. We hoard our emotions, and if they are lasting, they are slow and shy in appearing. So little are we warmed on the surface, that to many a Frenchman English life can hardly seem animated enough to make it appear happier than death. And when either from pride, or reserve, or solitary habits, by whatever means occasioned, people abstain from any effort to affect their companions pleasantly, there is always a consequent depression and torpor of the mind: its powers, unrelieved by communication, unstimulated by tacit applause, languish and become more and more ineffectual for securing social happiness:—

* Mdme. de Staël, *Sur l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur*.

concentrated, perhaps, and in so far stronger; but unexercised and therefore weakly developed.

All human nature pants for emotion; in *that* we feel the immensity of existence, for feeling does not find out its limits as every stretch of mental power must. Intellectual life, with all its fascinations, does but hide from us our partial deadness: we strive to be fully absorbed, but in the intervals of the most occupying pursuit, we are aware of a mournful dearth of emotion.

If people *could* take more effect upon us than they do, we should love them better, and our earthly being too. They think they can: we all do, we all think we have the power to rouse and delight and fortify other people at some time or other, because everyone has a consciousness of secret individual force: but we fail to bring it out, and our neighbours have to endure our fruitless attempts upon their sensibility, as we have to endure theirs. And hence the seeming hypocrisy of society in general: we all are bound to appear animated by companionship. When we really are, how blissfully the heart beats! we have tasted of emotion, and for a moment, how intensely exciting life may be!

It is ill for the heart of man to pursue intensities of feeling, they are allotted to us now and then, and come either in pain or pleasure, to show a glimpse of what our spiritual capacities are in both kinds; but the work of this life cannot be carried on in ecstasy, and we should fare badly on the 'narrow way' if we accustomed ourselves to more stimulants than we actually need for the cheerful fulfilment of duties, both active and passive, that are close around us. We know the usual consequence of spiritual drams; they seldom promote healthful action; and the majority of the crowds who

throng to hear a popular preacher, are not, I fear, much the better for being so violently impressed.*

Of our love of emotion I do not know a more curious proof, than the fact that we sometimes dwell with pleasure on a time of positive and even acute pain. I think this is only accountable on the supposition that we like to be impressed strongly, even in retrospect and by our own sufferings; for no doubt at the time the love of ease overpowered all other tendencies.

Let me now suppose that we have come to the conclusion that the *natural* motives, aspirations, and efforts of man are in the main attributable to these instinctive desires for taking effect on his fellow-men, or being by them strongly affected. Is it necessarily so humiliating a conclusion that we should wish to deny it, whether we can honestly dispute its evidence or no? I think not; and having glanced at the evidence which life offers abundantly to the candid thinker, from the days when, as Emerson says, 'children finding themselves of no account when grown-up people come in, will cough till they choke to draw attention,' to the days of sadder childishness, when old people will talk of their bequests, and threaten or entice with their legacies, as the only instrument of power that remains to decrepitude,—I shall now attempt to show the use of these instincts, and the ennobling direction we may give them.

* In what consists the pleasure which heightens the popularity of a man like Spurgeon, singling out by a look one of his hearers for a home-thrust, such as, 'God saw you do so-and-so?' The man so distinguished grins, not wholly from sheepishness; in all probability pleasure mixes largely in his feelings, unless he is a shy man. Why? Because it makes him feel that he is in some way a marked object; his individuality has taken some effect upon the preacher. To this love of taking effect does the popular orator address himself, as well as to the love of being affected.

The full purpose of any ineradicable human instinct is probably quite beyond ken of the creature in whom it is found, even though he be a philosopher; yet, here, as elsewhere, the marvellous wisdom of his Creator may in part be guessed at by man. He must believe that with all its attendant evils of abuse, every original principle of human nature has beneficent effects which far surpass his powers of observation, which make the wish to eradicate such a principle, presumptuous folly; and the hope of turning it to good account, reasonable and just.

If selfishness was altogether extirpated, such selfishness, I mean, as guards the best as well as the lowest interests of each individual, what would become of the world? Everyone might be eager to secure the interests of his neighbour; might be as unremittingly anxious for the good of others as we all are for our own; but it sounds better in theory than it would work in practice, for who *could* secure the welfare of a nature which was only partly known to him? and who would not tremble to leave his fate to the care of a boundless benevolence, unless he could trust that equal intelligence and wisdom were combined with that pure good will?

To follow the Divine command to love our neighbour *as* ourselves, neither better than, nor instead of, the single self, for whose conduct each person is to give account on the great day of judgment, will assuredly be found happier in the long run, both for the community and the individual, than any so-called higher reach of disinterested charity, — attempted without ‘the mind of Christ.’

But as a natural corrective of too great concentration on self, we find the strong impulse for acting upon other people continually at work, from first to last,

turning the powers of every mind upon the lives of all about them. This impulse, which self-love may generally prompt, habitually breaks away from the pursuit of *self-interest*; and with all the follies and sins to which it frequently leads, I cannot doubt that by its agency — by the working of this never-broken spring of vanity — the world gains infinitely more than it loses. It gains a thousand little pleasures and little services, which the pure sense of duty to one's neighbour is seldom likely to promote.

Conscience, when habitually awake, and always making itself heard, is too full of its own anxieties to command a flow of social graciousness, without the help of natural inclination. The wish to please, to take effect agreeably, supplies this help without our consciousness. Indeed, were we conscious it would be a failure. And without this inclination, should conscience say, whenever a visitor entered, 'try to be agreeable,' 'try to show polite deference, or give encouraging sympathy,' it may be well doubted, judging by our own very lame and imperfect fulfilment of *other* conscientious exactions, whether the visitor would get a very pleasant welcome at the bidding of the lawgiver within us; while we were settling how much pleasure we could sincerely show on the arrival of a guest, a sensible chill would be communicated, and instead of the vanity of wishing to please, we might find ourselves guilty of the unkindness of having causelessly given pain. For 'though these temperamental pro-virtues will too often fail, and are not built to stand the storms of strong temptation, yet, on the whole, they carry on the benignant scheme of social nature, like the other instincts that rule the animal creation.' *

* Coleridge.

The 'pro-virtues' do, in many instances, form the scaffolding of the real ones. It behoves us to scrutinize them closely, lest, sometimes deceived by their fair show, we leave off building the eternal structure of righteousness, which their slighness and frailty will serve for awhile to represent; but let the mercy and wisdom of the Creator be trusted, who suffers the wild grape in the vineyard He destines for 'wholly the noble vine,' 'the right seed,' hereafter. There are peculiar dispositions to be met with now and then, which give us some faint notion of the uses of a little social vanity, by showing the consequence of its deficiency;—people who seem, either from great pride, or from the unfeigned indifference of a preoccupied mind, to be almost regardless of what is thought of them; who care not how they affect their fellow-creatures, so that they themselves are let alone to pursue in peace their own favourite objects. These people may be religious, just, charitable, devoted to good ends, but wanting the usual link between their own self-love and that of their companions, I remark that they are seldom amiable. Their evident desire to please, when they attempt it as a duty, wins no favour; it is not gratifying to any one to perceive that another is making himself as pleasant as he can to gain the approbation of conscience; and we are all vain enough to wish that our *own* approbation should be sought for, that people should care to be pleasing to *us*; and hence we are quick to discern indifference on that score, and though we may respect one who betrays it, we rarely love such unmixed social virtue; it is not social grace.*

* 'Le savoir vivre et la politesse, ces secours si nécessaires aux hommes pour être en état de se supporter, ne deviennent pas d'une grande utilité

So strong a tyrant is self-interest when once it gains entire mastery, so mercilessly cold towards others, and so ardent in its concentration of forces upon self-profit, that I own I am thankful that its encroachments are not opposed by virtuous principles alone, that an antagonistic weakness instinctively disputes the ground, and inclines even the most selfish heart to gratify itself by trying to please other people. For it must be observed that the instincts of vanity, though self-regarding in ultimate aim, are frequently very serviceable and agreeable in their roundabout course.

A vain person—to take a coarse-grained example—wishes to be thought valuable, indispensable, or ‘most delightful’ in a small community. He or she may, for want of tact, prove fussy and obtrusive, but will more probably show a fine discernment in meeting the wishes of those on whom the desired effect is to be taken; and if we choose to call the motive ‘impure,’ I think we cannot deny that the result is generally gratifying.

It has yet another advantage, that it does not minister to spiritual pride. If all the kind little deeds and words of good-natured vanity, all its temporary self-denial, and transient zeal, had been brought about by sheer unmixed virtue, tell us, Experience! would there not be every

à ceux qui ne remplissent de tels devoirs que comme les assujettissemens de la société, ou par une habitude qui est souvent mêlée de distraction ; c'est le désir de plaire qui leur donne l'âme, c'est ce sentiment seul qui nous en fait un mérite. Eh ! quelle reconnaissance doit-on à celui qui ne nous manque des égards que comme une tâche que la tyrannie de l'usage lui impose ? Son extérieur indifférent, ou contraint, ou réservé, ne vous annonce-t-il pas le peu de part que vous avez à ce qu'il fait pour vous ? Sa politesse a tout l'appât du cérémonial ; et comme au fond il n'aura manqué à rien qu'à nous plaire, vous le quittez, fâché, pour ainsi dire, de n'avoir pas de véritables sujets de vous en plaindre ; bien des gens n'attendraient pas une autre occasion de le haïr.'—MONCRIEFF'S *Essais sur les Moyens de plaire*.

likelihood of a dangerous sense of superiority? would not thankfulness be expressed, however tacitly, by such a doer of good works, that he was not as other men are?

It is rather surprising to find oneself a special pleader for vanity, seeing that it is such a base and tricky element of human corruption; and I would not be its advocate for a minute did not truth compel me to admit that even in this plague of the heart we can see the wisdom of God: for as 'He maketh the fierceness of man to turn to His praise,' so does He give a high purpose to man's baseness also. The greatness of the abuse of any power testifies to the greatness of the use to which it was destined. We lose sight of those objects which are of real and eternal worth, and then trifle like imbeciles with the means bestowed on us for their attainment. Is it not natural that a creature who was made to delight in pleasing God, should, when He is forgotten, madly desire to please his fellow-men, and debase himself by exclusive attention to hopes so immeasurably below his original aim?

He who made us laid deep in our human nature, great powers of divers sorts, as yet unmeasured, and continually progressive in their tendency. Man was made to take enormous effect in this universe: it may be that in other worlds than this he will see the full extent of his powers; but here he obscurely feels them, and missing that large scope which successive generations of sin, and its accompanying mental darkness, have hidden from his view, his god-like energies contract, and fiercely press towards their baser objects. Hence that bottomless sense of vacuity in human life, which has been from age to age the complaint of fallen man;—uttered most desperately by those who have been endued with greatest might;—who have been

continually chafed by the insignificance of the effect they actually took, compared with what their inward consciousness told them it might have been.

In general this vacuity is bewailed most keenly in early life, before the young aspirant has learned to submit to earthly bondage, and when the world first opens its long and crowded perspectives. How often then is the natural eagerness of a young mind checked by a stinging perception of the 'vanity of vanities!' farther on the opiates of custom and example begin to take effect; and Habit still spurs when Hope closes her weary eyelids.

But too often the sorrows of young people arise from want of a field of action; their powers are often ready, and their hearts desirous of earnest work long before their older companions cease to think of them as children, whom lessons will fully occupy, and toys sufficiently amuse. Moody tempers and drooping spirits naturally follow upon this mistake: the cramped mind cannot explain itself, but feels depressed and indifferent, and seems altogether unthriving, like flowers which need air and light. Let it have opportunities of taking effect, and cheerfulness and energy will return. Nor is this only to be remembered with regard to the young. There are, unhappily, too many homes where, either from over-indulgence, or defective sympathy, grown people — chiefly women — are so held back from a due exercise of their powers, that they live and die unconscious of the strength that is in them; for to them it only seems a *causeless* unhappiness that makes them feel dissatisfied and uneasy, until indolence deadens the abilities which it cannot completely extinguish.

How often do we find a subdued, lethargic, unhealthy tone of mind in one who is habitually ineffective, even

in a very prosperous condition otherwise; and, on the other hand, how much joyous vigour we may observe in another who is conscious of taking effect under any circumstances, — often sad ones, but nevertheless exhilarating, because they elicit force. ‘Cheerfulness,’ said Bishop Horne, ‘is the daughter of employment, and I have known a man come home in high spirits from a funeral, merely because he had had the management of it.’

Is there a creature more unhappy than the listless idler? more sure to make other people uncomfortable? more likely to exemplify the truth of that pregnant saying, ‘une qualité de moins exige une usurpation de plus?’* For without diligence, every good quality of human nature must lapse into temporary stupor, if not into absolute decay.

It is probably essential to the health of the human mind to take effect upon things within its compass; and nothing will more surely enfeeble it than habitual failure in executing its intentions. To put off, or to let slip unacted, an intention of acting, — once clearly proposed, — wastes not only the particular purpose, but, I suspect, much of the energy which goes on swift and strong to form fresh intentions, and do fresh deeds, as soon as those that come first are thrown off the mind by completed performance.

It is the curse of indecision and sloth that they oblige the harassed mind so often and so fruitlessly to reconsider and reinforce its determinations; and as often as this is done, except it be from deliberate caution in deciding, the mind becomes more and more accustomed to distrust its own counsels, and waver in its own transactions: it loses the wholesome confidence

* De Staël.

which soothes an energetic mind even in reverses, for it cannot feel that it has done promptly all that there was to be done. No, for it has dallied with exigencies instead of meeting them fairly; it has missed opportunity, dawdled over instant duty, and doubted away its best powers.

The infirmity of such a mind cannot be pitied too much; a tendency to such a weakness in ourselves cannot be too vigorously opposed. Time noiselessly hurries us on to an age, when, if this has not been done, we may bewail a habit that has proved almost as irresistible as it is ruinous.

The thoughts of the Almighty are creative; in faint reflection of Divinity the intentions of the creature should always effect something. At the same time it is obvious that the wish that they should, must be guarded by the greatest moderation of hope, and the execution by the greatest wisdom and gentleness. If being too seldom able to take effect has its bad influence on character, too easy success has, I believe, a much worse result: it seems to give coarseness of touch, and a wonderful blindness to the powers of other people. The person who habitually predominates in any circle, soon betrays a self-confidence and self-appreciation, combined with a contempt of others, which shocks the reflective observer, and will go far to reconcile him to the more depressed state which is compatible with refinement, and is usually favourable to consideration for the feelings of other people. If one who seldom takes effect, is heavy and dull in society from want of assurance, he who always does is liable to becoming a burdensome bore, just because he is too sure of a certain kind of ignoble success.

And now, to bring the question before us to its last

issue, let us ask ourselves, if this strong instinct is ineradicable, what shall we do with it? Shall we fight it down on the surface and say that it is mere vanity; that it *must* be overcome; that to a Christian it does not matter what other people think of us? But often it does, and very much. Or shall we allow ourselves to fancy that our neighbours are really too busy with themselves to heed us, that we make a very slight impression on them? But that is partly a falsehood, for all people find time for gossip or censure, if inclined to either; and we know, experimentally, that the conduct of our associates strongly impresses us.

What is to be done? What, but to leave the surface alone, and work at the base? In vain we try to adjust externals to our liking; naturally, if we seek to affect our fellow-creatures as a picture or living representation of excellence in any kind, we grow nervous, the least jolt in social life may throw us out of that ideal position, may roughly jerk us into a very unfavourable light; and short of this humiliation, the contemptible desire to appear what we wish to be thought, is quickly seen and surely despised: but if we steadily direct this instinct to its right aim, the service of all on whom we can take any effect, we have an honest and lasting motive that raises us, and diverts both our own attention and that of our neighbours from one petty self, to the large and noble ambition of a follower of Christ. To save, to heal, to comfort was His work, for these effects He laboured, thus He made His omnipotence to be felt. Here is our pattern, here the way where wisdom will find blessedness, and fallen human nature the strength that can build it up.

However suspicious of *other* kinds of effect being taken upon them, I believe few people dislike to receive

the assistance they need, or the cheerful encouragement which unselfish kindness can give. But though to give this should be our ambition, I would strongly advise you who set your aim so high, to be honest with yourselves in finding out, and honest with the world in confessing, the natural pleasure you feel in taking effect. It is an unfailing element of self-satisfaction in any successful benevolence, and, trust me, whether you detect it or not, other people will, and that long before they can espy the pure motive of doing good for love of God, or love of man.

If they find you ignore the lower instinct, they will very hardly acknowledge the possibility of your being actuated by a higher aspiration also. They will naturally think that one who disclaims the evident impetus, may be easily self-deceived about the professed object. But never did a frank and good-humoured admission, that benevolent exertion was self-gratifying, lead any but fools to doubt that its end was far better than self-pleasing.

Nor should we slight these natural aids to arduous virtue, or pretend to value its utter unsupported simplicity more than, seemingly, the Creator does, who has planted in our nature allurements to every form of goodness which it was most essential to human weal to make common. It is true, as Schiller has told us, that the will never proves its perfect freedom and superior force, so well as when it gets *no* support from inclination, but it is as certain that every high aim gains great advancement from inclination being concurrent with will. This is no discredit to virtue, for every *ascendant* inclination (every bias of the mind that is not moral *declination*) precedes severe toil: even of those inclinations which we call tastes, this is the case.

We may reasonably suppose that the most holy spirits are incited and cheered in their labours by the hope, or the perception, that they can take very momentous effect on other souls ; by conventional usage, we call this, their secondary stimulus, zeal for the good of souls ; and the flushed animation of a beauty, who quiets a whole drawing-room by her entrance in full loveliness, we call vanity. I question whether the *roots* of both developments of feeling are not very nearly identical, in so far as both arise from conscious power.

If it is asked, why is one so often considered blameable, and the other praiseworthy ? the answer is simple : because in one case the effect is provocative of futile or mischievous sensations on both sides, and not always, or generally, produced by a being who has ‘an eye unto all God’s commandments ;’ whereas, in the other, enduring principles are being impressed, and he who makes the impression has ‘God in all his thoughts.’

And yet one need not class under the first head the common effect of *being pleased* ; for that is not so futile a sensation as some people seem to think. Pleasure is almost indispensable as a forerunner to lasting advantage ; it is an ingredient of well-being quite as necessary as pain. Now the beauty, though like the satirical wit, producing a strong effect, does not stimulate pleasant feelings only—envy, humiliation, contempt for worldliness, may be the result of her impress : when, therefore, we would test what is wrong and what is harmless in the desire to take effect, let this be admitted as one valuable distinction, — does it please or disquiet other people ? The aim of a Christian should be to discover whether it can *profit* them, but this need never bring into suspicion the sincere desire to please.

Beyond the limits of human society I see a hope of

taking effect, which, without warrant of revelation, cannot be very confidently held ; but it may nevertheless be thought of with comfort. There have been wise men who believed that in every resistance against sin, a real and lasting effect has been taken on the powers of darkness:—that they suffer loss, and are in some degree weakened, by every conquest over their temptations.

But in these days when the tremendous reality of spiritual foes is seriously doubted by many, and lightly ridiculed by still more, it would be thought but visionary to hold out a hope that on these invisible companions we may take effect. On a mystery still more wonderful the word of God speaks expressly, and it is clearly revealed to us that, in some measure, the righteous man *can* take effect upon Him who rejoices in the habitable parts of His earth, and whose ‘delights are with the sons of men.’*

What good do I propose to myself by this examination of the wish to impress? Probably, behind my love of disentangling truth from prejudice may be a lurking desire to take effect upon my readers by some supposed originality of idea: but I trust there is a desire quite as strong, and a hope far more likely to be fulfilled, that in tracing to a common root the many diversely acting foibles of human nature, one may do something towards the establishment of unalterable tolerance, in every mind that calls itself philosophic. I trust that when the sufferer from pride, and vanity, and conceit, and cruelty, finds their original motive to be a deep laid instinct of human nature, and perceives

* Such as are upright in their way are His delight.—*Prov.* xi. 20.
They that deal truly are His delight.—*Prov.* xii. 22.
The prayers of the upright are His delight.—*Prov.* xv. 8.

that 'a mightier power the strong direction sends,' thoughtful people may neither mutually abhor and condemn each other, nor despair of giving, by God's blessing upon their own persistent efforts, a right application to a feeling which nothing within range of man's thought can long lay to sleep, much less destroy.

ON THE DECLINE OF SENTIMENT.

‘N’apercevez-vous pas de toutes parts les croyances qui font place aux raisonnements et les sentiments aux calculs ?’

DE TOCQUEVILLE.

‘Si l’émotion pouvait être un état durable, bien peu de philosophes refuseraient à convenir qu’elle serait le souverain bien.’

DE STAËL.

ON THE DECLINE OF SENTIMENT

TWENTY-SIX years ago it was observed by one whose far-reaching sagacity has often proved prophetic, that 'sentiment of almost every kind is becoming faint and feeble,'* and Schiller many years before had declared that the cultivation of the power of feeling was the most urgent need of his day. ('Ausbildung des Empfindungsvermögens ist also das dringendere Bedürfniss der Zeit.' *Ueber die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen.*) That it is still more so in ours is my belief. I will not accumulate authorities in order that I may claim for this a place among received opinions, but I shall endeavour to show the grounds on which it is formed; for if a prevailing tendency is drifting us away from safe depths towards a deceitful stretch of shallow waters, the report of even unskilful pilots will not be without interest when their soundings are carefully made.

It seems rather a vague charge against the temper of modern times, if one says that *sentiment* is perceptibly declining, because the word *sentiment*, so used, does not carry with it a very precise meaning; by some people

* Isaac Taylor, *Spiritual Despotism*, p. 313.

it is supposed to stand for a phase of feeling that under that name can be elegantly referred to in society; by others, it is taken for the parent stock of sentimentality. Lord Kames gives us a definition of sentiment to which I would restrict my meaning of the word: 'Every thought prompted by passion is termed a sentiment;' and when I say that there is now much less of sentiment in English life than there was some forty years ago, I mean that, among all the thoughts which crowd the modern mind, few are prompted by passion; that, comparatively speaking, in these days, the heart is allowed to have less influence with us than it had with our predecessors.

When it is granted on all sides that the present generation surpasses those that went before in its activity of thought, its eagerness in business, and perseverance in research, one has not far to look for proof that such diminution of passion must be found among us.* Strictly speaking, passion and action are opposite terms; they denote conditions which rarely simultaneously exist: if the mind is wrought upon by what it passively undergoes, passion is the result; if it acts strongly upon other agents it is no longer in a state of prevailing passion; — in the feeling and in the exercise of force it must, for the time, lose its sense of passive impressions. Add to these self-evident truths a remembrance of the increasing coercion of *habit*, and it will be clear that a person of very energetic action cannot generally entertain many thoughts prompted by passion. It is true that an equal capability for passion

* 'The predominance of the active element necessitates the submergence of the emotional as a whole. Human nature, being limited, if one's vitality runs very much to the active organs, less will go to the other parts.'—A. Bain's *Study of Character*, chap. vii. p. 200.

and for action is often found in the same individual; that in certain rich, volcanic, natures, violent passion seems to strengthen every power and to give energy to every deed, but it is none the less true, that if passion is allowed to predominate, efficiency will be lessened, and that if strength for action is constantly put forth, strength of feeling will subside, either to its proper limits, or to an unnatural and rarely roused quiescence. But, though the probability of this undue torpor of feeling in a busy age might, on these grounds, be admitted by thoughtful people, who are used to consider the laws of mind as irresistible as the laws of matter, few besides will choose to accept a conclusion so hastily reached. A little examination of the most striking peculiarities of modern life may perhaps confirm its truth; and while I attempt this examination, I must appeal to the reader's experience for assent, as to the effect which those peculiarities have already produced on our manners.

It must be premised that the sentiments of which I deplore the loss are only those that arise from noble and disinterested passion. One might say that *all* feeling was becoming feebler every year, if it were but true of the baser modes of feeling; but, alas! we do not find that malice, or wrath, or envy, or jealousy, are on the decline; on the contrary, they must be liable to augmentation whenever the heart has not been taught to develop its nobler passions; for this reason, if for no other, that the vehemence of excited action rouses all these in natural antagonism to anything which threatens to obstruct action or divide success; unless a counterbalancing generosity neutralises selfish motive.

One is sometimes tempted to think that any *feeling* natural to man can neither be destroyed, nor long

entirely dormant: if habitually disappointed of its original object, it gropes obscurely towards another, and becomes unnatural; driven from its healthy course in a proper channel, it pours a subtle poison into the whole nature, and we call it perverted feeling. Instances of this must be familiar to every observer: I know not whether the one that now occurs to me is too fanciful: *nervousness*, or social timidity, is so confessedly out of all proportion to its exciting cause, that it can scarcely be explained by the sense of strangeness alone; and, moreover, people who are constantly thrown among strangers do not lose this paralysing affection.* Is it not very possibly a case of perverted instinct? The instinct of self-preservation was needed in times of more imperfect civilisation as a defence against real mischief, and most needed of course by the feeblest and finest organisations; but these, finding themselves exposed to few personal dangers, turn their instinctive guard against a condemning look as anxiously as they would have guarded in old times against an actual damage, or the injuries of a false and cruel tongue.

With one exception only — the feeling of pity — I

* 'What a mystery this diffidence is! We shrink before people whom we cannot respect, perhaps whom we despise; it is no sign of cowardice, for very brave men discover it. It is no sign of humility, for I think I have seen it in the proud and aspiring. One would say, at first sight, that it is an indication of selfishness, a proof that a man is always busy with himself, anxious how he shall be viewed; and yet is it not to be seen sometimes in the disinterested? It is a great mystery. Do study it. I believe this is the way of getting the better of it.' . . . 'We say in common speech that a man masters a subject which he comprehends, and real knowledge has a great deal of power in it. Is diffidence a primitive feeling, or does it grow out of others? Its commonness in childhood seems to indicate that it is primitive. If so, what are its uses? or what is its connection with our whole nature?'— W. E. Channing.

do not think there is any disinterested sentiment which has powerful sway over the generality of modern natures. What can we say of the sentiment of honour? Must not England begin to lower her boast of confident honesty? From what we know of the highly finished impostures and universal trickery of trade among our countrymen, one would suppose that the *sense* of honour was extinct, much more the sentiment that a passion for it inspires.

Anything of chivalrous sentiment is now so rare as to be deemed a delightful singularity wherever it may still be found: it is admired by many people, but these admirers are apt to think that it would take too much time, and be too unprofitable to be indulged by themselves, even if they *feel* a spark of it. And as to the sentiment of reverence, do we see, or hear, or feel, much of that? Are grey hairs venerable to the young, or the presence of parents any security for respectful manners among children?

I noticed that the sentiment of pity had still a strong hold upon us: the times afford abundant proof that this is now in far stronger exercise than it has ever been before; and not only is this a very rejoicing fact, and one calculated to reconcile us to many other deficiencies in modern character, but I believe that in some cases it accounts for these deficiencies. It may be doubted whether sympathetic insight and admiring reverence are compatible habits of mind. Pity leads to sympathy, and quickens our powers of insight; in this we are undoubtedly far in advance of our ancestors: we have gained insight, but in the same proportion we seem to have lost the power of *looking up*. The possibility of blind veneration is for us at an end: our popular writers have done much towards ridding us of any sort

of respect for greatness; and if people or institutions still appear venerable, we are told it is a subjective illusion, aided by a mere phenomenal *appearance* of greatness, which can be explained away by modern philosophy, as certainly and as easily as the raised appearance of a sun, really in a lower position, can be accounted for by the laws of refraction. According to modern opinion, many of the great men of the past were egregiously over-rated, though the blackest characters in history often come out in grand proportions when fairly treated by skilful investigators; and in *them* we are taught to believe there *is* something to admire.

This aptness to reverse former judgements on historic character arises from an inflamed insight, and a sympathy newly acquired, and it is therefore perhaps too eager for redress to be capable of impartial justice; but it springs from a noble source, like the kindred error of an excessive tenderness for criminals. That 'la sympathie nous montre un semblable en celui que l'on croit ennemi,' is a truth frequently experienced. Having learned to look, more than it was ever the fashion before to look, into the earliest beginnings of crime, and to examine the abject misery which often brings it to completion, we have found in the most hardened sinners certain movements of human nature that closely resemble the feelings which were suffocated or masked by the happier influences of our less tempted lot; we have discerned a likeness in the human brotherhood, have lowered the outcry of condemnation, and conscious that so much mercy is needed by ourselves for sinning with present impunity, we wish at least to bestow mercy on those who cannot long act *their* sins unpunished.

‘Ce qu’on appelle de l’indulgence en eux,’ said M^{de} de Staël, speaking of the lenient tone of Mystics, ‘c’est la pénétration qui fait analyser la nature de l’homme, au lieu de s’en tenir à lui commander l’obéissance. Les Mystiques, s’occupant toujours du fond du cœur, ont l’air de pardonner ses égarements, parcequ’ils en étudient les causes.’

It is ever so, when we study it with patience and humility ; our knowledge of the human heart necessarily renders us more pitiful : the severity of indignant condemnation is generally based upon surprise. ‘I am astonished at such conduct!’ is the common phrase that introduces unmitigated blame ; and ‘I think I can understand your temptation,’ often the first expression of a loving sympathy, even when it is clouded by sorrow and regret.

But as the most tender affection must at times be veiled in disapprobation for the safety and healing of the beloved, so, must not our pity be silenced when we convey to a reckless fellow-sinner the sentence of man’s justice and God’s eternal decrees ? and if the sacred sentiment of awe was not perilously enfeebled, is it not possible that a sense of God’s offended majesty might sufficiently counterbalance the impetuous movements of compassion ?

At this point many objectors may be ready to deny that the tendencies of the present day *are* indeavour ; they would say that I was blind to vast improvements in the religious life of our country, and in proof of its recruited energies they might refer to a large branch of modern literature distinguished by its reverential tone ; but if reverence suited the temper of our times, we may be sure that there would be less said about it, and it would not need so violent a return to exterior trappings to win back a partial popularity.

It is the excess of writing and speaking about feeling now prevalent in England, which is to my mind the surest evidence of its decay; for feelings habitual to us are seldom consciously dwelt upon; and we all know that if people say very much about their affection being strong, we involuntarily suspect that it is weak. That the *expression* of feeling should become more general in proportion to its decline in the heart, is not surprising, for the very vices which most sap its strength—vanity and selfishness—have most interest in keeping up its outward appearance.

First among the causes of this decline we cannot, I think, hesitate to name an unprecedented cultivation of the understanding. In all classes and from the earliest age, modern effort has been applied to a most careful exercise of the mind: the good results of this have been vaunted enough;—they are shown in the rapid advance of science, in our mercantile prosperity, in our marvellous press, and no less marvellous populace of readers. Such effects as these are striking to everybody; no one can live now without some perception of our times being wonderful; but it is the unwelcome task of thinkers to analyse the less noticed elements of external advantage, and to make considerable deduction from the estimates of sanguine optimists. Education is indeed a potent means of good, if it may be taken for granted that from all whom we educate, we educe that which is most good, and to all whom we teach, we give the learning which is most for their happiness;—if, however, we wish to assume this any longer, as a matter of course, let us give no attention to the statistical reports of national schools, and avoid consultation with clergymen in our rural districts, who have had much to do with schools. But leaving alone the doubts

that begin to gather round the subject of 'head-learning,' for the class that *must* give its mind to the making of furrows, we will observe how the character of our own class is likely to be affected by working the brain early in life.

Some powers of the mind are of course quickened, but necessarily at the cost of others, when at four or five years of age we call attention away from present objects, still so interesting, so important, and so very slightly known, and insist upon its being directed to facts and feelings entirely foreign to childish experience. Love or fear prevails with the ductile creature, and it will master the hard names, and tell the date of Magna Charta, at a time when it longs to follow the bee from one lily to another, and watch the wheeling swallow feed its young. You have now baffled nature in one main particular, and forced the plastic memory when you ought to have left it to feed on a multiplicity of gentle perceptions, and by and by you will find that injured nature baffles you; for while the intellect was straining its powers, emotion was silenced till it slept. Emotion requires a degree of passivity, calmness, leisure, and contemplation, and while none of these was possible—while you hurried your child from one study to another, and at playtime supplied it with such a variety of stimulants that expectation made his toys wearisome, and imagination had no chance of surpassing fact, the little heart was starving;—it *could* not properly develope its affections. Too much excitement in play is nearly as injurious as too much toil in study. You may laugh at the suggestion, but believe me, had the little girl been allowed to attach herself to the ugliest wooden shape ever hugged in *your* childhood, had you not ruined her constancy by such a succession of gay rivals, you would

be better loved by her yourself in after years. While you plied those little hands with new playthings, you were doing all you could to paralyse the sentiment of wonder—the source of keenest pleasure, and the inseparable associate of genius: for the young who have not enough rest from new impressions, cannot enjoy that quietness of mind which is as necessary to the intellect as sleep is to the body, and are never so long at a pause as to be able to feel with vivacity the delightful thrill of surprise.

The listlessness of young people in these days forms a painful contrast to the high-toned purpose and strenuous activity with which they are so early acquainted. How often do we find them languid, wanting a motive, full of misgivings, far from peace! The cause of this is, I believe, in great measure traceable to a precocious development of thought and religious feeling: we have required both when they were unseasonable and thwarting the designs of nature. *Reason* was appealed to before it had had time to gather in the manifold fruits of *sensation*, and conscience violently impressed with warnings against guilt of which it could really take no cognizance itself. Wherever this is done we must not be surprised if the victims should be singularly wanting in common sense, and as unconscientious about some sins as they are scrupulously fanciful about others.

Nor does this process fail to impair those very powers of mind which it was chiefly intended to benefit; at first an amazing quickness of thought, and an ability for bringing into comparisons the most distant objects of a wide intellectual range, makes us hope for enlarged powers, but, alas! how often do we find that this quick apprehension is able to comprehend very little: thought

has skimmed over an extensive surface; it has dived now and then and brought up a paradoxical puzzle, hard enough to silence plodding old people, while the diver hurries on to startle us soon with a sweeping generalisation upon particulars which neither our lifetime nor his, at the longest, would allow time to ascertain—and thus the largeness of his errors may sometimes preserve them from refutation. But how poor a substitute is all this for the patient toil of slower intellects, in days when not a tithe was known of all that children now run off in their scientific catechisms; when books were comparatively few, and the reader of a profound work thought over it longer than a modern writer now takes to compose another in reply. I speak of the *average* modern mind, and not of those who have carried science to unexampled perfection in many most important branches—minds that labour with a perseverance and devotion that could hardly have been excelled among the venerable scholars of an older time. And now, when the accuracy of science promises to bring almost every causative principle to demonstrable proof, it is natural that we should be inclined to urge forward every intellectual power, and neglect to cherish the powers of emotion; for though strong feeling has great force in human affairs, it is one which we can neither calculate on, nor evoke by the command of will, while the results of *mental* exercise can be tested, directed, and applied; and though the heart was never able to produce any counterfeit of mental power, yet intellect, aided by imagination, can and does effect many of the symptoms of feeling: but it cannot do so long.

It is by the analytic tendencies of a predominant understanding that the sentiment of *veneration* is brought into discredit. Reason coldly exposes its liability to

error, and as soon as feeling can be thought of as an hallucination, half of its dominion is rent away. It is possible that the indifference to the interests of the Church, which we often hear lamented, may be caused by this exposure. We have learned, as we think, to see through the enthusiasm of our ancestors, and have often found self-interest lurking behind a passion for reform, love of power trying to turn the minds of others towards the skilful alarmist as a leader, and cowardice prompting submission to the claims of pretended saintliness; and thus by an unconscious, and therefore unrectified falseness of deduction, we begin to suspect that strong feeling is, in truth, only the facing given to something weaker or more cunning, or more ignorant than the enlightened people of the nineteenth century can endure; and so we cease from excitement, but neither vanity, nor cunning, nor folly, cease from among us. Like children, who once thought echo another answering voice, we have made the fatal discovery that we are ourselves the creators of those prepossessions which so strongly affect us, and therefore we say 'all is subjective,' we hold our sullen peace, and echo and passion die away. As unfortunate as the heroine of one of Andersen's pretty stories 'eine wunderschöne Königs tochter, welche die Krankheit hat, dass sie allzusehr sah, was sehr beunruhigend war,' (a wonderfully beautiful king's daughter, who had the disease of seeing too sharply, which was very disturbing,) we are apt to examine human nature with eager penetration until we fancy ourselves able to detect all its workings; and having by analysis reduced our sorrowful learning to abstractions, proceed to generalise upon it in a very positive and melancholy way.

Foremost among illusions, let us place that piteous presumption which tempts us to call our meagre infor-

mation about the human heart, a knowledge of human nature. Those who know most about it, feel how little of it they *can* know; but those who believe Thackeray's account of it often think they know *all*.* It is this fashion for having a penetrative judgment which may, I think, explain two characteristic features of modern conversation and literature — its deep thoughtfulness, and studied levity of expression; — the growing demand for one leads to the popularity of the other. People find themselves expected to have an opinion upon grave subjects, and not liking to take the trouble to form one, they will have recourse to a joke, a clever hit, shrewd enough to imply some familiarity with the point in question, vague enough to save their credit, if after-knowledge should prove their opinion — such as it is — to be mistaken; and thus blunting the spiritual sense by railleury, they well understand the art of 'se servir d'un peu d'esprit pour tuer beaucoup de l'âme.'† Yet levity imposes on the mind, not only because it is generally gay, and therefore looks successful, but it has the air of being a stronger power than feeling, of which it can make so light; although levity could only attain this air by complete ignorance of what deep feeling is. This superiority of tone and imposing effect are about as well grounded as the confidence with which a person, never leaving his country home, will talk of what he will get his man of business in London to do: so long as his personal influence is an abstract

* 'Denn sprich nicht, dass du dann die Menschen kennst,
Wenn du ihr Schlimmes kennst — ihr Selbstbereutes.
Der Mensch — er fehlt nür, doch er ist kein Fehler!
Du kennst den Menschen nur, wenn du von ihm
Das Höchste glaubst, das Schwerste von ihm forderst.'

LEOPOLD SCHEFER'S *Laienbrevier*.

† Mdme. de Staël.

idea, he feels himself an independent and commanding person; face to face with the said clever agent (armed with those polished weapons of defence, against which no recluse can ever aim securely), he is but a clumsy, inexperienced fellow. Those who sneer at enthusiasm might be made to change countenance, to hesitate, and feel very uncomfortable, if brought into close contact with a mind fully occupied by one inspiring emotion: the arguments used by such a mind could stagger the most elegant trifler.

So long as we carry on the business of life at the feverish rate which now gives doctors so much to do, and moralists so much to reprove, it will indeed be difficult to form serious opinions, or cherish profound sentiment; for prolonged attention is indispensable to both. It is not a succession of startling ideas that will mature thought, or intensify affection, for only those thoughts and feelings that have been long and persistently entertained, will hold their ground; and imagination cannot fasten her almost indissoluble chain around the fleeting impressions of a hurried and leisureless existence. But who can find leisure now? Not to mention the fearfully incessant toil of those on whom the actual *business* of life depends—those who, while heaping up gold, and the worth of gold, seem ever to postpone till some still future day the short-lived enjoyment of their earthly treasure,—apart from these, and among such people as have abundance of time and money for their birthright,—who has sufficient internal force to resist the exorbitant demands made upon us by those modern habits of travelling, visiting, reading and writing, which now goad us through the year, in a rush almost as joyless and irrational as that of driven beasts? who affords himself time to ‘anchor’ by any

thought gloomy or glad, long together? or who knows much of Andrew Marvel's pleasure when he was

Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade?

Why, to many people it would seem a kind of immorality to spend an hour or two in a garden doing nothing, with neither book nor work in hand; they would think this a self-pleasing expenditure of time for no profit.* There speaks the voice of the age! we must be sure of a profitable result of some sort, before we venture on the expense of an hour; for in its own way our age is very conscientious, and guiltless, in general, of the vice of killing time, it much prefers to kill human faculties, such, for instance, as imagination, reflection, and innocent mirth.

Now it is in one of the *conscientious* requirements of the present day, that I fancy I find an influence calculated to corrode sentiment. The expectation of good and warm feelings *as a matter of course* cannot fail, I suppose, to render them less frequently genuine; and the tacit assumption, that unless people feel such and such emotions they are very unnatural and very much to be condemned, may well agree with superficial righteousness, but it is surely contrary to wisdom; for those professions of feeling which a cry for *proper* feeling will induce, are about as valuable as the worthiness of character to which the term respectable is

* 'When will their presumption learn,
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?'

WORDSWORTH'S *Prelude*, book 5.

commonly applied. It will not be beside the purpose to look a little deeper into this subject of made-up affections, as it lies at the root of much unhappiness, and many mistranslations of fact.

We may well doubt whether a cold-hearted person deserves blame so much as pity. Let the most affectionate among us imagine themselves in a position where kind feeling was expected and not promoted — where attachment was desired, and every hour made more and more difficult ; and so placed in idea, let them tell us how *then* to cure a natural coldness of heart. To command oneself to feel is, of course, impossible ; love, being itself, the most imperious of all human affections, is *not* placed at the disposal of the will ; and there are perhaps few sources of sorrow and perplexity more profound than the sense that love is due where little or none is spontaneously felt ; it keeps up a wearying conflict between the wish to be honest, and the desire to give pleasure ; and whether justly or unjustly, the untouched heart will either accuse itself as guilty, and grieve ; or steel itself to resist exactions, and become even harder and colder than by nature it is inclined to be. This conflict is not so uncommon as any confession of its pains. How shall we decide it ? will mere kindness hide the difference of what *is* and what *ought* to be felt ? Never ; it will only make the deprivation of a warmer feeling appear less cruel, but more hopeless. I have always felt inclined to justify those who are blamed for being unfeeling ; because I see that feeling depends more upon temperamental than upon moral attributes ; and the person who refuses to feign the affection by which he is not really swayed, appears to me to have a better heart than they who elaborate endearments in order to meet expectation,

and clear themselves from the charge of heartlessness. Christian kindness will in most cases prevent the blank being painful; it may do for relations what politeness effects for strangers; and Cordelia, I have often thought, might have saved her poor old father much anguish, by combining courtesy and good humour with truth; yet there are times when nothing can hinder an estranged heart from betraying 'the absence of the love which yet it fain would show;'^{*} and then, perhaps, we should be more likely to acquire something akin to true love by a brave confession of deficient feeling, than by any tribute of unfelt tenderness.

For a friend I should myself prefer the man spoken of in some story, who admitted that he had 'a strong personal dislike to his brother,' to one who feeling as much amiss, went through the forms of great fraternal affection. The case is extreme and hyperbolical, but it will serve as an indication of opposite characters.

A heart self-reproached for coldness often labours under false accusation, and where the want of feeling is certain, it is surely mistaken to blame or bewail it more than one would any other natural defect; always supposing that it *is natural*, and not the result of unrestrained selfishness. So long as the bad tendencies that stifle affection are checked, and the follies that vitiate it are severely scrutinized, I believe that we should view whatever affection our hearts are conscious of with gratitude, as the most precious gift of God. For when we reflect on the incalculable efficacy of a strong and right attachment in raising and softening and purifying the heart; when we remember what love and reverence for true friends has done for us, and what we owe to the assured comforts of a close and

* Coleridge.

happy relationship, I think we shall not doubt that so powerful an agent as love is allotted to us for especial ends, and in proportions of perfect fitness, by the same Father who gives us all our other blessings, and whose omnipotence is shown in this, that 'He maketh men to be of one mind in a house.'

But to many the necessary conditions of love are *not* granted. Often the bitter associations of childhood poison the after life; a subdued but ceaseless fear creeping through it to the end; often a feeble and cold temperament is inherited; often grinding care wastes the energy of hope, and with that all the fervour of the heart must die away. When from these or any other guiltless causes the heart becomes chilled, it is cruel to condemn it in another, it is silly to lament it in oneself. Not to speak of that most mysterious thing which we call *taste* — which being habitually offended, makes love of the highest order out of the question, and being met and pleased, makes so much that is unloveable to be forgiven; there are in human nature various obscure influences on which we cannot reckon, either for the preservation or disturbance of love; these work upon us with unsuspected and unremitting force; we cannot directly combat them, for we know not what they are; these only the holiest influence can countervail. But seeing that our Maker gives us *all* things for a specific purpose, and has for each soul a peculiar work it is but reasonable to suppose that the exact amount of temperamental warmth in each individual, is precisely that which will best fit him for his destiny, and that either more or less would be contrary to the interests of his fellow-creatures, as well as to his own true good. It may not be difficult to believe this, if we can take a dispassionate view of the social effects of warm feeling;

for assuredly it is not from the conduct of cold natures that the greatest misery is brought about. Selfish indifference causes a fearful amount of suffering, but vehemence of emotion, unless it is held in check by good principle, allows little peace either to those who are loved, or to those who are disliked.

If the distinction between affection in its original meaning, and the mixture of habit, interest, and duty, usually so called, was more clearly recognised — at least by each person in the depths of the heart; if we took pains to discover whether the love we profess is instinctive or superinduced by motives that overbear instinct, and generally prove so transitory, we should not first deceive and then disappoint. Temporary influences will avail to silence the voice of inexorable nature, and prudence will labour to stifle her faintest protest; but nature has *time* for her advocate, and by time will she be justified, and by time will her wrongs be avenged.

Most deeply does the heart resent anything that obliges it to violate its own truth; and a positively vindictive state of feeling often originates in trying to feign the external show of an unfelt joy — so great, so rare as love. There may be a sense of what is expected, of what is due, and of what it is reasonable and proper to feel, which often hides this resentment, even from self-consciousness; but it is there when the heart that *has* known warm love finds the expression of such love exacted from a far less lively affection; and I believe it may generally be noticed that those people who have forced themselves to express more than they really felt when feeling could be simulated, will be shockingly destitute of *any* when only true love could produce its appearance. The surprises of social life will often result

from violations of the heart's sincerity in past years ; they will sometimes horrify us in *effect*, though their cause may have been applauded for many years as a beneficial arrangement of early discipline. It is true that a gentle teacher may wholesomely foster good feelings by taking them for granted in young people ; but they must be moderate feelings that are so encouraged ; — feelings that would never be prominently brought forward ; it is when we require evidence of *warm* feeling, that we so certainly chill whatever does exist, and lead to an habitual profession of what is spurious ; for the affection that the will commands us to exhibit, is often nothing more than an antipathy carefully concealed from conscience.

What we call natural affection cannot in all cases be considered very natural, and to expect it in equal measure from very dissimilar characters, and to suppose that it may be confidently reckoned on by right of relationship, where natures are widely distanced from each other, is to forget truth in order that we may support goodness : — goodness refuses to be so supported, and virtue can owe nothing to the baseless expectations of a mind that shrinks from truth.

Loye, like everything else belonging to the spiritual or material world, forms a link in the unbroken texture of cause and effect ; if we say love is inexplicable, we only mean that its cause is so hidden that we cannot discern where it lies ; if, on the contrary, we speak of it as what is natural, we only express, without knowing it, a persuasion that causes of affection exist adequate to the effect which we have observed such causes will produce. In nine cases out of ten these causes may not be counteracted by any stronger influence ; but suppose that some peculiarity of nature gives a strong bias to-

wards things which the object of our 'natural affection' dislikes,—suppose that taste is shocked, and reason offended by the most leading characteristics of those whom a person ought to love, and consider if it can then be just to look for the common degrees of natural affection. We may look for, and sometimes find a state of feeling less happy, but more exalted — a love that passes over antagonisms with constant and dutiful solicitude; yet I should imagine this to be very unlike common *affection*, and quite unable to produce, without hypocrisy, those expressions of fondness which an affectionate nature so much delights in. But how many hungry hearts will continue to call for these, where none can be voluntarily offered, by word or look, or signs of temper! And they may extract them, but every time they do the strength of real feeling is impaired. Is it not possible that a little more attention to the causation of love might soften some of the asperities of domestic life? It appears to me, that family affection is often sacrificed to the superstition that it will last on as a matter of course, that it is ingrain and *cannot* suffer from the wear and tear of time. Its outward profession, indeed, seldom falls away; and the deep instinct of earliest attachments may live on when all the fires of passion, and all the cold waters of indifference have passed over it; but what does its obscure life avail us if there is virtual alienation? and who remembers often enough how insensibly this alienation may begin, how slowly, but how surely it will increase when begun, unless the cause of disunion is removed? Each member of a family is frequently made miserable by the temper of one who is affectionate, and who trusts securely, though almost unconsciously, to family affection holding out: haughty

sullenness, indulged by another, keeps every companion aloof; but that the unhappysulker must inevitably forfeit some portion of love, never perhaps occurs to him or her. And so with regard to all faults destructive of domestic peace—they are yet oddly enough supposed to spare domestic love. It is time that this superstition should end, although it be highly respectable.

From an exactly opposite point of view, affection is regarded with equal disadvantage. Having felt the discrepancy of human desire, and the fullest attainment of what is hoped for, we are ready to smile assent when Emerson likens all human ambition to the kitten's pursuit of its own tail; it is our own *notion* of things, and not that which they really are, that we pant after so eagerly. 'The dust of the earth' we stamp with the impression of our own wishes before we make it an idol; and now and then the disquieting thought flashes through the mind that *all* we seek for here so ardently, is but as the tip of the kitten's tail — the extreme point of our own imaginations; apart from imagination worthless, or nowhere existing in reality. 'Then comes the check, the change, the fall,'* and from these the unspeakable ennui and life weariness that is so deplorably common; for it is in a *decisiveness of feeling* even more than in a determinate line of action, that the heart finds the best earthly element of peace, and cruelly does it suffer if shaken even for an hour in its allegiance to the old objects of affection. But we are so shaken, we know now that we are liable with fantastic admiration to overrate the merits of our dearest. Alas! some of us may know it from their own bitter experience; and looking at another person with a bundle

* Tennyson's *Two Voices*.

of old letters, hoarded as the most precious treasure, our ghastly trick of dissecting joy at once brings to mind some cold maxim with regard to the short-lived value of those relics. Involuntarily we think 'how commonplace and dull those letters would seem to any but a friend under the spell of love!' 'What is *thy* beloved?' we might be tempted to say, 'more than any other beloved' whose letters have been grasped with eager longing, read and re-read, wetted, it may be, with tears of joy or grief — and then? — laid by — not read — not so much loved, and on some grim day, when relentless Reason held a session on such prisoners, coldly eyed, looked at with a bitter pain from enlarged wisdom, and tossed into the stifling fire with all the precipitance of self-contempt. 'What is thy beloved?'—ours were inconceivably loveable, till we left off loving.

So hastily do we at times measure all things around us by the broken fragments of our own superannuated hopes; and that such measurement is generally fallacious need hardly be added here.

From the large superficial acquaintance with all varieties of human life, which much reading and much travelling will procure for any observing mind, we are now early in life qualified for making those wholesale generalisations upon it, which will often dishearten more than they can soothe, because they seem to reduce life to a mere epitome, and steal from it all the charm of vagueness, and all the glow of imagination. While every minute of present time passes over us as slowly and as heavily as before,—thanks to this habit of generalisation, the future is abridged to an insignificant span, and looks dim and discoloured through the dull atmosphere of indifference. This tendency to generalise may be detrimental, even to that sentiment of pity, which the

nineteenth century has so strikingly developed. Particulars of individual suffering must become unemphatic, and the intensity of feeling that tortures one miserable heart may naturally be overlooked as a slight concern by the beneficent schemer who is used to ponder upon the aggregate miseries of the mass. It is only by being face to face with single sufferers that we can learn what sorrows, different from our own, really are.

We know how it is when at early morning the light plumes of smoke begin almost simultaneously to curl up from the rousing cottage homes around us. Seen afar in their undistinguished similarity, the houses from which those 'azure pillars of the hearth'* proceed, only present to the mind a pleasing notion of busy matrons and strong men going forth to their work and to their labour till the evening; and with a pitiful sigh we contrast them with the squalid inhabitants of the back streets in crowded cities; but should we be near enough to hear a baby scream, and an angry woman scold, and to see a few dirty children running out to squabble in the lane, palpably unwashed, and scarcely clothed, a vivid perception of the rude, disordered life re-awakened in that cottage quickly scatters the poetic generalities that had occupied us before; and it is with that neighbouring cottage and with those ragged little ones that we then wish to begin our labours for reform.

It is certainly well to have some knowledge of the aggregate misery of mankind, but I am sure that we may generalise on human nature on so large a scale, that we become apt to pass over the joys and sufferings of one human heart with feelings as firm and unpitying as the tread that crushes an ant-hill; for of what

* Tennyson.

importance, comparatively, is the fate of one among hundreds and thousands who we know suffer and enjoy in precisely the same way? As a proof of the prevailing tendency to undervalue human units, I am inclined to notice the impatience observable among us for entering upon some charitable work more extensive than the fulfillment of our plain duty to our neighbour. I do so with diffidence, because it is possible that a warmer zeal in my own heart might teach me that this ambition is consequent upon any high degree of Christian charity : yet it does appear to me singular that the claims of those who live around us seem to meet with so little attention from many of our young contemporaries. I confess that to me the field of merely neighbourly charity has often looked sufficiently laborious. I find a stiff soil for the bravest labourer to plough among the prejudices, the wretchedness and unfathomed ignorance of the poor immediately around us ; and self-sacrificing kindness need not be for many days unexercised in the society of our own class, and our own kindred. The blessed truth that 'to him that hath shall more be given' holds good, no doubt, for those who occupy themselves in charitable works ; all I mean to say is, that to join a benevolent society, or become a member of some philanthropic committee, is not so necessary a condition of Christian love as the fussy manners of our day might lead a novice in beneficence to suppose.

If we would fain revive in our hearts a healthy warmth of feeling, I believe there is no better means than to open them to those whose lives are cast in a different mould from our own, — who are not affected by the same sort of influences that limit or suppress our own emotions.

Let us put ourselves as much as we prudently can

en rapport with people in other walks of life : in their moral atmosphere there is a proportion of elements very different from that in which we think ; their standard of right and wrong, of pleasure and pain, of possible and impossible, varies greatly from ours ; and if we examine these whenever we can do so without intrusion or repugnance ; if we listen for every cry that reaches us from the unfathomable depths of humanity, we may be sure that our hearts can no longer remain insensible. Utterances will reach us that *must* pierce through all the ' wrappings of custom,' and melt the heart, unless it be cauterised by worldliness and vanity, — that may rouse up the blessed strength of an unwavering enthusiasm, — that will certainly drive us to the mercy seat of an omnipotent witness, and most merciful judge.

' Do you see this, oh God ? ' * is the spontaneous outcry of the heart when once its attention is fastened upon a case of hopeless misery, or a victim of systematic oppression ; for at such moments faith starts from the torpor of disuse to repulse the death-blow of despair ; and the human spirit knows that judgement and eternity must be at hand to redress the tremendous wrongs of time : by a sublime instinct she measures the divine power that can compensate hereafter by the divine patience that can suffer such woes to hold us here, — and casting upon her invisible helper all the burden of helpless compassion, she quiets herself under His silence and regains such confidence as was expressed by the Psalmist, when he said, ' and thou continuest holy, oh thou worship of Israel ! '

Now it is hardly possible after such emotion to remain as cold and unsympathising as one may have felt before.

* Hamlet.

It is of course very seldom that we can gain access to a variety of positions where the loudest or most thrilling accents of the human heart can be heard: to women it is often impossible; but if to them this varied experience in human life is denied, a thorough acquaintance with some of its most touching samples is not only well within their range, but is generally imposed on them by duty. And oh! if you wish to love human nature without the aid of gratified self-love; to honour it, without resting your hopes upon man for one day; if you would learn to regard its foibles as you do those of a warrior who has borne the brunt of battle; to mistrust its strength as you do the weakness of a tottering child; make yourself familiar with the life that creeps by under cottage roofs. Try to deserve a welcome to lowly doors, a friend's place at the narrow fireside within: and if you deserve and profit by such a prerogative, you will not long complain of a callous heart. We may go in with our kind words, or little gift, and feel benefactors, but how often are *we* benefited by the humble servants of God, who may be perhaps too rudely nurtured to receive help courteously, or use it wisely, but who, according to their ability, are quietly pushing on in a toilsome way under burdens that we shrink to imagine, and with what we should call spiritual disadvantages, were it not for certain smittings of the heart as we watch their unconscious self-sacrifice, their undoubting trust in God, their cheerful submission to the will that gives to us so much of earth's esteemed good things, and to them so very little. Let us go much among the poor: though their dullness will baffle us, their whimsical errors mix absurdity with pathos, their obstinate conservation of bad method provoke, and their inconsistent code of morals puzzle us, still from amidst all this we may elicit

the precious truths of instinctive wisdom, and sometimes bring away the soothing gift of tears.

Among the low-born poor we familiarise ourselves with only one class of beings, but the concealed struggles of people in trade, the alternating rapture and despair of poor artists, and all the hazardous ventures of professional men, are as truly interesting as the simpler necessities of a more humble station; and probably there are few situations of life that would not repay close attention, from the gorgeous stateliness of troubles in high rank to the regrets of a village child, obliged to hurry to school when the sunshine is filled with the song of larks, and the lane-side purpling with violets. From every condition of being, life appears so different, and in each its pleasures and its pains are met with such throbbings of the heart, that the *more* we know of *any one* the better and the stronger will be our sympathies. Those people who turn from the contemplation of any kind of life except their own (and such as they would fain make their own) as something in which they have no concern, are prisoners of selfishness, cruelly confined, and nourished upon a meagre and stinted allowance: what wonder if their whole nature should pine and grow feeble! The wide scope of humanity was intended by the Creator for the spread of their affections, but while they shut themselves up in a narrow darkened room, they can guess neither the strength nor the happiness that might be theirs.

If novels are what they ought to be, they present to us, under the disguise of fiction, the truest pictures of human nature, and in default of actual experience perhaps nothing is so desirable as a copious book-acquaintance with the secret history of natures dissimilar to our own; nothing so likely to educate

imagination, and give to it that pliancy which is almost an indispensable condition of charity towards our fellow-men. What else will secure the capability of sympathising with other people under any cramp of individual feeling? Not friendship; that fails very often because human hearts are — what they are: not of necessity even piety, for the pious mind is often so taken up with what its neighbours ought to be, that it will not attend sufficiently to what they indeed are; — not only a large experience, for no experience *can* reach to the shades of feeling which affect another nature: — one thing only do I know that will keep sympathy from flagging or torpor, and that neither wisdom nor charity can dispense with, — it is imagination, tempered by wisdom, and directed by charity.

It is repeating an old truism to say, if you wish to preserve the power of imagination, you *must* live a good deal apart from the world; and it is no less true with respect to feeling. In society we habitually hide strong feelings; we suffocate their least expression. This concealment might intensify rather than weaken their force within, but that we are tempted at the same time to feign sympathy with a variety of less radical feelings, and thus we get into the habit of surface excitement and internal stolidity; of which the slightest acquaintance with the world will afford numberless proofs; for there we meet on all sides warm currents of seeming sympathy; but looking farther for any lasting concern in troubles that called forth compassionate words, we too often reach the coldness and hardness of the nether millstone, that grinds to impalpable dust everything unconnected with the absorbing cares of egotism.

If we wish for feeling hearts, we *must* withdraw from the pressure of society; as invariable and irresistible as

the laws of physical nature are those that form our spiritual condition; no after-resolution of the will can annul them; and if for months and years we have scattered our feelings upon trifles, it becomes *impossible* to feel deeply for objects more worthy of the heart's interests; it becomes *impossible* to have or to feign that true dignity which only right feeling can support.

We may do much towards increasing our happiness by cherishing every sentiment that is blameless, not in its nature wrong, nor liable to be blamed justly as foolish, for that would make it obnoxious to ridicule as *sentimentality*. The indulgence of sentiment is foolish, and therefore blameable, when its object has no *true* relation to our happiness; when only imagination gives it value. For example, a strong affection for anyone with whom we are not brought into connection either by that person's feeling for us or by our outward circumstances; or a longing desire to live at some particular place of which we have formed a romantic idea; or any vehement propensity towards things which are not attainable; all such sentiments as these are *begun* by imagination, and are therefore likely to produce violent and futile and transitory emotions (unless they go so far as to establish fixed ideas, and so complete our unhappiness by partial derangement of mind). We may generally know whether a sentiment is rooted in firm and healthy ground, by the quietness and constancy of its working; if it is, it pervades every thought more or less, but seldom agitates, and though imagination heightens its power, the intrinsic nature of things gave it birth, and truth sustains its existence. Take as an instance of a healthy feeling the sentiment of patriotism. What can bear more closely upon happiness than the country to which we belong? and if it is a country

singularly blessed, if it is an England; admiration, and love, and a grateful devotion to its interests can hardly be too strong.

The same with regard to dear relations, to long proved friends, to noble studies; what we feel about all these is more likely to be too little than too much: but as for those prodigies of merit and perfections of happiness which fancy talks of, before experience can contradict her, let us not waste hope upon them. And yet, while carefully avoiding such vain excitements, we shall do wisely if we cherish, with intentional indulgence, every emotion that stirs the soul without endangering its peace. At such advice as this some reader may be smiling, and may think its absurdity only equalled by its vagueness; I will therefore try to explain my meaning by examples.

When martial music seems suddenly to brace every nerve; when, under its spell, a start of new energy changes to the deep sigh or relieving tears of infinite longing, do not hasten from that melting influence: all passion is not bad in its effect. The tears which obscure feeling has excited may soften the hard tempers of your heart; be not ashamed of them: neither will the soul be weaker for the sudden impulse which lifts adoring hands to the bright windows of the innumerable mansions in our Father's house. Follow your inclination also if it should prompt you to kiss the lips of the white lily that stands up in June to meet the first morning beam, and the glistening touch of moonlight; and if you find yourself at evening alone with an arm round the lightening-blasted trunk of a stately forest oak, do not despise yourself for touching it so tenderly; you have some excuse for being sentimental here. English fleets have been built, have conquered, have gone to wreck, since

this vegetable being was folded in the acorn: English hearts as firm and proud, in their human world, as this once was in its green one, have stood the storms of life as bravely, have extended fresh powers year by year, unchanged by chills or sunshine, untouched by blight or secret worm, and have at last been shattered like this tree in a moment; riven by a sudden stroke from Heaven, they remain among the living, but are dead to life's interests like this blackened trunk which still stands, without response to spring or summer, without shelter for little bird or weary beast; without use at all unless to touch the heart of man by the pathetic parables of nature.

But these parables *cannot* touch the creature whom the world has moulded to its own transitory requirements: for the atmosphere of the world is a deadly opiate to all quick sensibility. The world will only permit pathos to affect us under certain graceful conditions: wherever it marks strong feeling or eccentric mood, it counsels the man to hide, and the woman to forego both the one and the other. Now with regard to means of *external* prosperity the teaching of the world may be respected as authoritative, but with regard to happiness its opinion should surely have no weight, for the comfortless state of those it calls happy, warns us emphatically against deciding what we shall affect and what seek after by any standard of the world's. By our baptismal vows we professedly renounce it; by every reasonable determination we should certainly condemn it; for the world we know is blind; it *will not* see light; it will not believe the 'Light of the World' when He proclaims that eternal verity, 'whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.'

(Mark viii. 35.) It therefore continues by word and deed to assert that happiness *does* consist in the abundance of things that a man possesses, and to urge us to clutch and desire more and more of these things.

Alas! we are but too quick to obey its mad impulse, and though the apples of Sodom crush in every hand, and one after another mock us with their tasteless dust, we still reach out eagerly for more of that deceitful bait. Those who heed God's word *know*, and those who try to do His will *feel*, that there are within them the germs of far better things, to be obtained by patient culture. And they might know this by observation alone if corrupting habits had not fixed a contrary persuasion in the mind, for the events that pass around us, and all the testimony of history go to prove, beyond question, that many people find more happiness in yielding to a strong and ennobling sentiment than in the gain of any other advantage whatsoever.

It may sound Quixotic to say so, but in nations come to the highest pitch of prosperity, I doubt whether there is so much true happiness as in those which, though struggling against adverse influence, are animated by some prevailing enthusiasm. I think it might even be questioned whether those times of tumult and bloodshed in our own country which we read of, were *so* miserable in passing as they appear to us in looking back: there was terror, and grief, and perplexity; but to all these none are so tremblingly alive as people who sit at ease, none making them afraid:—there was anguish and defeat, but in spite of all these, what stirring emotion! what exultation of spirit while putting forth its whole strength! what zeal and tender devotedness to those who represented the leading ideas of patriotism and loyalty!

Let those who have tried to weigh the burden of objectless effort, of ennui, and debasing frivolities in our day, — the burden that makes us bicker with one another in print, and torment ourselves with an attempt to discharge duties that our neighbour's expectation and not our own conscience lay upon us, let *them* judge which have the happiest lot; our forefathers warmed by generous feelings, or ourselves chilled to the heart's core by our skill in examining, and talking, and writing about each one of these feelings when nearly extinct.

To them was life a simple act
Of duties to be done,
A game where each man took his part,
A race where all must run;
A battle whose great scheme and scope
They little cared to know,
Content as men-at-arms to cope
Each with his fronting foe.*

We may be wiser than they; our views of life are certainly for the most part wider and more profound, but hitherto have we been happier? has our increased knowledge brought with it an increase of contentment? If the power of an emotion compared to external circumstances is doubted, let us remember a mother's love. In whatever misery and need she may be, the joy of *this* will in most cases survive, and from its ecstasy throw into shade all more selfish kinds of joy.

A child's kiss
Set on *her* sighing lips shall make *her* glad; †

and although this emotion be unparalleled in its intensity of sweetness, yet there are others, — there is love, and friendship, and patriotism, and the calm enthusiasm

* R. M. Milnes.

† Mrs. Browning.

of genius, which would equally spurn any material boon offered in exchange for their objects. 'If a man would give all the substance of his house' for these, 'it would utterly be contemned ;'* and must needs be so while the spirit of man contests the empire of transitory things, and feels itself immortal. There are, I suppose, in an age like this no worldly advantages more cognisable and certain than great riches; yet even now, when avarice forms the solution of many mysteries of social evil, how often is wealth disdained and refused in favour of some priceless *sentiment* which a good and noble heart cannot outrage: and how strong is the feeling of delicacy which forbids people to seek,—of honour which would disable them from enjoying, if it came unsought, that wealth, which however much wanted in one sense, is verily abhorred in another;—wealth, which the unhesitating grasp of a less sentimental person would lay hold of eagerly, while he laughed at the notion of any obstacles from within. This eager winner the world may call a sensible and prosperous man, but unless delicacy is morbidly indulged, I cannot doubt that the other is the happier of the two. The calculations of a prudent mind devoid of sentiment may be very preservative against temporary evils, but it is only sentiment, kindling and invigorating every pure element of humanity, that has ever made individuals happy and nations glorious. We may surely look upon anything that is charged with sentimental interest as an agent for rescuing us from a kind of death; the hidden death of insensibility. The sufferings which accompany want of feeling are not often avowed, but could they be known to anyone

* *Solomon's Song.* Chap. 8, ver. 7.

who, with a warmer temperament, was ready to blame severely the hardness of a cold heart, I believe censure would be hushed by the most profound pity. The misery caused by negative qualities has not escaped Mr. Hawthorne, in his subtle analysis of human nature. In one of his delicately fantastic stories where he describes a yearly Christmas banquet, prepared, according to the will of an eccentric testator, for the ten most miserable people that could be found, a guest is introduced who bears every appearance of singular prosperity, and yet calls himself the most wretched of them all, for he has *no feeling*. In spite of the smooth serenity of his aspect, 'he occasionally appeared not unconscious of the chillness of his moral atmosphere, and willing, if it might be, to warm himself at a kindly fire. But age stole onward, and benumbed him more and more.'

And so year after year he took his place at the dismal board, with a strange variety of heart-broken guests, and maintained, notwithstanding his freedom from any assignable cause, that *his* secret gave him precedence in woe. 'I know,' he says, 'when pressed by enquiry, 'of but one misfortune, and that is my own. You will not understand it. None have understood it, not even those who experience the like. It is a chilliness, a want of earnestness, a feeling as if what should be my heart were a thing of vapour, a haunting perception of unreality. Thus seeming to possess all that other men have, all that men aim at, I have possessed nothing, neither joy nor griefs; mine, mine is the wretchedness. This cold heart! this unreal life!''* A piteously true representation of natures, which seem to

* *Mosses from an Old Manse.*

themselves 'to be on the outside of everything,' who think themselves aliens to common sympathy, and probably isolate themselves more and more by indulging the grim satisfaction of confessing the coldness they feel. Here temperament is not always in fault; and it is not always an incurable coldness: some people often know too well that they are exiles to an arctic region of uncongenial minds. *Liking* for those about them cannot be, and Christ-like love alone, unhelpt by that which is indigenous, is too apt to be stern from its struggle to subdue natural repugnance, and then alas! how loveless must they feel! '*For by delight love is kept alive;*'* and where shall that heart find delight which can echo the assertion of one now joined to the great assembly of just men made perfect—'I have no one to cordialize with me on my own intellectual level?'†

When we are tempted to blame a chilling manner, an unsympathizing companion, let us remember, for the sake of mercy and truth, how much warm feeling may be frozen by misfortune, how much tenderness may be hardened by habitual disgust and repulse. We justly pity those who are bowed down with sorrow under bereavement, and shall we unjustly refuse our pity to those who have not had delight enough, or love enough to feel bereaved either by separation or death? They know that they are expected to grieve, as confidently as they were before expected to enjoy; but having really been long used to pain in the place of joy, they cannot now begin to taste the sweetness of natural feeling, and they muse over their ill-timed indifference with mingled perplexity and shame.

If our affections cause us pain, we are perhaps

* Swedenborg.

† Bishop Jebb.

unwise to wish for exemption from that pain; for unless we suffer intensely we cannot intensely enjoy. It would be a poor exchange, even if we could make it, to get rid of keen sorrow and exquisite delight, in order to secure a cheap, dull, sameness of insipid life. The pain that any justifiable sentiment brings upon us will only make that sentiment still stronger and dearer; for, in most cases, until we have suffered for any object of affection, we hardly know how much we love, nor how sweet that love is which makes personal suffering a matter of trifling importance.

Mr. Ruskin says to artists, 'Do not think it wasted time to submit yourselves to any influence which may bring upon you any noble feeling.'* I would fain enlarge upon this suggestion to every heart that has a wise concern for its own happiness, and say, spend something on your feelings, let them cost you something, let them lay claim to your time, your expenditure and attention, as much as do all those busy schemes which a clamorous world sets before you with importunate urgency.

The wide spread of knowledge in these days offers to expand the mind, but it scatters your attention, and deprives emotion of its warmth; and while you toil after all that is calculated to quicken thought and excite feeling, the power of thought is sapped, and the possibility of excitement is at an end. If you give yourself up to this toil, you will lead an active life indeed, but your heart will wither: a wonderful keenness of perception, and a nice sense of expediency will be gained, as necessary guides in a perpetual conflict of motives, but with the cold plenitude of prudence there

* *The Two Paths.* Lecture 4.

is an utter deadness of love. Do not therefore grasp at too much. Refuse yourself any more business than you can comfortably carry out, all books you cannot thoroughly read, when worth such reading; all responsibilities you cannot thoroughly discharge; and allow yourself, for the sake of the brain as well as of the heart, any innocent pleasure that will retard the feverish hurry of the times. You will never be able to lead a sweet and beautiful life if you suffer it to be too much complicated with opposing interests. Let a few well-cultivated tastes content you; a few tried friends, if you have them; and if blessed with any strong attachment that reason can justify, guard it thankfully: do not look about for any greater happiness: do not let the fickle world laugh or hurry you away from its enjoyment. As much as is possible give place to feeling in your inner life. (If I speak imperatively, it is because a strong conviction adopts the shortest formula.)

Human nature *needs* sentiment, to moderate the impetuosity of its active propensities: ever pursuing, seldom reaching the satisfaction it seeks for; urged forward by the power of habit more than by any sweetness of motive; worn with anxiety about things that diminish in value as soon as they are acquired, such is the natural course of human energies when life is barren of feeling.

But with those who can feel deeply there is a certain degree of rest; in all the agitations of the heart there is a kind of calm; and if the sentiment to which it recurs is often full of melancholy, even in that fulness there is more satisfaction than in the hollow excitements of the unfeeling: still more so when the heart can dwell serenely on its cherished delights, can pass from the flutter of the present moment to thoughts which years

have proved unable to exhaust, and feel the love which it knows to be

Eternal, separate from fears.
The all-assuming months and years
Can take away no part of this.*

Why hurry on from hour to hour only acquiring? Why not brood a little over what you *have* with placid satisfaction? If the gratified affections, which once promised so much joy, do not give your heart a sweetness and hopefulness that is more to you than any ambition for the future, why should you think that anything farther off will? Do you suppose the *present* is all a desert, and that an oasis of joy and beauty is awaiting you farther on? Poor heart! when the distant point is reached, you may become aware that you have left an oasis for sandy parching ground.

I sometimes fancy that the increasing habits of centralization — the rush from the provinces to London, causes so much stimulus to imagination and feeling that both succumb, unequal to the demand made upon both. London with its almost miraculous activities, is enough to overwork the most vivid feelings. Would you pity? The heart faints under the load of misery — misery both manifest and obscure — in the near neighbourhood of its luxurious homes. Would you admire? What ever-growing astonishments, of man's achieving, are here, continually surpassing all that was previously known. And how shall the heart dare to harbour its secret hope among the thousands who scorn all feeling, treating it as a trifle — as worthless as the withered daisy dropped from childish hands? Or how

* In Memoriam.

can it dream of happiness in close proximity to the thousands who have none that is innocent, — who are ruined, outcast, and desperate?

Those who are used to the tumultuous roar of human life in our great capital may be quite untouched by these influences, but I cannot believe that they are without effect on the mind of occasional residents; and surely the quick communication between town and country that now brings so much enjoyment to provincial homes, brings with it also a great deal of London indifference.

The unfeeling tone of modern life seems to me nowhere so strongly marked as in the music of some of our recent composers: what intricacy! what scientific complications! what a brilliant rush of harmonious verbiage! what difficulty and amazing rapidity in its execution! but what pleasure can this give to the heart, compared to the rich and simple melodies of old times? those softly emphatic tones of which we never weary because they awaken the deepest instincts of humanity, and being indeed the utterance of some heart moved by profound emotion, speak at once to ours with tender sympathy, and somewhat sooth its vague and passionate yearnings. Now finite minds can only respond to a limited number of impressions, and if more are crowded upon them, these impressions must all be confused and faint; it therefore behoves us to arrange a simpler combination of interests if we wish to taste fully the pleasure of any one of them. In these days the result of enlarged knowledge is to make facts appear natural and of course, which were before regarded as strange and unaccountable; hence there is generally a more negligent observation of the usual phenomena of life: this is at the cost of much wholesome emotional

pleasure, and the best way to counteract such negligence is to force the mind to separate single facts or distinct appearances from their sequence in everyday life ; — to detach them, as it were, from all contiguous objects, thus allowing each so singled out to take upon the mind its utmost effect.

By so doing the freshness of earlier feelings may be recovered, and the jaded spirit, held back awhile from its feverish search for new excitements, may feel the latent mystery of every natural object that is near. Take for an instance a family of sheep, — a pair of lambs with the mother ; it is usual enough to see these as an accessory of a spring view, to think of them as emblems of innocence, while possibly the next moment they may suggest misgivings as to the necessity of eating mutton ; but setting aside these common associations, observe the intense solicitude of the heart throbbing under that torn and weather-stained fleece. If you pass near to one of its white treasures, see how maternal anxiety speaks in the usually unobservant eye, what courage wakes amidst proverbial cowardice, and with hasty stamps warns off the intruder. While you notice this, and the ignorant unconcern of the young ones, think what an unfailing force of natural affection the Creator has planted in this short-lived creature, — what unselfish love supersedes the brute's instinct of self-preservation, and how much emotion is here felt and enjoyed by a being who may not be susceptible of any thought. I hope it is not singular to regard these simple facts with a deep sense of creative love ; yet how many people know nothing of such soothing associations, and since they were children have scarcely cared to look at a lamb ; even they might begin to experience what I speak of, if illness confined them long to one room.

In illness we are *obliged* to submit to the impression single and trifling objects make upon us; for nothing else can be had; the mind has worked round and round its inner domain like a caged squirrel. A dog burying its bone in the garden outside offers then a welcome distraction. Will he bury it in sight? No, we see the cautious tread toward a screened covert, we are interested in watching the beast's prudent manœuvre, we see he looks round apprehensively from time to time, lest anyone perceive where he hides his treasure — what importance he attributes to his bone! — (oh! and we have our bones, too!) — and then through a leafy veil we imperfectly witness his grubbing transaction, his careful nose smoothing over the soil, his final snuff — and smile to see the very different air with which he emerges from his lurking place — tail erect — no anxiety now; rather a self-satisfied strut and confident hastening back to his usual resort. The spectacle has been amusing, and we are sorry when we have seen the last of him. This is the most trifling means of diverting an invalid that I can recall; but the many forms of happy and beautiful life that come within range of sight from a country window, would afford more convincing proof of the effects of observing minute details.

Until anything is examined for its own sake, apart from scientific or *relative* value, we do not know how much feeling it might stir within us. Now the rate at which modern minds observe and think and act, tends to connect all details into an unimpressive whole, which wearies by its unbroken pressure on all the lighter and more aimless impulses of man. The effect of merging details of life in an *imagined* generalization is extremely unwholesome; as it is the cause of finding

time burdensome, so also is it an almost invariable *result* of any morbid condition that disables us from turning time to good account.

The discontented heart will always add to its complaint, that disagreeable things will have to be done over and over again ; and that even the few pleasanter incidents of life will become wearisome by repetition, — that there is no variety ; for the mind having lost the healthy play of its faculties, which ensures variety of *emotion*, accuses outer life of sameness ; hence disgust of all things, lassitude, and mental loss of appetite. If we can but restore to the mind its attention to detail, the dulllest circumstances may be again invested with interest.

I have reserved to the last my gravest complaint, on the fatal deficiency of feeling that benumbs our spiritual life, and the tone of thought which threatens to disseminate an increasing mistrust of religious sentiment. What is popularly called the philosophy of our times has helped us admirably to classify every state of feeling ; so classified, we have gone on to reduce them by analysis to certain fixed laws of cause and effect, such as these, — given a susceptible temperament, a superstitious teacher, and regularity in habits of divine worship, and a pious bigot will be the result : or, find a person of strong nerve and healthy physique, who, while exact in all devotional duties, is used to work hard in his worldly calling, and unused to self-observation, and you may depend upon such a person being free from all the cramping influence of a morbid conscience. But while accepting incontrovertible facts of this sort, one runs some risk of regarding devout feeling as the almost necessary product of such and such modes of life, and consequently of thinking wrong actions and irreligious

tendencies less evil and less dangerous than we once thought them, because they are so clearly traceable to influences over which we have no command, and causes of which we have often no perception, since they are only cognizable to the mind that can examine its own life as a whole, in retrospect, and trace its predominant tints to the colouring additions of evil and shadow thrown in at each turn of its winding course.

This line of thought, without being sufficiently definite to disquiet us, unbalanced by truths still more certain, cannot fail to relax some of the main energies of virtue; and once admitted, the world of writers and talkers will not cease to give it abundant confirmation.* They cannot avoid doing so, because momentous truth is here involved in a specious web of error; and the dependance of good and ill-doing upon antecedents of circumstances and physical nature is obvious to every eye. It is only a watchful spirit, an awakened conscience, which, in all the conflict and pressure of such external motives, can perceive those decisive moments when free-will commands fate, and by a little act or a light word *knowingly* yields itself to evil; or, by the victorious struggle over recognised temptation, places itself in one instant at a greater distance from doubt, and sin, and woe.

Again, the solvent of old prejudices, as matters of former belief are now sometimes termed, is found in this one thought — are not many religious truths relative to our ignorance, and not absolute truths? If relative, may we not lessen or increase their cogency by our own

* 'There is nothing but what may be confirmed, and falsity more easily than truth. If you establish ten heresies of even an abstruse nature, and tell an ingenious person to confirm them, he will confirm them all' — SWEDENBURG.

mental habits ; in a word, are not their effects subordinated to human volition, and do we not support them by our credulity as truly as the Chinese prop up the idols in their temples before they bow down in adoration ? And so we might at last persuade ourselves that all religious truths are only modifications of human opinion. Miserable should we be if we could learn to do so !—we should be ready to cry out with Mde. de Sévigné, ‘Épaississez moi un peu la religion qui s’évapore toute à force d’être subtilisée ;’ for the faith that is subject to the feelings, the nurture and the compass of an individual mind, is no faith, it is but a religious inclination, and has no power over the human spirit when its winds and waves get up. Never can it effect the peace which poor John Bunyan received when, as he tells us, the word of God ‘brought light with it and commanded a silence in my heart of all those tumultuous thoughts that did before use, like masterless hellhounds, to roar and bellow and make a hideous noise within me.’

But we say, and with real magnanimity, let us sacrifice our peace if it is necessary for the attainment of truth. The love of truth, and truth gained at all hazards, is perhaps one of the distinguishing virtues of the present day ; but it may be pushed to an extreme which deprives it of the name of virtue, and only leads to gigantic folly. For example, we have learned the great truth that the intellect is necessarily as much subject to illusion as the senses ; and yet, with this confession in our mouths, how many people seem to hope that by strength of intellect they can throw off all such subjection, and see things as they are in essence, — even now while we ‘see through a glass darkly.’ It is a grave question, still unanswered, whether we do always approach truth more nearly by this

endeavour to break away from ancient moorings; and it is well, before we try to answer it, to think how the Creator has decided for man upon this very point.

All through the sacred volume more stress is laid upon the conditions of peace, of well doing, and well-being, than upon any intellectual means of enlightenment; and one might suppose, from the apparent indifference as to man's knowledge of abstract truth, that God saw his creature's mind to be yet unfit to receive it. I am aware that this will seem a very lame argument to some of our daring thinkers; these would say that to make this sort of appeal to the divine mind is unfair, and only an evasive attempt to silence philosophical doubts by religious dogmatism. Let us, then, set aside religious dogmas for a while, and look at the results of unrestrained truth-seeking from another point of view.

The notion that some truths are venerated by us because they are adapted to our partial knowledge and cherished credulity, is of course followed by the thought that, with more spirituality and enlightenment, we should look through the *seeming* truth, and be able to neglect its claims in favour of more spiritual apprehensions: and the next thing is to congratulate the mind on being so far enlightened as to *suspect* delusion, or, at least, to recognise the effect of ignorance upon faith; and the uneasiness caused by such suspicion is gradually soothed by self-complacency. It restores some degree of calm to think 'we suffer for truth:' good, if so it is; but by a very natural confusion of ideas we soon begin to attribute to ourselves greater spirituality, and more advanced insight, *because* we have found out that ideas of truth are in a measure self-chosen. And alas! this is by no means a necessary consequence; we may discern the traces of tempera-

mental error in the creed of another mind; we may know that a slight warp of early superstition can bias our own for life; but these perceptions may exist without any increase of spiritual strength; indeed they are often quickened by declension from former virtue; and when we throw off, one by one, the fetters of early religion, we are often loading ourselves, day by day, with the strong chains of an allowed sin, and are becoming the slaves of something worse than superstition and more degrading than acquiescence in a belief that reason *cannot* fully explore. We may have torn from our eyes the scales of prejudice, intending to gaze on truth with unflinching bravery, and all the time pride may have closed them with her coarser bandage, and self-indulgence darkened every avenue of light. Truly the narrow belief that prompts to consistent and virtuous effort *is* preferable to the doubtfulness of an unbiassed mind that is too wide-reaching for concentrated toil, and too clever in unmasking error, to care to apply itself to the prosecution of known duty. It may even be doubted whether those religions which enslave human intellect and dwarf the soul by a studious avoidance of light, do not allow it more peace, more freedom for healthy action, and more access to God than can be gained by that kind of religion which trusts in an undefined and formless appeal to the devotional *tendencies* of man; tendencies so likely to be overpowered in an age when everything that concerns his temporal estate is stringent in its demands—visible, palpable, and all-important with the majority of those among whom he lives.

It is from the influence of those restless disputers who would detach faith from every belief that cannot wholly approve itself to human reason,— of those who speak of

liberty, as 'the principal thing,' refusing to see that without due limits it may degenerate to a perilous licence, and who find every creed too narrow for their expansive scepticisms; it is from *their* influence that we may expect the bringing in of decrepit and imbecile superstitions. And though in legislating for less exalted natures the holiest of men will sometimes advocate a religion without precise dogmas, yet the pure origin of this sanguine mistake can never impede its calamitous issue.

We confidently hope that England is too enlightened for any possible return to Romish errors; but if our country becomes infatuated by the pretensions of extreme liberalism, either in matters of faith or of policy, the reaction is inevitable, and we shall again have need of martyrs, and want another Hampden.

Nothing can now bring the power of reason and the due enjoyment of liberty into possible disrepute except the preposterous abuse of both; and when reason is deputed to fathom those divine mysteries which only folly could suppose to be within its compass, the *vis inertiae* of a trammelled intellect looks somewhat wiser than the vapourings of a mind that can powerfully presume. Goethe prophecies too truly when he says

Ueber Berg und Thal,
Irrthum über Irrthum allzumal,
Kommen wir wieder in's Freie;
Doch da ist's gar zu weit und breit;
Nun suchen wir in kurzer Zeit
Irrgang und Berg auf's Neue.

Whenever there arises in the mind a strong desire to rid itself of all the illusions with which nature gently surrounds us, a sense of power and a thirst for freedom fill it with overwhelming expectations, and amid these it

loses that feeling of dependence without which the intellect of every reasonable creature *must* be unwise; and while judging of its position on earth as that of a conqueror destined to immortal glory, it may forget that this position is also the nursery of a very feeble and limited intelligence.

Nobly animated by hopes of immense ability, man is too apt to overlook the fact that he is not placed in this world to triumph, but to be educated by an allwise Father: if we constantly remember that He is now teaching and training the human mind, it will not disturb us to know that this is to be done by the agency of certain phenomenal illusions; we shall be content with their action upon us, as that which God's providence has designed, and there will not be that tone of indignant resistance to all modes of thought and feeling of which reason cannot give a strict account, — the attitude of our minds will never be that of defiance or sullen displeasure.

How much these characterize modern habits of thought the prevailing mannerism of our poetical and quasi-philosophical literature will, I think, sufficiently testify. To me it seems as if many of our contemporaries had only got so far as to discover that man is duped both in his heart and intellect. The discovery makes them very uneasy, and so constantly do their dissatisfied expressions make us. In this nursery of human spirits such thinkers behave like turbulent boys who have quarrelled with their playthings and been truants from their tasks, who in their moody inaction try to persuade others to do the same, by showing how many toys their destructive hands have proved to be hollow.

Suffer the childish image as a gravely intended par-

allel; grant that our natural delusions are as baseless as a toy-shop horse is lifeless, and the pretty doll as insensible; but are boys and girls the better for too much remembering what their toys really are? or, when it is forced upon their notice, are they happier for throwing them away as a '*take in?*' They are idle, sullen children then, without the stimulus best suited to draw out and exercise childish powers; and so it may be with us when we think ourselves undeluded; — disenchanted by knowing the unreality of much that seemed real and deeply interesting before.

In this present state of being we are no more fit to know the truth of things surpassing human thought, than children are fit to manage the live horse and provide for the live baby; and yet we will not trust a Creator to give us suitable entertainments and occupations here! On the strength of some faculties little developed in this life, we spurn the objects that are calculated to educe such as are to be here *matured*. Foolish children! We can see through the surface delusion perhaps, and are angered by it, but the great momentous realities it may cover surpass our penetration, as much as the powers of heart and head which are developed by child's play surpass an infant's comprehension.

So truly and beyond doubt is it very good for man to have 'a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted,' 'a time to break down, and a time to build up,' 'a time to keep and a time to cast away; and though this changeful succession of employment, with all the varying sentiments that accompany it, may seem 'vanity and vexation of spirit, and a sore evil' in some parts of the process, yet it is the exercise and the life of his spirit.

The passions that hurry him along may be less enduring than his earthly frame ; the objects he strives to grasp may fade and shrink before his love or his hope can perish ; but they are not vain without cause. Man was made 'subject to vanity,' and in the designs of an omnipotent Ruler such vanity cannot be without its beneficent and everlasting results.

DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD.

‘J’AI dû me prouver à moi-même que je faisais une chose bonne et utile en pensant librement et en disant librement ce que je pense, et je n’y ai réussi que quand j’ai vu avec évidence combien l’idée que la piété se fait du monde est incomplète et défectueuse.’ — E. RÉNAN.

‘Les hommes ne reçoivent point la vérité de leurs ennemis, et leurs amis ne la leur offrent guère ; c’est pour cela que je l’ai dite.’ — DE TOCQUEVILLE.

DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD.

A LITTLE thing may lead to great discoveries, and the consideration of some trifling point will often carry one on to questions of deep interest; all trifles having a basis of important reality.

I found this to be the case when looking for reasons that could account for the almost total extinction of Epic poetry in the present day. In reflecting upon that symptom of modern feeling, I met with similar characteristics of more serious change; of alteration that bore upon the highest concerns of man; and some which perplexed me exceedingly, because they could hardly be admitted without the contradiction of venerable opinions, and the risk of high treason towards those which have long been held sacred.

It is so much my dread to add the least impetus to the prevailing habit of doubt, that if I thought the problem in question could escape the notice of any thoughtful person, I would refrain from touching upon it; but, believing that, in one shape or other, it confronts us at every turn, I am persuaded that it is wiser to face its difficulties than to endeavour to hide or deny them. Unless we know the real weight of these difficulties, we shall be in danger of attributing to them far more than

they truly have, when at last ignorance starts on perceiving what bigotry labours to keep out of sight.

Thinkers, to whom alone I address these pages, will not charge me with presumption because I submit to their judgement thoughts which have scarcely satisfied my own; *they* will see that in dealing most imperfectly with a subject above my powers, though very congenial to my tastes, it is with the hope that my attempt may serve as a stepping stone for more powerful intellects, and invite that correction from clearer insight which I do so unfeignedly desire.

In any uncertainty it is always found that a fair statement of difficulties forms a useful preliminary to later decisions. If in this essay I speak decisively, it will be but a figure of speech, for the sake of placing my ill-defined notions in distinctness, not from the wish to impose them upon other minds as wholly just. Even errors, plainly uttered, will be suggestive of truth when they are brought before a competent judge; and if I can succeed in making clear what I now think about one of the greatest enigmas of spiritual life, I may hope to stimulate an abler brain to tell us—more than we have yet been told—what we ought to think.

The rare appearance and obscure life of any poem bearing the name of epic, during the last twenty or thirty years, will not, I suppose, bring into question the truth of my premise, that epic poetry is nearly extinct. And though, if I remember rightly, it was the fashion, up to the last ten years, for critics to accompany their admiration as reviewers, with the wish that our greatest living poet would place himself on the highest ground of poetical fame by a completed epic, yet of late years even that official piece of advice has been silenced. By what? By the dreary impression of failure which

recent epics have produced? or by the slowly attained conviction that they are become essentially obsolete? This last reason is, I believe, the true one: the neglected, seldom heard-of epics of modern times would only confirm the foregone conclusion, even if they could be read. For, not only is the power of producing, but the possibility of enjoying epic poetry falling into disuse. Observe how little our standard works of this kind are now read. Some few highly cultivated tastes relish their antique merit still, and write up and cry up beauties that oblivion threatens to entomb: these leaders of literary fashion get a respectful hearing, and some few disciples; the forgotten books are taken up and re-read, but with effort and slowly; and people admire them more perhaps from second-hand estimation than from their own.

After awhile the poems which 'are more admired than read'* become fixtures on their shelves. If in this year a census could be taken of the number of people who read Milton after they are twenty years old, it would prove how much fame rested upon inherited opinions, and how few really enjoyed his sublime but antiquated poetry: I speak, of course, of his great poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*; few of the lesser ones can sleep while human nature has an ear for music.

We still acknowledge as master-pieces what we hardly care to look at. Who, for instance, reads with interest, or even with patience, such accounts as Bojardo's, and Ariosto's, and Spenser's, of brute force in heroes, and undifferented beauty in heroines? The combatants fight, or flee before their victors, like so

* Dr. Johnson.

many dogs, and what is wanted to subdue them to their fate, magic largely supplies.

To us, who have known the greater magic of human perseverance and energy, these old-world wonders are ineffective; and as we admire mental more than muscular attributes, we feel indifferent about the number of foes Orlando or Astolfo may slaughter, and cold to the beautiful creatures who look on. Undoubtedly there is a charm in the poetry of olden time, which no change of feeling can destroy. The exquisite enjoyment that it affords, is partly owing to this:—the ideas of former generations were more simple than our own, less encumbered with the manifold varieties of thought which high culture brings in; and thus they give us leisure for seeing, in all their grandeur and pathos, those more elementary principles of humanity which are common to every race in every land. Wearied with modern complications of thought, and impatient of fretting subtleties, we turn back to delineations of primitive feeling with a sense of relief. It is repose and solace to the heart to dwell upon the unhesitating belief and unfeigned emotion of an earlier race;—but yet we seldom seek this repose.

Let an average reader of well-cultivated taste be restricted, for an hour, to a room with so few books in it that Tasso's *Gerusalemme*, and a few recent periodicals, and a new volume of poetry by some well-reputed versifier, were all that he had to choose from, would Tasso be chosen? In nine cases out of ten, even if taken up, it would be quickly laid down. It is allowed to be a masterpiece, but who cares to read it?

Now as regards readers, the judgement may often be better than the taste, and they may idly enjoy reading what they could never pretend to admire; but if the

old epics did in truth strongly affect the modern mind, we should assuredly have a *rebound* from those revered works in the *writings* of our own day; the mental echo would be in proportion to the intensity of pleasure received: this echo is now never heard. And it is not to be wished for: the interest which attaches to an epic poem now, is about as strong as that we find in the recital of a curious dream; both may excite the imagination of a narrator, not that of the hearer, however patient he may be.

It has been observed by a contemporary critic that in the literature of the present day *all is picture*;* and this is accounted for by the necessity of keeping pace with the hurry of minds which have so much brought before them that, unless an impression is rapidly made, attention cannot be gained at all: hence the disuse both in prose and verse of that slowly descriptive, gradually engaging style, which suited the tastes of our calmer-lived predecessors.

It is intolerable now; it is like giving drink to a feverish mouth drop by drop; the water so given may be crystal clear, but the patient pants for quick refreshment. Ah! hurrying, fevered, restless humanity, how it pants and strains for something to recruit it now! It cannot wait to be gently, slowly gratified, it is almost delirious with excitement: and writers share in the disease to which they minister. No intellect that lives on modern diet can slowly depict its representations of truth or fancy—they must be struck off upon the mind in haste and eager force; and hence the mannerism which is now complained of as word-painting; word-prosing will no longer do; and unless the vivid imagery

* W. M'Call.

which has taken its place relates to worthy objects of interest, the skill which is applied to trifles vexes, both from disappointment and a sense of wasted power.

Perhaps the main cause of epics becoming obsolete is given best by Lamartine when he says; 'Le mouvement des choses est si rapide, ce drame de l'histoire appelle tant de personnages sur la scène, la critique exerce sur toutes les figures du temps une si scrupuleuse sagacité, que le prestige de l'imagination est bientôt détruit, et qu'il ne reste aux grands hommes que le prestige de leur puissance et de leur génie; celui de la Poésie ne leur appartient pas. D'ailleurs l'œil humain s'est élargi par l'effet même d'une civilisation plus haute et plus large, par l'influence des institutions qui appellent le concours d'un plus grand nombre ou de tous à l'œuvre sociale, par des religions et des philosophies qui ont enseignés à l'homme qu'il n'était qu'une partie imperceptible d'une immense et solidaire société; que l'œuvre de son perfectionnement était une œuvre collective et éternelle. Les hommes ne s'intéressent plus tant aux individualités, ils les prennent pour ce qu'ils sont, des moyens ou des obstacles dans l'œuvre commune.'

I make no apology for so long an extract, as it gives my meaning with a precision not easily attained when touching on a subject of such vast extent. No one man can now occupy room enough in the public mind to maintain the central position of a hero in epic poetry: our greatest living heroes look like common men from their proximity to many nearly as great; the heroes of the last generation have had their journals published: and those who lived still farther back have been submitted to the crucible of modern historians, — thus the dross in which their fine gold was embedded has been

exposed to view, and after this process the small residue of fine gold that is left, soon becomes dim to the eye of memory, because of the dust stirred up by the hurrying to and fro of a much occupied posterity.*

It is true that attempts are still made by affectionate admirers to rescue from oblivion many a good man whose wisdom or holiness were eminent in the limited circle of his own acquaintance: we still see memoirs, formidably stout in figure, of people never heard of before, and are promised not only their lives but the remains of their living cogitations; yet the incurious public are for the most part quite content that these domestic luminaries should turn their backs to them still.

Generalizations have made 'colossal individuality'† to be almost denied in the present day. The nineteenth century, being used to dwell upon abstractions, can hardly accommodate its admiration to those abated instances of wisdom and virtue which biography represents; used to view all the concerns of life in the aggregate, it is naturally inclined to condemn the detail of human interest. And besides, all external performance having been made comparatively easy by wealth and science,‡ less attention is given to the *mode* of action, more to its purpose; and the thoughts and intents of the heart do not admit of heroic portraiture. The most fearful struggles of a modern hero are those

* 'All the windy ways of men
Are but dust that rises up,
And is lightly laid again.'

TENNYSON'S *Vision of Sin*.

† W. M'Call.

‡ 'Chaque découverte des sciences en enrichissant la masse diminue l'empire individuel de l'homme.'—DE STAËL.

which Heaven alone can witness : if man is called in to appreciate and judge, the victory is prophaned. Or it may be that *his* hairbreadth risks arise from his fellow men — foes to his virtue, but not ostensible antagonists — being people who profess the same faith, and nominally engage in the same conflict. These trials of heroism may be sublime, but they can scarcely appear so in poetry ; and it is remarkable that in the modern novel — our nearest approach to an epic in its purpose — sympathy rather than admiration is appealed to, when the fate and the feeling of principal characters is narrated.

In the old romance, perfection was to be described ; in the new it is resigned in favour of verisimilitude ; and the real scene of action, on which attention is fastened, lies deeper far than the visible world on which brave knights did valiantly, and fair ladies faultlessly suffered, till the time came for married bliss.

The change from admiration to sympathy is great, and very significant : its effect upon poetry was long since foretold by the modern prophet De Tocqueville. He says, ‘ *L’égalité en s’établissant sur la terre tarit la plupart des sources anciennes de la poésie.* . . . On peut également prévoir que les poètes qui vivent dans les âges démocratiques peindront des passions et des idées plutôt que des personnes et des actes. Le langage, le costume, et les actions journalières des hommes dans les démocraties se refusent à l’imagination de l’idéal. Ces choses ne sont pas poétiques par elles-mêmes et elles cesseraient d’ailleurs de l’être, par cette raison, qu’elles sont trop bien connues de tous ceux auxquels on entreprenait d’en parler. Cela force les poètes à percer sans cesse au dessous de la surface extérieure que les sens leur découvrent, afin d’entrevoir

l'âme elle-même. Or il n'y a rien qui prête plus à la peinture de l'idéal que l'homme ainsi envisagé dans les profondeurs de sa nature immatérielle.' *

Nothing; but because, in most cases a similarity of nature, or experience, is needed to guarantee belief in the poet's report of those depths, this interior ideal can never form the attractive centre of a popular narrative either in prose or verse.

In these days also we have, comparatively speaking, no recognized scheme of heroism that the poet could refer to, as a standard round which the imagination of all readers would gather. To explain this assertion better I would apply it to Mrs. Browning's longest narrative poem,—a glorious failure, yet a failure; for more reasons than need be given here.

We are, at the present time, apparently, too uncertain what is the best and grandest form of human effort, to be able to place before other eyes an ideal life that would at all satisfy the limitless aspirations of our own. It seems almost as if the modern ideal was now pushed by the 'excelsior' impulse quite beyond the reach of art. Can it be that it is leaving earth for heaven?†

* Sur la Démocratie Américaine, vol. iv. p. 120.

† 'Man's idea of God must rise as he sees more of Him in His works, as he sees more of Him by reflecting on his own nature (in which the true proof of natural religion lies), and in those efforts of human virtue in other men which would be unaccountable if there were no God and this world were all. More and more, too, from age to age, the ideas of the soul and of a future life rise in distinctness; man feels more and more that he is a traveller between the cradle and the grave, and that the great fact of life is death; and the centre of human interest moves gradually towards the other world. Man would perhaps have been paralysed in his early struggle with nature for subsistence, had these deep thoughts then taken too much possession of his mind.'—GOLDWIN SMITH's *Lectures on History*, lect. 1.

And here I approach the real difficulties of the subject in hand, and shall probably contradict myself by making vain efforts to bring dissonant ideas into harmony. Let me state the question as it appears to me from one point of view, before I oppose to my own deductions the arguments which seem irresistible when we place the subject in another light.

Pure religion inculcates a sublime indifference to earthly things,—of course under the conditions of inspired wisdom; the bigot insists, it may be, upon *unqualified* contempt of earthly happiness; but even the enlightened Christian tries to make small account of it. The common mass, people who could neither originate nor enjoy true poetry, hurry on through life (unless their hopes have been lifted to eternal good)—pursuing the poorest trifles with unabated zest; by such people the unseen and unimaginable future is forgotten. Far otherwise with the true poet,—the far-seeing and insatiable seeker of everlasting things. As a Christian he knows the world must pass away: he considers it a mere training ground; he feels a lonely pilgrim; he is sure, by bitter experience, that all here *is* vanity and vexation of spirit,—a *seeming* and not a *reality*;—how then can he regard it with the same reverent, affectionate interest with which the ancient poet invested the least details of life? By him, an epic could hardly be undertaken in earnest: if attempted, the serio-comic wisdom of modern life would creep in and make his heroes appear, what indeed they are, comparative insects.

And as with the poet so it is with all thinkers now: we all know too much; we have looked too long ‘be-

fore and after,'* to believe persistently in our own creations; we are like children grown too old for stories, we have heard so many that we guess the end too soon, — see through the disguise, and even at times suspect exaggerations in our own life's story.

I suppose that few educated people are strangers to these lucid intervals of heart and head; they bring us keen pain and cold faintings of purpose, even though we flatter ourselves that *then*, at last, we have got at the truth. In each of the moods we lose much of the fire that would formerly have sought escape in an epic.

It has often struck me as a sign of the world's old age and consciousness of near dissolution, that short and interrupted sobs of lyrical verse are now the most usual utterance of her greatest poets; — as if there was a practical disbelief in any future generations whom their sustained efforts might enrich. It is as if all living powers were now concentrated upon present time, as if there was a profound doubt among us whether there will be another age following our own, in the world as it now stands. This may be a fanciful notion and quite untenable; yet who now labours for posterity? We popularize to any extent for the vulgar mind, but who dares to provide the treasures of science and philosophy which will need successive centuries for their due appreciation?

'I am a servant to posterity,' says Bacon; who thinks to be so now? Perhaps one or two of those whom the

* 'We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught,
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.'

SHELLEY.

world calls dreamers: but the ambition of Alfieri* would be strange to many of our best modern writers; in the press of modern life they find public attention hard to fix, and beyond it what do *they* expect of fame? Possibly a faint remembrance.

And now leaving a discussion of merely poetical interest for considerations of far greater moment, we shall see how naturally the one led to the other.

Many religious people approve of this seeming disdain of earthly life; they cultivate it as a part of that total abnegation of this world's reward which becomes the followers of a crucified Saviour. But with this conclusion I cannot satisfy myself; I cannot reconcile it with the truth that there are other requirements of human nature, and of sanctified nature too, quite as essential, in their due degree, as mortification. I cannot avoid seeing that man's welfare *on earth* must still be dear to the Creator who 'has pleasure in the prosperity of his servant;' and that though the Redeemer has procured for us a better inheritance, and thus made all temporal things to sink immeasurably in comparative worth, yet temporal blessings are His gift, and a neglect or contempt of this transient existence is quite as ungod-like as it is inhuman.

Can it be the will of God that the perfecting of earthly things should be set aside in anticipation of the heavenly? or, because this beautiful world is transitory compared to the world to come, are we to renounce all delight in it as a deceitful snare?

- * 'Se' tu quell'uno, il cui desio cocente
Dai molti uomini il tiene ognor diviso?
Quei che in me il guardo umile altero hai fiso,
Nè laude vuoi di coetanea gente?'

ALFIERI'S Sonnet to Fame.

It seems to me impossible that, when human nature is already so marred with sin, we should render it a more acceptable offering to the Maker by perverting its blameless instincts and crushing its natural powers. How can desolation and ruin be pleasing in His sight?

Such is the bent of my thoughts, influenced no doubt by the prevailing current of opinion which now sets so strongly against asceticism. For the *religious* theory which makes epic poetry unacceptable has, by its own extremes, brought about a singular reaction—one which, if I do not mistake, gains ground daily.

A very remarkable revolution has passed over our estimates of pain and pleasure: there was a time—not many centuries back, when the endurance of privation and pain was closely connected with the idea of virtue and excellence; but against this ascetic prejudice we have raised triumphant opposition. Revolted by the unreasonable bitter-hearted austerities of a large class of devotees, we have become zealous protestants against pain, the comprehensive term *self-development* has overridden its stern predecessor *self-denial* with many a plausible motive, and in modern writing we more frequently find the idea of holiness associated with enjoyment than with suffering. A 'holy and happy' mode of life is more in accordance with prevalent notions than a holy and painful walk:—comfort and satisfaction being very generally taken as a test of right conduct, and certainly as its probable result.

As surface proofs of this change, take the expressions 'muscular christianity'—'beautifully human'—'freest development of nature.' So great a reaction could not follow upon anything less than extravagance in contrary opinions. Reason was once so little regarded in spiritual concerns, that superstition was able to simulate faith; to

tyrannize over common sense *as* faith; and gradually to bring faith so travestied into loathing and contempt. Only thus could such a lover of the truth as Carlyle be tempted to use language like this, 'public ignorance, known to be the mother of devotion' — only thus could religion and philosophy be brought into apparent enmity.* Reason was silenced by superstition, till superstition had suffocated piety, and then men turned eagerly to reason for redress — they sought from human reason a guarantee for the truth of what was taught as divine revelation, feeling afresh, as if it was good news lately brought to them, that 'truth cannot be contrary to truth,' that 'God would not in nature teach us anything to misguide us in the regions of grace.'†

But with our usual proneness to extremes, we went on to make human reason a judge as well as counsellor, and too frequently what reason *could* not test, could not appreciate, of things that must be spiritually discerned, was pronounced superstitious and vain; and while rejoicing in the re-animated thought that natural instincts are not altogether rebels to be broken, but servants to be trained, we are now too likely to forget that they cannot lead us far enough: within the limits of human nature they may not misguide, but we as Christians have been commanded, and have promised to go up higher.

And it is surely false to say that because the Son of God took upon Him our nature, therefore a perfected *humanity* is all to which we need aspire, for in His perfect humanity He enjoined a higher aim than human

* 'La superstizione è sempre abborrita dalla filosofia anche perchè tosto o tardi conduce naturalmente all' irreligione.' — CESAROTTI *Sulla Filosofia del Gusto*.

† Jeremy Taylor.

perfection ; — a likeness to God. ‘ Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.’

Without putting any force upon the words ‘ He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,’ might we not say, he who seeks and admires the full development of human nature only, in preference to that supreme elevation of union with the divine nature, is not worthy of Christ, — cannot yet love Him as He must be loved before we can taste of the fulness of joy?

It is with these considerations that I restrain the influence on my own mind that the prevailing tone of opinion might else have had, and the tendency to think too much of earthly prosperity and natural enjoyments. But nevertheless I cannot accept the contrary opinion so dear to the Puritan spirit ; and though I see that the endeavours of this century to remove all kinds of difficulty have been brought to bear upon ideas of religious duty so ingeniously, that duty is hardly recognized unless it can be shown to be agreeable and profitable, and is thus becoming a matter of taste rather than of obedience, — with this peril full in view, I perceive also that if Christian detachment from the world was carried out as radically and universally as *some* pray that it might be, the will of God (as we understand it, with regard to the occupation of this earth and the extension of human capacities) *could not be done*.

And I appeal to any candid thinker for confirmation of this remark, that wherever you find present life and present concerns looked upon from an exclusively spiritual point of view, you find morbid feeling, narrow range of thought, and a variety of minor errors of judgement extremely damaging to the interests of human society, and, not least, to religion itself.

There are epochs in every thoughtful life when the

surrender of all worldly objects would be welcome, either as a rest from the buffetings of a scrupulous conscience, or as a pledge of sincerity in repentance, or as a safeguard against future temptation: such a sacrifice has often been made; only the Searcher of hearts can know how often it is bitterly bewailed if reason should ever plead too loudly to be overborne by enthusiasm; only the God of truth can enable us to have a right judgement when such a sacrifice is contemplated. For this is certain, that cowardice may easily combine with conscience, and want of wisdom as well as unworldliness may blind us to the worth or transitory things: these may have no apparent relation to devotional work, and yet in despising them the soul will surely suffer loss.

And if such contempt of the world is undesirable for the individual who feels it, the expression of it is, for the most part, hurtful to others. If not mistaken for an attempt to seem righteous overmuch, it is withstood by all the blind instincts of repugnance and antagonism. Religion has nothing that it can afford to lose in the affections of this generation; superstition has taken quite another course in the modern mind, and gives spurious worth to things which religion holds cheap. We are still very superstitious about the requirements of the world, while sagely amused by the foolish sacrifices made in old time for the love of God—the unhealthy vigils, the hard penance, the pilgrimages to the shrines of saints; our own voluntary sufferings in another kind of service, do not yet stand far enough off from modern feelings to strike us as absurd and needlessly self-imposed.

Though religion retains all external honours in our country, and it is seldom that in such a country any

loss of inward affection for it would be allowed to transpire, yet there is a very perceptible turn of thought insidiously undermining heartfelt respect for religion, which finds favour now among many whose intelligence and high character will give weight to every opinion they entertain.

It found voice in Schiller's '*Die Götter Griechenlandes*.'

Da die Götter menschlicher noch waren,
Waren menschen göttlicher.*

And it is expressed again by a recent observer, 'The religious world is a great obstacle to religion.'†

The ideas, to which such words throw out a clue, it would be easier to ignore than to answer; but inasmuch as they hint at truths which we are too likely to overlook, and betray towards revered opinions a degree of hostility, ready to make the keenest use of those facts which an enemy is the first and a friend the last to see; it would be dangerous as well as cowardly to leave them unanswered.

Wholesale reprobation is of all weapons the weakest; the only chance of really strengthening a cause frequently misrepresented, or secretly attacked, is to examine it afresh with honest courage, and see *why* 'the way of truth is evil spoken of;' and then to put in the strongest relief the objections raised against it: those having been weighed with justice, one can proceed to the statement of corrective views; but to put these forward first, as is so often done, before difficulties have been measured, or doubts explored, is to lay open one's best arguments to suspicion and mistrust.

* When the gods were more like men,
Men were more godlike.

† *Saturday Review* in an article entitled 'Good People.'

Let us then enter upon the consideration of this paradox, 'The religious world is a great obstacle to religion,' without shying; remembering that it is not those who love *least* whose sight is most quick to detect flaws and stains; and that those whose hearts yearn most ardently for the help of religion will be most alive to the defects of that religion which everywhere meets their observation, and so often disappoints their hope.

Let us, to begin with, look at the faith held in solution by our English world from an antagonist's position, and ask ourselves, what agreement is to be found between the religion of the New Testament and the religion of professing Christians? There are differences so startling, that it takes some little discursiveness of thought to trace the ramifying deductions which make it possible to believe social practice is even intended to be obedient to Scripture rule. We have to make allowance for metaphorical figure, for differences of race, of climate, and of manners, but when all this is remembered, the contrast is still, on some points, very surprising.

At the same time, while there is so much of all that English natures prize—time, and liberty, and money, freely and perseveringly expended upon charitable schemes, we cannot deny that one of the most distinctive marks of Christ's disciples—beneficence, is obvious among those who otherwise seem to make no claim to that title.

In circles remote from the so-called 'World,' where conformity to Bible precepts is attempted or professed, the observer hopes to find his ideal less imperfectly represented, less out of proportion with reality; he expects to feel something of the blessedness of a more heavenly atmosphere; to find the spirit of peace, if not

of joy ; to be compelled to acknowledge ‘ God is with you of a truth.’ But too often he comes away with a bitter sarcasm, reporting inconsistency, narrowmindedness, failure,—a region

Where passions have the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names.*

It is well if he does not add the charge of hypocrisy, and affirm that he would rather have to do with an honest, whole-hearted worldling, than with a self-deceived professor of sanctity ; that there is a pride in those who assert their contrition, and an arrogance in those who expatiate upon abhorring self, far surpassing common pride ; and that, altogether, *natural* religion bears sweeter fruits than any of those which are so sedulously cultivated by bigots in the high-walled enclosures of strict orthodoxy.

Has no thought like this ever occurred to us ? Has the mind never asked itself, almost inaudibly, whether it is possible that man has lost as well as won by Christianity having become a matter-of-course profession ? and whether true piety is not more rarely met with, now that its phraseology is common in every mouth, than it was in times when spiritual light was less generally diffused ? Such questions are often forced upon us, and they urgently need attention ; but they will be better answered, when a little thought has reduced them to a more accurate mode of expression, thus : what desirable elements of human nature have our modern forms of religion thrown into comparative neglect, and why have they been attended with this drawback, and how can the evil be remedied ?

The Christian’s religion should cherish all things that are lovely and of good report ; and if any such things

* Wordsworth.

are excluded, it is by those who hold the truth on main points with a mixture of error and prejudice on minor ones. Nothing can more concern us than to know what these errors and prejudices are.

But when we determine on consecrated ground, as well as everywhere else, boldly to face things as we find them, and not only as we should wish or expect to find them, or should suppose ourselves warranted in saying that they must needs be found, we must be prepared for many a rude surprise. Our very limited perceptions of truth often seem to be contradicted by the evidence of fact; and till the veil is removed,* it is probable that here as elsewhere the thoughts of man must remain immeasurably at fault.

Lest they should be still more erroneous than is inevitable, 'things themselves are to be considered as they are in themselves, and then they will show us in what way they are to be understood; for to have right conceptions about them, we must bring our understandings to the inflexible natures and unalterable relations of things, and not to any preconceived notions of our own.'† Yes, though they be the obscure and tangled 'things' of man's spiritual life, and though our preconceived notions are derived from the purest religion; for these obscure things *have* natures quite as inflexible, and relations quite as unalterable, as those physical powers of which we say that they must act according to the laws of nature; and these preconceived notions, however true in the abstract, are made false, and in the highest degree detrimental, if applied to human nature in ignorance or defiance of its laws.

This fact has to be met by all honest observers;—in

* Isaiah xxv. 7.

† Locke.

certain ways Christian discipline appears to mar the virtues of the natural man. I could not bring forward such an unwelcome assertion if its evidence was not irrefutable in daily life. I will now try to state, as clearly as an enemy of Christianity would wish to state, the particulars in which its influence seems to be defective or hurtful; and I shall endeavour, at the same time, to show how this apparent shortcoming or damage is to be accounted for and obviated, without attributing either defect or failure to the Christian scheme.

In natural courage, in truth, in gladness of heart, and in pleasantness of manner, real Christians do often suffer by comparison with people of less strict profession. I do not say that the majority of Christians have less proficiency in these virtues than average people 'of the world;' but that a remarkable want of these virtues is often combined with excellence in others most characteristic of a Christian; and that of this want the christianized conscience does not apparently take note as the natural conscience would.

In a far different sense from that of its original use, it may be said that 'conscience does make cowards of us all.' Conscience cultivates scruple; prolongs hesitation, commands self-mistrust; it is taught to be smitten with compunction for trifling offences, to suspect evil in every natural wish, to watch over every word, restrain every action throughout the day, and then at night it is taught to criminate itself as unwatchful, and the conduct as exceeding sinful. This is the training that enfeebles natural energy of mind. It is undeniable that the long and minute self-examinations and self-accusations prescribed by almost all devout writers *weaken* character: it seems obvious to me that they must do so; virtually they make us gainsay at

night all the good sense, and calumniate all the good endeavours of the past day; as the hours went on we tried to do what was best and wisest; many an old infirmity tripped us up; many a temptation to known evil may have been yielded to; and yet, on the whole, heart and mind were bent on what was right: can it add to our faith *virtue* to say in our prayers that all was wrong?

No doubt all was wrong, impure, and worthless, from one point of view — when judged by the standard of what a disciple of Christ should *in the abstract* be and do; it was a cold and base return for all the mercies of divine love, and shows how dead we still are to spiritual things; in theory we ought to have done much better, but oh! it is not safe to deal with our own consciences or judge our lives by this ideal measure, for not only is the world 'set' in our hearts by our Maker, but we are compassed about with infirmity, and clogged by hindrances that require a very practical and accurate attention to things as they are; and if our prayers and religious thoughts keep too much upon what we ought to be in theory, a great deal will go on unchecked in practice which it is most essentially necessary to perceive.

The want of proportion in our religious phraseology is at the bottom of much delusion, and the cause of that want of proportion is generally the spirit of fear.

An unwarrantable misapplication of sacred words is agreeable to the apprehensions of conscience and not to its just dictates. And these apprehensions increase with the moral refinements and spiritual susceptibility of advancing civilization.* In earlier ages it seemed

* Dans un temps d'ignorance, ou n'a aucun doute même, lorsqu'on fait les plus grands maux; dans un temps de lumière on tremble encore

virtue enough to avoid transgression, but in ours—to fall short of the excellence to which a Christian can attain, may occasion as much contrition as was once felt for positive guilt alone.

Still these apprehensions, though urged by conscience, may often be groundless—the instinct of feebleness and timidity. For consider, the threatenings of God's wrath against sinners are comprehensive, and touch us all, as all have sinned, yet are they by no means equally terrible against all kinds of sin; and if we (knowing that we grievously fall short of our duty every day), for fear of refusing scriptural warning, take to ourselves and our lesser sins the fearful condemnation pronounced on those who forsake the Lord and commit overt and deadly sin, we weaken the harmonious force of conscience, and lose sight of the truth. It is by so doing that many humble spirits deprive themselves of peace, 'making the heart of the righteous sad,' whom God has not willed to sadden by His word; and, thinking it *safer* to fear always and believe the worst of their spiritual condition, they do not attend to what is truest,—i. e. that in spite of all their shortcomings they may be, thanks to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, in a comparatively safe state: they may be pleasing in God's sight.

For His glory as much as for their own comfort it is very requisite that they should exert themselves wisely to prove that 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' (2 Timothy i. 7.)

The same defect of courage shows itself in a natural tendency to appropriate every probability of sorrow,

lorsqu'on fait les plus grands biens. On sent les abus anciens, on en voit la correction, mais on voit encore les abus de la correction même. — MONTESQUIEU'S *Esprit des Loix*.

while sheltered under the Christian belief that this life is a scene of trial, and that woe must be as universal as sin. It does not seem to occur to such dejected natures that it is our duty, as much as we can, to resist both : on the contrary, they are often somewhat distressed at feeling tolerably happy for a few weeks together, and think it may be a bad sign ; expecting that the consequence will be either a fatal declension, or some more cruel stroke of fate than has yet been endured.

And is not this a dishonour to the Father of Mercies?

Again, I have feared too much indulgence of fear, too careful a look-out for terror, in the tone of Christian feeling about death. It has often struck me that in heathen writers a more becoming, manly spirit was put forward in speaking of that last earthly trial ; that we cherish trembling thoughts of that still undescribed crisis of being, as suitable to our faith, and productive of religious awe, when we might do better to fortify and compose them. I see no suitability in our prevailing estimates of the dreadfulness of life and death, excepting in this, that we have tried the one and not the other, that in life sufferers are seen to be susceptible of consolation and sinners are known to repent, and that all they who have died 'dwell in silence' with regard to this world, and never report what the darkness of that mystery hides.

But I can conceive it to be very possible that any spirit of man who had passed through life and death might express astonishment that we so little dreaded the prolonged crisis of *life*, that every decisive hour of living strength and will did not gain from us that awful regard and those heartfelt prayers which we spend on the last, when every faculty is most likely powerless ; when the *body* groans, and suffers, and dies—

the body which was known all along to be but dust. 'This' indeed, such a witness might say, 'was but the *shadow* of death; how came it that the "deadly wounded" *spirit* was unheeded year after year — its groans not answered, its wants neglected, its outcries silenced, its long enduring death passed over as a small matter, and apprehension all turned away from that time when the choice of life and death was offered, to a moment when it would first be known to what state that tremendous choice had led?'

It is a question we may well ask ourselves now; remembering that, if we would believe the word of God, it is of the time when a man can 'gain the whole world and lose his own soul,' that we should think with far more awe than of that when we shall only lose what is changing and perishing every day.

Where courage is impaired, *truth* is sure to suffer; and yet I hesitate here, being very reluctant to exhibit any loss of that fundamental virtue among Christians. Nevertheless, it is vain to flinch from the scandal of modern Christendom, that by Christian practice we do undeniably falsify human nature in some of its bearings; we suppress before we can exterminate the evil within us, and while nature prompts one expression, religion insists on another. For instance, in very unhappy circumstances, where almost everything about us seems evil, we know by faith that all is good; but while feeling that all is miserable, we command ourselves to give thanks to God and cheerful contented sayings to men; and we may be content to suffer, but from thinking it our duty to speak up to the level of our belief, and not closely according to our sensations, we undoubtedly lose something of natural candour and natural freshness. The blessing and graces of God can and do

abundantly compensate, but it *is* a loss, and too often, from our own shortcomings in faith and prayer, we undergo the loss, without laying hold on the spiritual compensation.

In this case it is perhaps wholly beneficial to stifle nature, for its candour would reveal an unruly will, and its freshness would be an ever-springing flow of complaint; but the habit of denying utterance to genuine emotions tells disastrously upon better feelings than discontent; and just in the proportion that you raise the standard of profession you necessarily increase the chances of self-deceit and hypocrisy.

In our haste to prove that we believe and aim at all God sets before us as right to think, and feel, and do, we appropriate to our own use those forms of speech, and that mode of demeanour which can only be quite sincere when used by people whose spiritual attainments are really great: used by rote, they may both falsify and disappoint the user; for, finding that expressions of ardent piety leave feeling and act unameliorated, the profession falls in estimation; and thus it has happened, and will always happen when vital growth does not keep pace with external representation, that '*la foi déperissait sous une écorce trop épaisse de respect et d'assentiment général.*'*

All that falls under the head of 'talking good' is suspicious and instinctively disliked for the same reason; and by talking good I mean using devout language with an emphasis or frequency that one's own feelings would not prompt: for the sake of benefitting hearers this is done, but I cannot imagine that it is often successful for edification. (I am not here considering the case of one whose *business it is to teach*; and who may yet often

* *Vie de la Comtesse de Bonneval.*

have to lament the distance between teaching and feeling.)

The human spirit does after all communicate more rapidly and more veraciously with fellow spirits than with their intentions or their words; and when people talk, in any way, with a view to what they wish their hearers to feel, rather than for the original purpose of speech — expression, we know by instinct how much of design, how little of present conviction those well-meant words convey, and wait with what patience we may till the mind of our companion is off duty, and will begin to show itself without self-adjustment.

Good words, in order to do good, *must* come from the heart; and if the feelings spoken of are foreign to experience, it is earnestly to be desired that they should be less familiar to the tongue.

But here we must guard against a serious misunderstanding—the very possible folly of calling that hypocrisy which is really religious experience far in advance of our own. To this error we are exposed by the total dissimilarity of the natural and the spiritual man; what is irksome or impossible or inconceivable to the one, the other performs with unconscious ease: this the natural mind of man cannot understand, — and used as it is to detect reasons and adequate motives for all the phenomena of its own sphere of action, it is tempted to refuse credence to those for which it could never account, because they *can* only be ‘spiritually discerned.’ And the difference being that of kind, and not of degree, the understanding can never fathom the mystery. Let it abstain from the attempt; a cradled infant could work out all the problems of Euclid, before the natural mind of man could gain insight to the most unvarying facts of spiritual life. The lower

cannot comprehend the higher, but it is a disgrace to spiritual life when the experience and the needs of natural life are forgotten or ignored; and it is by this neglect that truth is sacrificed. It is by an almost ostentatious disregard for the ordinary interests of human nature that many good people make their goodness repelling, and their wisdom, as children of light, conspicuously less than that of their worldly companions. The subjects most dear to their zeal they often fail to advance, because they will not first study human nature, and then humbly deal with it *as it is*: in this respect singularly turning away from the example of our Lord, and apparently unobservant of the method of the Holy Spirit in teaching through the whole course of inspired writing. In this, the entire scope of human nature is evidently borne in mind, and most considerately addressed; and thus are its counsels and admonitions of endless efficacy.

One would think that it needed but a little sagacity to see that if the Lord so graciously dealt with man's nature in all those points on which His revealed will expressly touched, we ought in our measure to deal so with one another, in the thousand little matters of which Holy Scripture takes no cognizance beyond the general and reiterated injunctions *to love and do wisely*. And man's insight being as short and obscure as it is, must it not be one of his greatest duties to study the nature and learn the best means of affecting the fellow creatures he is so dearly pledged to help?

Undeniably it is; and yet how many seem to think that here the bare outlines of faith are enough, and that to employ reason for tracing out the complex details of human nature is to 'lean on an arm of flesh;' and if any one brings forward a fact in human nature

for which the phraseology of Scripture seems to make no allowance, ten to one the fact will be by such people denied for the sake of accommodating all perceptions to a biblical standard, and the honest speaker will be thought profane.

Oh! that they would believe 'the will of God revealed in things themselves,' and 'take counsel of the providence of God as well as of His word!' *

But if one asks how they themselves dispose of facts, open to every observer, which are unrecognized in Scripture, they will say, to account for these, that there are sacred things which belong to God, and that on us is imposed the duty of bringing all things to 'the measure of the sanctuary.' To the spirit of such an answer I cordially assent; to their mode of acting upon it I earnestly demur; holding truth to be the real measure of the sanctuary, and that no refusal and no obscuring of truth can be approved by the God of truth.

Surely it were to make as if He was the God of heaven and not of the earth also, to slight everything less than heavenly truths as insignificant and unconcerning: this refusal of every perception of truth that appears discordant with established belief is, to my thinking, the greatest presumption and profanity, for it *is* assuming that God's thoughts are as our thoughts, and that the Almighty ruler of the universe does admit man to the whole of his counsels when giving him the Bible, if by this we test, — not only our conduct and affections, for which it was given, — but our ideas of what we will see and know in the world around us, for which it was certainly never intended.

It is, thank God, far more possible for every one to be

* Bacon,

a devout Christian than an intelligent thinker, — far easier to perceive the finger of God in all that befalls man, than to comprehend the workings of that wonderful human nature to which its Maker will do no violence;—for in ‘making a Christian he does not unmake the man,’ and where the intellect is weak and prejudiced, we must not expect to see its intrinsic defects remedied by grace; the impression of the narrow gauge will be found on every opinion, and take its full effect of mischief.

But because this forms one of the greatest obstacles to the good influence of devout people,—who, if narrow-minded and intellectually short-sighted, *cannot* fail to repel by their ill-guided efforts to attract,—I would implore all who have yet time to reform habits, to resolve *to look at things as they truly are*, and not to suffer any preconceived wishes or theories to blind them: to remember that nothing cripples reason so much as any kind of dishonesty: and to believe a truth which contains a great fund of wisdom, peculiarly needed by religious minds, that ‘in the system of the universe there are two orders of things, utterly distinct from each other — the order of principles and the order of facts. A close and indissoluble bond unites these two orders without identifying them.’*

Again and again the effort to identify them has been made, and the failure astonished those who tried the experiment. Whoever makes it afresh, does unconsciously refuse to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s; and will probably learn in a very painful school these two lessons, that it is a grievous mistake to expect from supernatural means that which strictly

* Cavour.

natural means are calculated to produce : and that to use the wrong means, however intrinsically good, for attaining a right object, is to do wrong both with respect to reason and to faith.

Indeed, for the sake of religion, we should not suffer its claims to encroach upon the rightful domain of common sense; for healthy common sense infallibly resents the interference, and in trying to resist it, retaliates very perniciously, and begins to dictate to the religious sense. And in the neglect or misuse of reason we abuse a great gift, and dishonour the giver to the full as much as when we deny the testimony of faith.*

It will be more difficult to show the possible injury done to truth by the Christian's profession of love to all, than by habits of devout unreason, because on that point civilization, apart from Christianity, is equally chargeable.

'A Chinaman,' says Mr. Laurence Oliphant, 'has wonderful command of feature, he generally looks most pleased when he has least reason to do so, and main-

* 'God loves to see such a noble creature as man is follow and imitate Him in his reason. "All things strive to be assimilated to God," as the schoolmen have it. Now men cannot be more assimilated unto God than by moving as intelligent agents. Does God Himself work according to reason from eternity to eternity? and has He made a creature in time whose very essence is reason? why then does it not open its eyes? Why does it not use its lamp? and though it cannot discover all, yet let it discern as much as it can? Let it not act in the choicest points of religion out of blind and implicit principles, and huddle up its choicest operations in I know not what confused and obscure and undigested manner. This neither becomes sons of light, nor works of light. The more men exercise reason the more they resemble God Himself, who has but few creatures that can represent Him in so bright an excellency as this, only angels and men; and therefore He expects more from them. And the more they exercise their own reason, the more they will admire and adore His.'—N. CULVERWELL'S *Light of Nature*.

tains an expression of imperturbable politeness and amiability when he is secretly regretting devoutly that he cannot bastinado you to death.* For in China, without Christianity, civilization of a certain sort has reached a high pitch : still, if for wishing to bastinado you to death we substitute,—wishing earnestly that your troublesome presence was far enough distanced from his;—many a good Christian might inwardly claim praise for an identical exercise of social fortitude and dissimulation.

The concern and pity expressed for many more griefs than the human mind can bear in remembrance; the liking implied by ordinary civilities for people thoroughly disliked, and the loving phraseology of natural affection for those towards whom, in some cases, if all were known, affection is most unnatural; are duties,—social and Christian,—with which Nature will have nothing to do.

Poor Nature, sitting in her fastnesses, asserts with uncontrollable sincerity how little she cares, or likes, or loves; but conscience, remembering that love is the livery of the servant of Christ, insists on loving demonstrations; and with such practised skill are they provided that notoriously ‘No man knoweth either love or hatred’ by anything that appears in the manner of well-bred Christians.

In this way words are emptied of meaning, and the unfelt expression of sympathy is given and received without refreshment or pleasure on either side; without pleasure!—ah! and often with heart-sickening pain,—for this lavish expenditure of mimic affection makes the heart feel bankrupt; it sometimes doubts whether it

* *Lord Elgin's Mission to China and Japan.*

has any wealth at all, when it has to put on the show of so much.

Who can deny that the simplicity and warmth of natural feelings is by this means deteriorated? and that the spontaneous love of a heart which has not constrained itself to love,—against all contradiction of antipathy,—is more true, more lasting, and more delightful, than any tepid sentiment superinduced by christian charity?

The friendship of the good haters is proverbially hearty and sincere;—friendship based on principle;—full of benefactions and benevolence, but, oh! how weary and how wearying are its patient and cold attentions! For to perform the duties of love, without tasting its pleasures, is one of the most arduous efforts of which human nature is capable: and, saddest truth of all, when all is done its main end is not answered; nature still turns away, and no boon can bribe, and no solicitation win her.

Antipathy is one of those insoluble elements of human experience for which we can never find a satisfactory place in theory: in practice it comes under the rule of duty, and must be ignored, or subjected to the conscientious requirements of every trying day; entirely conquered it cannot be; but to indulge it, or give it a hair's-breadth of *evitable* footing, is to open a wide gateway to sin.

Our difficulties with regard to the conflicting claims of truth and charity arise—as I suppose—from the low ground on which we still carry on our spiritual life: we feel bound by the precepts of Christ to love and honour all men, but the privilege, the infinite joy of such love, we can hardly imagine; into *this* joy of our Lord we have not yet entered, and from our poor

self-occupied hearts it seems too far distant to be possible; yet He who is Truth and Love invites, commands us, to love one another as He loves us—an awakening from the death of selfishness to the life of such charity which, though impossible for us to effect, is possible for God to give; and for it we should pray always. We are dead till it is given;—till this spirit of Christ is formed in us.

When the love of Christ has taken full possession of the religious world, there will be no need of any semblance of goodwill and loving-kindness: and though something answerable to antipathies of nature may still exist while man is constituted of soul and body, yet these dissonant notes will not jar then, they will be taken up into a higher harmony of feeling,—and what the Saviour loves will hide from us what we ignorantly dislike, and make forbearance sweeter than many natural friendships now are; for the kindness of a spirit who dwells in Christ and Christ in it is more tender than unsanctified love.

If the sense is hard
To alien ears, I do not speak to these.*

Nor from internal experience, but from ‘the evidence of things not seen,’ and a sure trust in the promises of God. It is the certainty that these must be ultimately fulfilled, which makes the least approximation to divine love in human hearts a pledge of hope and a cause for boundless gratitude.

Necessarily, gladness of heart will be deficient in proportion as heartfelt love is wanting. The body of our religion, without its animating spirit, is a heavy burden, grievous to be borne; and nothing can be more deject-

* Tennyson.

ing than to submit to the restraints of a high calling without accepting its freedom. It is not intentional hypocrites only who are, as Dante says he found them in his dismal circuit, 'Stanco e vinto.' But this sad disagreement between profession and inward life will not account for the gloom that pervades many a religious circle; nor need we conclude that vitality of faith is altogether wanting in them because we find them joyless.

Temperament, national manner,* and various other incidental causes, may explain much that would perplex an unaccustomed eye, as contrasting so strangely with the exulting tone of the Apostles. And besides the sorrow of daily backslidings, and the sense of a weakness and sinfulness that nothing short of omnipotence could ever bring back to health, Christians have enough to sadden them in some doctrines of the very creed they profess. The wonder might rather be that those people who believe that a few only shall be saved—that but a small minority of their fellow-men will escape extreme and never-ending torment, can feel a moment's happiness, or care about the passing joys of this life, which they suppose to be the *only* joys to which the majority of mankind will attain. It is, however, manifestly impossible for the human mind to conceive this article of their belief, though thousands would die upon it; and what cannot be conceived may be always on the lips, but will never be borne in mind, and will thus never *habitually* interfere with other motives and other assurances of faith. Of the infinite mercy of our God we can form some faint conception, because we already taste it, it is about us on all sides; but of *everlasting*

* 'There being in the make of an English mind a certain gloom and eagerness which carries to a sad extreme.'—BERKELEY.

woe we are as yet unable truly to think, for the words represent nothing within human experience. We can use them therefore with an ease and absence of emotion which is astounding until we remember, that sensation is the only door by which ideas gain influential access to the heart.

Now by means of the sensation of fear, some faint glimmer of the worth of those tremendous words does reach our consciousness; and if frequently retained there by imagination or revived by eloquence, it cannot fail to inspire profoundest grief.

We may be thankful for the daily round of little cares and little hopes which keeps the mind busy, and incapacitates us for looking into an abyss of mystery, on which it would be madness to dwell. But it is anything rather than surprising that some minds feel the terrors of that awful future in an overwhelming degree.

With regard to christian joy, as well as to christian love, we must recollect that not only is the ideal character to which we aspire unattainable in this present state, but that in our present state the aspiration for that character and even the ideal itself has to be formed, and in the midst of adverse influences; so that we are ever in danger of failure in our efforts for the higher goal, while dissatisfaction with anything less exalted has induced us to forfeit the advantages of natural and free development. We lose *abandon*, and a firm unhesitating hold upon enjoyment; often too, — especially in questions of expediency, ‘a little grain of conscience makes us sour,’* where, without this protesting instinct, we might have been serene and sweet.

Again, in the attempt to reach the standard of christian excellence, we find self-denial an essential con-

* Tennyson.

dition: we deny ourselves—generally that which would be self-chosen, of a seemingly unnecessary kind, such as the indulgence of tastes innocent but often absorbing. These we resign, the lower necessities of nature we *cannot*, these remain in full force and with them selfishness can carry on its wretched game, all the time that conscience is appeased by the sense of sacrifice in matters more under the direction of the will. But surely it should be a strong argument against the non-cultivation of natural tastes, that when you have allowed all to dwindle unheeded for the sake of concentration in seeking the one thing needful,—when thus you have broken or blunted the *peculiar* instruments of service with which you were sent into this world, commoner instincts will assert their unalienable rights. You refused, to study that you might give yourself wholly to good works, but you *must* talk to your neighbours, and then you gossip or censoriously judge; you deemed music and drawing, and other accomplishments, vain objects for endeavour, unworthy of the time and pains they demand, but when you want to make your society,—as a Christian, —pleasant, you spread for companions the snare of thinking good people very stupid and wearisome, and doom yourself to the absurdity of expecting a right motive to supersede the necessity of right means. You so exclusively gave your mind to preparing for another world, that you overlooked many of the requisite provisions for doing your duty in and towards this;* you will nevertheless need and probably seek the *physical* comfort, of this life, for though you would not trust your

* ‘He who shuts himself up from all enjoyments of the world until he has lost all knowledge in the ways of the world, only makes himself a less useful member of society than those who drive along in the torrent of impulse with the common run of mankind.’ — ABRAHAM TUCKER.

body to serve the mind, in order that both may serve the spirit, and by the immortal spirit the God who created all,—the body will not fail to serve itself, and more and more attentively as it advances in age: and we know that the body is a bad servant to the spirit; a very rebel and malcontent in all spiritual service, without the intervention of the mind. Mind holds it in subjection far better than the spirit ever can *immediately*, because mind borrows largely from matter, and renders large tribute to the spirit. Take away or weaken this connecting link, and life will not be long enough for finding out all the damage you have done.*

Cavillers see the result, not heeding the cause, and complain that a strict religionist is more narrow, illiberal, and self-absorbed than many a hearty soul who declines the careful walk which he is told will save him, and continues in the broad road of ruin to exhibit uncultivated virtues and unembittered charities, which shame the stunted growth of the much pruned tree.

So the world speaks; and we are all only too glad to fix our attention on the harmless products of nature, and to pass over the fearful devastation of good which unprincipled lives will for the most part betray. All are too prone to compare the mournful struggler along the narrow path with any comfortable exception of apparent welfare on the broader road. And none can deny that the contrast is sometimes disadvantageous, that the purest christian principle will sometimes bring upon a tempted and humble soul the unattractive veil of 'a face haggard but composed, pensive and self-absorbed, with the eyes of a broken heart.'† Not that this is the

* 'He that is a civil and moral man can also be made spiritual; for what is civil and moral is the receptacle of what is spiritual.' — SWEDENBORG.

† Olmsted's Cotton Kingdom.

consequence of the religion itself, which is meant to be triumphantly exhilarating, but of this religion when it actuates a feeble and depressed temperament; and, as is usually the case, the strongest element of a combination has to bear the reproach of the weakest, and the spirit is charged with the infirmities of the flesh. Yet after making all allowance for these known causes of deficient religious joy, there remains still so wide a difference between our tone of feeling and that of the first Christians that one may well doubt whether we now take the Gospel in its full sense. No Apostle writing to the church of our day could say with any force 'that your joy may be made full:' what it requires first is that its sorrow and fear should be made less.

For the unattractiveness of devout people, even in the eyes of rightminded companions, there are very probable causes which ought to be noticed. Not to speak of the tendency of conscious virtue to censure what is opposed to its own sense of right, and toilsome efforts; and the scope given by a righteous horror of evil to the 'besoin de s'indigner' of the natural man; (a tendency and a scope which are undeniable, though not consequent upon the *virtue* but on the imperfection of wisdom and charity that accompany it;) there is also the common aptness of human nature to turn its self-restrictions on one side of character, rather than on all, and to satisfy itself with great moral exploits in one department of duty, to the neglect of conspicuous faults in another. This inequality of self-discipline is of course natural and common in all men, but in the case of very religious persons it is more strongly resented on the plea that they 'set up for being better than the rest of the world.'

Again, piety delights in limitation: thinking to bring

every thought to the obedience of Christ, but not always being able to perceive what kind of service thoughts not directly pious can render to our Divine Master, it is too much inclined to reprobate and exclude as aliens those which are beyond the pale of its own efficiency: and would thus make life a very poor and barren field, compared with that which by Divine Providence it is; and dismiss as useless some of the most useful agents in social economy.

Human nature always tries to see an agreement, — a similarity and proportion of means to ends; but it is a wish seldom gratified in matters of spiritual life, where means most unlikely are often most efficacious, and antagonistic principles most wonderful in working out the harmonious designs of the Creator. And not only is man impatient in judging of the means to be employed for vast ends, but, having such an ephemeral view of God's world, he naturally looks out for an immediate effect of right means: he has seldom time in his short life to follow the course of anything more circuitous than *direct* action; and the slow unintermitting, indirect action of eternal power is so far beyond his comprehension, that he sometimes forgets its presence and ridiculously questions its success.

And so it often happens that good people, confident of righteous purpose, arrogate to themselves a right to dictate upon points where silence and reverent humility is the only wisdom man can have; attempting to foreclose all the problems of this life by a precipitate application of religious truths, they bring these sacred truths into discredit, and do more than any atheist could to strengthen the foolish persuasion that religion is the stay of weak minds only.

How vainly do such dogmatists pretend to arbitrate

for people whose experience has taught them what life really is,—who have found that Sunday School lessons *cannot* allay all doubts ;—that purely religious aspirations will not cover the whole ground of our earthly career ;—that man is not a simple piece of spiritual mechanism, from which you can withdraw all ambiguous motive force, and readjust, by the right texts being thrown in !

To treat the hopes and desires of any devout mind with contempt is farthest from my intentions ; but what is childish and disastrously unsuitable to the mysterious dignity of human nature, should surely be exposed as childish, and not sanctioned because it is a religious mistake. While there is time, our religion should be carefully scrutinized, and winnowed from all adherent chaff ; for chaff may be allowed to accumulate till it hides the good grain ; and there are at this epoch of the world symptoms of an angry revulsion against venerable rubbish which may lead the next generation to mistake the precious for the vile.

‘Be ye wise as serpents’ was the injunction of our Lord. If we were, we should anticipate dangers, and discern the signs of the times ; till we are, let us ask for wisdom, and pray that it may be given to us as liberally as our need of it is urgent and great.

If we would understand *why* good people so often seem ignorant of the real importance of temporal objects, we must refrain from supposing that piety combines with folly more easily than with wisdom, and state the phenomenon thus :—a dominant motive tries to control every faculty of the mind ; what it cannot subdue to its own purposes it would, if possible, annihilate. This assertion is not, I believe, too unconditional. Mental history justifies me in saying that to whatever

principle of action the mind submits itself, to whatever it truly inclines, it gives, in the long run, complete subservience: nor will obstacles lessen this, they will only arrest, for a short time, the impetus to which they really give momentum. When once we can detect the ruling motive in any mind, we may be sure that, unless the Spirit of God effects one of those rare and sudden revolutions of nature which are on record, we shall, five or six years hence, find that motive more engrossing in its sway, and more imperative in demand. Be it good or bad, it will transmute all things to means of attaining its own object; and this with a subtlety and unsleeping skill that must astonish any who open their eyes to the observation.

Now as this law of nature acts in pursuance of a less worthy end, it acts also in support of what ought to be a supreme motive; and the excellence of the object will not present the natural tyranny and *undesirable* exactions of a prevailing desire. To give examples, without which words may often mislead in obscure lines of thought;—a miser, a bookworm, a collector of some years standing, will be driven by habit, as much as by taste, to see all things as they are or as they are not calculated to promote his favorite quest: if the world offered no check to his propensities he would have it turned upside down for gold, books, or curiosities—passing by or despising everything else as immaterial, and not to the purpose of his life. So does each one of us become enslaved to ruling principles; and obviously for wise and providential purpose. But precisely the same process may befall the devout soul whose piety has long passed the bare limits of religion, and changed from painfulness of service to the raptures of holy zeal: such a one, if unchecked by the voice of reason, will see no

bounds to the province of religion in mundane affairs; it will deny that there are any, — it will wish all minor interests to be consumed as dross, and would fain have nothing attended to besides the one thing needful. And too often this description of Rémusat's will apply as fairly to a devotee in England, as to a religious man in France: 'Parmi nous, un homme religieux est trop souvent un homme qui se croit entouré d'ennemis, qui voit avec défiance ou scandale les événements et les institutions du siècle, qui se désole d'être né dans les jours maudits, et qui a besoin d'un grand fond de bonté inné pour empêcher ses pieuses aversions de devenir de mortelles haines.'

And in warfare with masked enemies, on ground beset with cunningly-hidden pitfalls, such a state of apprehensive suspicion is natural for one who is exhorted to watch always; in twilight we may easily mistake a foe for a friend, but at the same time there is equal danger of our not recognizing a friend; and of the two counterbalancing sayings of our Lord 'He that is not for us, is against us,' and 'He that is not against us is on our part;' the last is incomparably the most difficult for a Christian to believe, for we can seldom see far enough in the subtle chain of causation to ascertain the advantage and support that may accrue to spiritual life from much that goes on in the world, apparently for the world's interests only.

Hence the intolerance of all that is not directly aimed at the profit of souls, which leads some good people to do them most serious injury, which justifies in their eyes such a thrusting forward of devout sentiment in season and out of season, as if they, like Timothy, had been individually commissioned by an apostle to 'reprove, rebuke, exhort,' as appears to sounder judgment pro-

fanation. Hence the force put upon common experience in the attempt to make all things witness to the sacred truths, so justly loved, so unwisely dragged forward. Hence the effort to open every lock in the intricate mechanism of the human heart by one key, because that key is the only one that can admit us to peace when we beat with trembling and despairing hands against the adamantine walls of the fate by which we are encompassed ;—as for instance, when a great blunder in life has been committed by a religious person, to refuse the lessons of wisdom which its painful consequences should teach, by calling those consequences providential. As no doubt they were, but *our* part in carrying out providential designs is not to be so simply disposed of. The devout christian would be pained to hear a guilty man say that his sins were providential, because from them Providence elicited the designed consequence of ultimate advantage ; and no less are the wise offended when they find a want of prudence and forethought, a manifest error and miscalculation, attributed without further reflection to the overruling will of God. Neither the pious nor the wise *can* know exactly what to say or to think on this question, hanging as it does on man's free will,—a mystery by which human reason is baffled, while owning that *only God's* will is done. Still it is not presumption to assert that, wherever folly has been as evitable as sin,—as clearly the result of neglected warnings or undervalued counsels,—that folly is a dishonour to the service of God, and if it produce, by His mercy, good effects in the end, those effects can no more clear the foolish servant from danger in allowing folly, than the sinner from the guilt of doing evil that good may come.

Therefore if an indiscreet fluency and frequency of

religious common-place in conversation is known to distaste, not only the careless, but the serious mind—to make religion less lovely, and those who love its holiness less influential—shall we dare to continue the offence, and call it a providential stumbling-block?

The habit of ever and anon announcing religious motive seems to arise from the same fear of being mistrusted, which appears to have led many compilers of prayer to bring together into one form of petition all the main points of christian belief, as if a compendium of one's doctrinal faith was indispensable to devout supplications; whereas, seeing that prayer involves that faith, one would naturally think it the least suitable opportunity for its specification; and to state *what* one believes to Him who searches the spirit seems on the face of it needless in habitual private prayer. So in society, the same defensive precaution may induce people to *say* a great deal that one would think might be taken for granted *as felt*, if their lives gave proof of faith, working by love. It does not surely concern us to see our friends' *D. V.* after every expression of intended plans, if we know them to be truly resigned to the will of God when this crosses dearest hopes, and frustrates cherished schemes: and if we say of a joke that much repetition wears off its edge and fun, that the mind is soon palled by a reiterated phrase, however felicitous in its first use; how can we avoid the fear of a like result when we stereotype a pious expression? Is it not far worse to dull the force of that? Is not the mind of man already sufficiently callous and dull in spiritual matters, without an uncalled-for contribution to the mass of sayings which more and more fail to impress when they are heard or spoken as a matter of course?

We are told in reply that 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;' it is most true, but not surely with an abundance of formulary words. As far as I can observe, any feeling which abounds within takes concise, varied, vivid, ever new modes of expression; the deeper it is, the more ingeniously original will be its means of escape; and above all things it waits for opportunity, and quickly seizes it: now and then it may be poured forth irrespectively of what kind of reception it will meet, but this is only in exceptional cases of excitement. For the most part every profound feeling has its own infallible tact; and would be self-wounded if it had to make the hackneyed verbal demonstration, the conventional appeal for sympathy which, upon subjects of religious experience, is so frequent and so distasteful.

And besides, though feeling, when strong, may increase its vehemence by expression, let it not escape notice that, when weak, it is by expression perceptibly abated. Can we afford *any* abatement of feelings which seldom last in any intensity as long as we desire and pray that they should? Are our religious impressions so vivid, generally, that they can bear being faded by exposure? Surely no.

I have now tried to expose the faulty or indiscreet habits that are likely to be found in conjunction with religious intentions; and some who read these pages will think, even if they cannot accuse me of libel, 'if such things are laid to the charge of the religious by a friend of religion, it might well say,—Save me from my friends!' I, from my side of the question, heartily echo these words; and wish indeed that religion was saved from the blind and passionate support of some of its warmest friends.

We hear often enough of the harm done in the world by bad people; that is a broad target which every arrow can hit; but if more heed was taken of the harm that good people do by their faults and follies, the warning they afford might be of greater use; both because, if truly good, *they* will be humble enough to accept admonition, and because the harm done by those who are in high esteem, whose lives are, as has been said, 'the ungodly man's bible,'* is far more extensive and profound than the reckless sins of the ungodly. It must be so; if these last corrupt practice by bad example, the others bring principles into disrepute which are, compared to practice, as the wide-spreading permanent root to the quick-grown perishing leaves. And unless we can bear to have the faults and errors of the religious world fairly examined, and separated, as such, from its principles, *these* will bear the blame—these be looked upon as the originating cause of what is undesirable and disapproved; and the more excellent way will be suspected as the refuge of folly, by a world only too ready to scorn it.

It is usual to attribute this inclination wholly to the aversion of the natural man to all godliness; it is easy and plausible too, but it is not, I believe, quite just. The virulence of invective which distinguishes any attack upon religion cannot, I think, be accounted for on these grounds only; for we find a touch of the same bitterness in the comments of men, earnest in good purpose, when they discover sin hidden by holy profession, and poisonous error fast bedded in depths of piety. If such men loved true piety less, they would be less indignant with its counterfeit. Their bitterness expresses the

* 'Christians are the ungodly man's bible, he will take his ideas of religion from what he sees in their conduct.' —KNELL.

most grievous and intense disappointment: bad as human nature is, it craves for religion, it feels an unfathomed abyss of misery surging around, within, and without, and knows that only a God can rescue, and only His light can lead safely through; it gropes, even in iniquity and despair, for that God; it craves, with unappeasable desire, for that light. 'Who will show us any good?' is the voice of agonized humanity, both when most miserable and when satiated with earthly blessings. The religious world answers; and if it gives the serpent and the stone instead of the expected nourishment, shall we call it the perversity of the natural man that cries out against deception and cruel mockery?

The cruellest act that man can do to man is to raise or increase a doubt whether the service and worship of God is indeed the salvation, the happiness, and the glory of man; and looking back to history, and seeing how often foul crimes have been entrenched behind religious duties, and gross folly gilded by the external ornaments of sanctity, one feels that those whom one age called misbelievers would perhaps have been the devoutest Christians of another; and that the woe pronounced by our Lord on men who suffered not that others should enter into the kingdom of Heaven while professing to find and give admittance, extends beyond themselves, from generation to generation, making faithful ministers of Christ to be suspected of priestcraft, and holiness of conduct to bear the reproach of supposed hypocrisy.

Suspicion of priestcraft or hypocrisy is not what I am now combating, but the misjudgments, the exaggerations, and the downright falsities of some religious people; which, if sheltered from examination *because*

they are used in religious service, will, as certainly as the consecrated oppressions of former ages, advance the growth of impiety in the long run.

The disappointment that follows on any comparison of what is looked for and what is found in the religious world, may be, as we have seen, the consequence of defect and error in the conduct and opinions of religious people; but it must not be unnoticed that it is very often attributable to our observations being made from a wrong point of view: to this branch of the subject we will now turn.

It is said in Scripture, speaking of men's teaching, 'by their fruits ye shall know them,' but we do not find the excellence of Christ's religion submitted to this test; and we are not led to expect that he will be glorified in his saints in the present world. Indeed, judging by analogy we should naturally suppose that in earthly repute 'the servant *would* not be above his master, nor the disciple above his Lord.' For if, when the head of the Church was seen, 'no form or comeliness' was discerned in him by men, — 'no beauty that they should desire him,' is it strange that the body should be wanting in outward attractions also, that its symmetry, as seen on earth, should be more marred than that of any human institution, and its form appear less perfect than that ideal which may be realized among the sons of men? This should be always remembered; the fragmentary outlines of a divine plan which embraces Eternity, dimly seen by mortal eyes, cannot reveal its perfection of wisdom and love in the narrow confines of Time. It must appear imperfect, faulty, and unsuccessful till we know as much of the divers requirements of a future state of being as we do of those felt here: and the perpetual effort of a reasonable mind should be to

silence the ignorant objections of nature, and to receive the assurances of revelation with an obedient will and an unreserved faith.* It is difficult, but it is infinitely necessary, so to do; for if we judge by sight, there will be no lack of powerful arguments to justify the delusive reasoning urged against christian discipline, which contradicts faith, and, by degrees, destroys it.

‘When affirmative reasoning is applied to a preconception, an infinity of particulars, all voting the same way, fly to its assistance — both the decrees of ratiocinative philosophy and the phenomena of the world being laid hold of in the fallacious light of the senses.’†

And when faith is destroyed, experience will soon seem to bear us out in secretly esteeming the life of the devout Christian ‘madness, and his end to be without honour,’‡ and we shall begin to call ourselves *enlightened* when thick darkness is closing round us. For here ‘we see not yet all things put under’ Christ, even

* O there is less to try our faith
In our mysterious creed,
Than in the godless look of earth,
In these our hours of need.
Ill masters good: good seems to change
To ill with greatest ease;
And worst of all, the good with good
Is at cross purposes.

O blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell,
That God is on the field, when He
Is most invisible!
And blest is he who can divine
Where real right doth lie;
And dares to take the side that seems,
Wrong to man’s blindfold eye!

FABER.

† Swedenborg.

‡ Wisdom, chap. 5, v. 4.

in a sanctified heart: and in this life it is impossible that the perfect beauty of holiness should be perceived as clearly as the happiness of a *naturally* happy soul is: it needs a heavenly illumination to enable us to detect, in the faint and early lineaments of christian character, any likeness to Christ; and even when matured, the veil of human infirmity hides its glory, and we see tears, which will not be wiped away until there is no more death.

Reason cannot discern why human nature is to be so strangely thwarted, chastened, and crucified as it is: we know that it *must* be, that it behoves us to suffer, but not by any showing of reason; and I think it unwise to attempt to explain the use of some kinds of sufferings: as far as discipline goes we can understand its purpose, but when it reaches a higher pitch, and seems to incapacitate for life's duties, to be, in the truest sense of the word, mortification — even to the best parts of nature, then faith only can call it good. With regard to principles as well as persons we may say 'man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;' and in some of those principles of human nature which to us appear most desirable, He may see the source of ultimate danger. The mortified, broken spirit, with all its shortcomings of spiritual health, may have capacities for future perfection which His omniscient eye sees to be wanting in many promising qualities of the natural man. And those people who refuse to believe this, may find enough of unhappiness and morbid exaggeration of christian belief, to tempt them to think, 'If this is the result of religion, who would wish to be religious? Is not a simpler natural religion, nay, a heathen innocence, much to be preferred?'

So thinking, they prejudge a cause not yet tried out to its end. Heathenism and natural piety have had their full trial; the one has been found so corrupt and defiling to human nature that it has been left far behind, effete, and henceforth impossible for civilized humanity to embrace: the other has been found utterly insufficient and disappointing, for its motives fail when the strongest seductions arise, its strength becomes weakness under the stress of passion within or of affliction without; and though some people still cling to the hope that this unfettered, unconditional, religious instinct will answer all ends, yet we see too many wrecks from a vain reliance on its unstable anchor for this to have a large number of advocates.

And yet we sometimes dwell upon the virtues compatible with heathen faith, and the easy charms so commonly attributed to natural piety; because distance in one case softens adjacent horrors, and an air of spontaneous goodness reconciles us to defect in that of the other. We judge of both as of underrated powers, leniently, imaginatively, and perhaps with some touch of pleased self-love in having discovered excellence which is generally overlooked. We judge of our established religion as men judge of their rulers; captiously, because it is in authority; suspiciously, because it promises everything good, and as yet we gain so little (as it seems) from it; unfairly, because it seeks to restrict our conduct to given modes of action, and our thoughts to prescribed limits of belief. And thus our judgement is very likely to be blind and unjust.

Besides, it is obvious that in comparing the two ideals of a Christian, and a man governed by natural religion only, we find ourselves with nothing higher than the first, and nothing lower than the last, to measure their

respective advantages by: consequently, the failings of the one will be as striking as the natural merits of the other;—a fact that is sure to tell against christianity in the estimation of unreflecting observers.

Let us then acknowledge, in conclusion, that the fullness of blessing secured to us by a christian life,—the triumph and joy it holds in pledge,—the entire and glorious victory to which it is advancing, can as yet be only made manifest to faith and hope. The leaven is still hid in the three measures of meal—it ever works; and at last the mercy and wisdom of God will be shown in the complete restoration of redeemed humanity. The time for that may still be far off—but it is ‘for an appointed time;’ in constant approach, it will not tarry. To do all we can as devoted followers of Christ to quicken that process, to hasten that day, is our part; and undaunted and patient through hope we should strive, so sure of final conquest as to be cheerful under temporary defeat.

The foregoing enquiry having taken its rise from the fact I adduced as one main reason for indifference to epics—that in theory the religious world professed to think this life unworthy of any kind of loving glorification, and that all religious turn of thought—up to very recent times—had inclined us to pass over earthly renown as valueless; I cannot bring it to a close without drawing attention to the very different posture of mind to which we have been brought by a reaction from that supermundane theory.

Though we have now no fear that ‘*le mauvais sens, reprenant ses esprits, songe à nous redonner des poèmes épiques,*’* yet from untenable heights we may

* Boileau.

easily fall to more degrading levels. The history of human opinion has certified us that no reaction ever brings it back to the point from which its opposite began to diverge. Of this we shall find remarkable proof in modern notions of temporal well-being.

In darker ages, when the coarsest pleasures of sense were snatched and unscrupulously enjoyed by the strongest ruffians,—when man's honour was sustained by prowess in fight, and unflinching cruelties of revenge,—and when his very religion sanctioned or paid the expenses of his worst passions, it was an intelligible instinct of purer faith to turn its eye from such a world of violence and wrong, and abnegate wholly what seemed irreclaimably evil. The chivalry—the high romance of those days, with all the nobleness of feeling and constancy in self-denial which it involved, was not, and perhaps could not, have been recognized by pious hearts as the herald of still better things, because it was in jovial fellowship with vice. And human wisdom could not then discern that this gay poetic spirit, while devoting itself seemingly to human glory and human praise, was blindly bringing in a more refined civilization to the praise and glory of God,—that it was winning men from gross servitude to sense, and suspending, for short intervals of delight, a rude contest for merely personal interest,—thus gradually teaching the first elements of spiritual life in a kind of alphabet of brightly coloured letters.

The saintly men who heard of tournaments and saw something, even from their cloisters, of the excitement and pleasure that they caused, could in all probability seldom read those letters, though Providence had put them together. Unless they were men of rare philosophy, they must have seen human disorders far

more clearly than divine meaning, and denounced, as a vain, beguiling distraction from the concerns of eternity, those very amusements of their age which we, on looking back, see to have been so useful, and in the long run so advantageous to the cause of religion. A reflection this, which might cure us of any scornful thought or precipitate censure with regard to the habits either of the present time or of the past. Not that I can so accept the famous saying 'whatever is, is right' as to believe that history teaches nothing less agreeable than a complacent *laissez aller* frame of mind; for we are not sent into the world only to observe and admire the merciful workings of Providence, but to work our own work while it is our day of labour and experiment; and to work well, we must learn where our predecessors have failed, and how we can best improve upon their success.

The faults and ignorances of nations as well as of individuals are no doubt, as we say, overruled for good; but knowing that will not lessen the guilt of either, in suffering any avoidable neglect to deprive the world of what is intrinsically right for men or for nations.

The recorded experience of centuries has put us in a position from which we can look back upon the errors of many a past age,—the mischievous tendency of many a once-cherished belief; but while occupied with the consideration of these, it would be well to scan our own possibly erroneous bias with sharper scrutiny than we generally apply to ourselves; never forgetting that 'les chaines qui nous serrent de plus près sont celles qui nous pèsent le moins.'*

Once, in the pious desire to subserve higher interests,

* Madame Schwetchine.

civilized man misused human life, — dedicating to exclusively spiritual exercises, a period of existence in which body and soul and spirit are all intended for distinct action and suitable enjoyment. It is possible that while the old habit of religious mistaking lingers in the field of thought and in verbal profession, we may now be given to the abuse of this life by too much indulgence of the lower nature, and, while disdainful of heroic exploits because the warfare of a Christian is nobler and more arduous, we may be losing the virtue of a hero of old time, and not gaining any proficiency in those of the Christian either. And though we now appear to be learning afresh (from muscular Christians) the worth that may rightly be attached to this present state of being, we by no means approach even that lofty temper of feeling which produced epics: we have so fully exploded the grand and airy illusions of a Quixote that there is no chance of a return to *those*. The fear is, that in our contempt for hopes too high, we may pitch our own too low; that while we scoff at the noble knight, we may content ourselves with the ignoble satisfactions of Sancho Panza: we take so much delight now in what is ‘beautifully human,’ that we may lose sight of the truth that man was made but ‘a little lower than the angels.’

The right balance between self-denial and self-development by self-indulgence is most difficult to keep; everyone must find it so who attempts a careful self-discipline: at one time the ill success of austerity leads us to suspect the advantages of much denial of nature; at another the ruinous consequences of relaxed control seem to warn us against any gratification of natural impulse. And even in abstract thought the difficulty remains; the experimental knowledge of the

great use and lasting advantages of culture, i.e. well developed tastes, and the equally certain knowledge, by faith and experience, that the spiritual man is *not* the perfection of the natural man, but something quite different in kind, as well as in degree — and that therefore the idea of giving the fullest development to the one, in hopes of thus making preparation for the other, is philosophically absurd, — apart from the flat contradiction such an idea offers to the words of Jesus, ‘by whom all things were made.’*

The Giver of life plainly tells us to deny ourselves in this world, as a condition of eternal life; and to try and gain the whole world for the purposes of the natural man, however innocent, must therefore be to lose tremendously. For the words ‘and lose his own soul’ are darkly significant of a loss quite immeasurable by our finite powers.

Now what is true of individual fate may be reasonably supposed to be true with respect to nations, — and therefore it may be that the unexampled prosperity of England is not a blessing without a drawback and loss of spiritual advantage; yes, and loss of that which, as a country, she holds still dearer — liberty; for, if a slave to her own physical well-being, is she less enslaved because her tyrant is respectable, and does not forget to have her churches warmed and tastefully ornamented, as well as her luxurious homes? †

If enslaved by anything, would it not be better to give allegiance to sentiment rather than sensation?

* ‘Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’—MATTHEW xvi. 25.

† ‘Une nation qui ne demande à son gouvernement que le maintien de l’ordre est déjà esclave au fond du cœur; elle est esclave de son bien-être, et l’homme qui doit l’enchaîner peut paraître.’—DE TOCQUEVILLE.

And if swayed by one contagious idea, might not *chivalry*, with all its exaggerations and false honour, prove more wholesome and inspiring than *commodity*, with its petty cares and false, low estimate of good? The contrast between the two is very striking: the chivalric honours of this life are thought absurd, and they are spoken of as a bygone dream; but through all ages past, life was surely never spent with more studious attention to temporal comfort.* And at the same time, the objects we pursue are now so many, the means by which they are attained so rapid, the interests that engage our thoughts so complicated with concerns that seem to admit of no delay, that we forget the worth, the dignity, and the beauty of the present hour, and deal with it hurriedly, only in reference to ulterior designs.

Is it not possible that in our efforts to think of this

* A fact from which Channing drew comfort, and then administered hope in the following remarkable passage:—

‘To turn the tide in our country is a thing out of the question. A nation which is seized by an idea will act it out and exhaust it. The idea of wealth,—of greatness by gain,—of material grandeur,—has possessed our people, and they are certainly working wonders with it. They are pouring a stream of civilization, of a low order, to be sure, over this continent, with marvellous rapidity; and they are intoxicated with success. But, as I say, I have no despair; no idea can possess a people exclusively. Human nature is too vast, various, generous, to be wholly mastered by a low passion. There are many among us struggling against the material chains which bind the community, and every convert to spirituality and true freedom does something to prepare the revolution that *must* come. I say it *must* come. The very violence of an impulse tends to exhaust it. Human nature cannot work one way for ever. Its great end, self-development, is silently going on, even when it seems to contract itself most. New wants unfold themselves by degrees, and the mind never acts with greater energy than from a new spring in an opposite direction to that which it has long followed.’

Channing's *Letters*.

life in relation to the future from which death divides us, we have too much forgotten what it positively *is*, apart from comparison, and all idea of probationary purpose? It is transitory, and yet it is eternity begun;—it is passed through in weakness and danger, but it gives us great powers to employ, and has wonderful safeguards for our protection: it is full of evils and sorrow, and nevertheless brings with it not only an occasional exquisite delight, but an almost continuous stream of lesser enjoyments; it is defiled with sin, and ringing with discords, it is full of disquiet and pain; and yet beauty smiles on every spot of earth, with more or less perfection, and the peace of a pure conscience and the calm of a faithful resignation to God's will can restore harmony to the inward being, and turn physical pains to joy.

Such a state surely deserves a more grateful acceptance than we are wont to give it. And is it not too probable that, beneath our religious indifference to transitory things, a very faulty disregard of present blessings lurks unreprieved?

If this present world was all we expected to enjoy of paradise, we might very often complain of its purgatorial defects; but how often,—bear witness summer dawns, and softly dying days!—how often should we say, 'it is enough—no more beautiful creation can exist!' We should feel, it is true, unalloyed anguish in the sorrows of separation, but we should undoubtedly make more loving use of this earth; we should prize it more reverently, and more carefully adorn its too quickly passing hours, if we thought it the festal gathering place of human beings, and not a mere ante-chamber to another of surpassing happiness and glory.

Indeed, it appears to me that, as regards the *impal-*

pable blessings of earthly life, we are in danger of forgetting that this world where we now are is one of the many rooms in our Father's house, and that though we have not here a mansion in a 'continuing city,' yet we have for the time a marvellously beautiful residence. We have pushed the hackneyed simile of an inn a little too far; so far that we sometimes seem to use it as an inn only, desiring nothing from it but physical ease and refreshment—postponing hope of all other gratification till the time for removing shall come. And it must be observed, that though in the simile the traveller shows great indifference to what sort of accommodation is provided, knowing that it is but for a little time, the traveller in real life, though staying only a day at an hotel, makes a great point of having his provisions good, and his comfort in all kinds secured. So does the traveller through life in our day. Pictures of imagination, lovely views of local hope, and all interest in the traveller who came before, and the travellers who are likely to follow, he can dispense with; for those might, he thinks, distract attention from the itinerary before him; but a good dinner and a comfortable easy chair he insists upon with an urgent will: and when he has eaten the one, and fallen into a lulling doze on the other, will he be thinking much of the object of his journey? Really, I am of opinion that he might have thought of it much more had he been kept awake with the fading pictures, and near prospects, and traditional stories of the wayside inn. And if he thought aright of the value of every minute in which an immortal being possesses, not only the common daily largess of external nature (enough, one would think, were it a new bounty, to enrapture a duller creature than man), but volition for wisely acting, and reason for searching out truth, and a heart for

loving and blessing other lives with love, and power to serve his God; he would not consent to employ them with an eye to the future alone; he might rather feel 'how dreadful (in its *present* amount of privilege) is *this* place; this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' And, so esteeming it, he would feel even this life had a noble and beautiful ideal, which every faculty of the mind, and every needful restraint of the body, should be exercised in preserving with the utmost reverence and delight. And I believe that a mind wakened to this truth would confess that habitual joylessness and neglect of *present* good, from whatever motive allowed, is unwarranted by Scripture, repugned by reason, and in every sense wrong.

It is a desecration of holy ground, and a rude disfigurement of the symmetrical proportions of human nature. For God made 'everything beautiful in his time,' and 'giveth to a man what is good in his sight:' and He has made the imaginative faculty, the various powers of the intellect for art and science, and the humbler ability of being eager and pleased about little concerns, 'which perish in the using' as surely as the bread we eat and the clothes we wear. He — not we ourselves: what, then, can justify us in setting aside these secondary interests as insignificant and unworthy of a Christian's thoughts, while the demands of the body are so regularly attended to? Is it not to act as if we thought ourselves more wise than the Creator; as if we could, by a pious suppression of instinct and burying of talents, improve upon His designs, when He gave to every man his portion of intellect, and taste, and power?

No one does think so; but many, and some of the most devout among us, act as if they did. They act and speak as if it were best to disband all natural faculties

which cannot immediately and evidently serve religion ; and wisest to leave them as aliens ready for an enemy to enlist and oppose, with specious triumph, to the pious exertions of self-crippled minds. This is altogether different from bringing every thought into obedience to Christ ; for suppression and extinction make service impossible.

Surely it is more to His glory ‘in whom all fullness dwells’ that the manifold powers of man’s complex nature should be subservient to Him, than that the half of them should be crushed or mutilated from the fear of any revolt against the commands of a faith which is too weak to believe that Christ is ‘able to subdue all things to himself,’ and that throughout His creation ‘one thing establisheth the good of another.’*

Shall it be in vain that science teaches us that many distinct colours are needed to form the purest white? And shall we for ever hope to improve our spiritual state by negations—by casting out as wholly evil, instead of wisely building in afresh, those elements of human nature which ignorance and sin have brought into confusion and disrepute? I fear we shall, until the *whole* of God’s word is accepted with the same unquestioning docility which has received its most intelligible parts:—more intelligible to man because they speak of single and separate duties;—less expressive of divine purpose, because, being but *parts* of revealed truth, they cannot comprise any intimation of the stupendous whole—that profound harmony of love and wisdom of which this present life is only a small fragment.

We know so little of the future state, to which all

* Eccles. xlii. 25.

doubts appeal, that we cannot affirm what, beyond the great indispensable of fearing God and keeping his commandments, will best prepare us for an after life. We *cannot* know what bearings our present occupations may have upon our future advancement, but 'true fortitude of understanding consists in not suffering what we know to be disturbed by what we do not know,'* and here we know that in a multiplicity of minor interests, pursued with cheerful alacrity, subordinate to the greatest, is the 'life of the spirit,' and therefore I am led to believe that in making it our joy and pride to use this present world gratefully and humanly, without neglect of any human faculty, or contempt of any human interest, we should be doing more towards preparing ourselves for heaven than we can, while the expectation of that unknown heaven disqualifies us for an innocent enjoyment of this well-known beautiful world. I think it possible that a higher value for the ideal things of this world might induce us to spend its realities less ignobly.

'I said ye are gods, and ye are all the children of the most highest,' were the momentous words quoted by the Lord himself: they startle us still; for, with all our pride and self-sufficiency of reason, it suits daily experience better to speak, with Job, of the 'son of man that is a worm;' for modern life has lost its heroes in a multitude of well-to-do respectable men.

Poor Imagination, nearly starved to death by Common Sense, whispers to shivering Enthusiasm, whom it turned out of doors long ago, 'should not a godlike creature find here a happiness far above worldly prosperity? Should not a creature so excellently endowed achieve

* Paley.

better things on the smooth platform of modern civilization, than making a fortune and then spending it respectably? Oh! my old friend, when you and I kept house in olden time, man was not so well clothed, and he knew much less; but he spent happier days, for Hope was a little near-sighted, and Love was blind, and so they willingly stayed at home on earth, and then we were his dearest companions. He cares little for us now; but without us he grows very toilworn and weary: he stoops more and more every day, looking only at the ground he so disdainfully treads: if he would call us back, and cherish us kindly, we would again lend him our wings.'

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