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LONDON : PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET
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THE GAY SCIENCE

BY

E. S. DALLAS

VOL II.

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LONDON

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THE GAY SCIENCE.

CHAPTER X.

ON PLEASURE.

THE conclusion to which we have been driven in the foregoing chapters is that criticism, if it is to be a science, must be the science of pleasure; and in the last chapter of all we came to some understanding of the sense in which pleasure is to be regarded as the aim of art and as the theme of criticism. That view will be confirmed as we pursue our inquiries into the nature of pleasure. In entering upon this inquest, however, I must remind the reader of what he has already been forewarned, that I profess no more than to spy out the land flowing with milk and honey, and to show of the grapes and the pomegranates and the figs of Eschol. It is one thing to view the

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 — land, another to possess it; one thing to point out where alone science is to be found, another to exhibit the science in all its fair proportions. The latter of these tasks I do not attempt, and the aim of the present volumes is accomplished if, in the pages that go before, I have succeeded in demonstrating clearly what ought to be the object and the method of critical science, and if, in those which follow, I can indicate broadly the bearings of pleasure.

What we are to understand by pleasure.

Now, there are many shades and pitches of feeling—as pleasure itself, joy, gladness, glee, gaiety, mirth, bliss, delight, luxury, amusement, hilarity, jollity, ecstasy—to which we give the common designation of pleasure. The word pleasure, although sometimes used in a special sense, is for the most part generic; just as pain is the generic name for the opposite class of sensations. What can we conceive more diverse than the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore and the pleasures of the reveller glorious in his cups? Yet both are called pleasures. The joy of the Lord and what Isaiah calls the joy of wild asses fall under one and the same appellation. The Cyrenaic philosophers of old, with Aristippus at their head, went so far as to say that pleasure is always one and indivisible; that there is no difference between one pleasure and another in kind or in degree. It is not likely that the

common sense of mankind will ever give in to such a theory. But we have no difficulty as to giving one name to a feeling which comes to us in many forms. Pleasure is the most general name for the sense of enjoyment, and happiness is the sum of life's pleasures in combination with its pains.

It is right to begin any analysis of pleasure with this bit of dictionary, because the term is sometimes employed not as generic but as of special application to the lower enjoyments of our nature. Thus, a life of pleasure is commonly understood as a life of sensual gratification; and since some good people have such an alarm of pleasure that they are ever prone to put upon it the worst meaning, and the mere mention of it calls up to their view the spectre of human lust, and all the reproaches that—whether deservedly or not—have been heaped on the followers of Aristippus and Epicurus, it behoves one to explain in the outset the much broader sense of which the term is susceptible, and in which alone it is used throughout these pages. Pleasure cannot be described as either good or bad until we know what it is that gives pleasure; just as love is neither fair nor foul apart from the object of love. If we love what is vile, our love is vile: if we love what is noble, our love is noble. And in the same way we cannot speak of pleasure in the abstract as worthy or unworthy.

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The name of
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Whether we are to praise or to blame it, will depend upon the source from which it is derived. I have already had to point out, and may here repeat, that it is no more immoral for art to aim at pleasure than for science to aim at knowledge. The question of right or wrong depends on the purity of the pleasure, as it does on the modesty of the knowledge. Science may puff up and art may debauch the mind; but this is not because the one gives knowledge and the other pleasure—it is when the knowledge is vain and the pleasure is mean. Be it therefore understood that in the following discussion I speak of pleasure in the widest sense, as including every form of enjoyment, not one in particular.

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sure.

Another caution may not be uncalled-for, namely, as to the amount of definition which, in an inquiry like the present, we have a right to expect. When the question is raised, What is pleasure? a moment's thought will convince us that the thing in itself is indefinable. Analyse it as we may, we very quickly come to something which defies analysis. What can we say more about the sense of pleasure than that it is the sense of pleasure? If you ask me, said Augustine, what is time? I do not know; but I know quite well if you do not ask me. And so of pleasure, we have all felt it—we know it when it comes; but we cannot describe it, save in terms that go on vainly repeating each other.

What then, it may be asked, is the object of an inquiry into the nature of pleasure? I have given the reply in the end of the last chapter. The best reply is a host of other questions. What is life? what is electricity? what is heat? what is motion? and what is meant by a science of things which are not to be defined? An electric spark is an electric spark: we cannot define it, any more than we can define the thrill of pleasure. It is in our power only to define what are the laws and conditions under which the spark is produced, what are its antecedents, and what are its consequences. So of heat, so of life itself, and so of pleasure. We know them not in themselves but in their relations. It is the utmost of our science to trace their evolutions.

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We can only define the laws and conditions under which it is produced.

And now, when we look for a science of pleasure, we cannot fail to remark how little towards it has yet been said or done. Not that we think little or talk little about pleasure. We think and talk about it a great deal. The greater part of mankind live entirely for their pleasure, care for nothing else, think of little else; every word they utter, everything they do, goes straight for pleasure and involves an opinion of it. But we may think and speak much about a thing and yet not think and speak about it in the way of science. Millions of people in England every day talk about the

How little has been done towards a science of pleasure.

Though the subject is scarcely ever out of our thoughts.

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 — weather, tell each other that the day is unsettled, that the wind is in the east, that there is thunder in the air, or that there is need of rain; but it would be absurd to suppose that every old wife who says to her neighbour, "It's a fair day," or every watchman, who cries at the small hours, "A fine starry night," is a helpmate of Fitzroy and Glaisher. Indeed, all the scattered millions of observations on the weather which we hear on every side are to a real science of meteorology but as a drop in the bucket. And so of pleasure; our daily thinking of it and working for it tell nought for science; just as, also, to see and to think of what we see is nothing like what we understand by a science of optics.

The philosophers have examined pleasure from the moral rather than the scientific point of view.

In so far as pleasure has been at all a subject of discussion, it has been chiefly regarded from the moral point of view. People have been inclined to raise the question, not so much what is pleasure? or what are its laws? as what is the good of it? or is it allowable? These questions, and the discussions they raise, have nothing to do with science. Just as the questions, May I look at this or that? is it morally right for me to open my eyes? are of no account in the science of optics; so in a science of pleasure all questions as to the moral right or wrong and good or bad of pleasure-seeking are nothing to the point. And if we put aside these moral and practical discussions, which are all too

numerous, then we come upon the curious fact I have mentioned, that as yet little has been said or done towards a Science of Pleasure. The attempts to fathom the mystery of pleasure are wonderfully few and far between. I am not now, be it observed, complaining that criticism has never yet been duly recognised as the science of pleasure; I am taking note of the prior fact, apart from any thought of criticism, that pleasure has very rarely been the subject of scientific inquiry. It has been the standing bugbear of moralists and pietists, the theme of interminable clangours, and of arguments that wheel in ceaseless circles; and the sad heart of humanity, infidel of joy, vexes and perplexes itself with the eternal question, Is pleasure pleasure? Dryden never wrote more vigorous lines than those which he put into the mouth of Aurungzebe :

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit,
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay:
To-morrow's falsèr than the former day,
Lies worse, and while it says, we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possess.
Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain;
And from the dregs of life think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.
I'm tired with waiting for this chemic gold
Which fools us young and beggars us when old.

Nor is the emperor singular in his complaint:
there is a wide wail that we are ever thirsting

CHAPTER for pleasure, and that the thirst is never slaked.

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And peer
into any
mystery of
human
existence
sooner than
into that of
pleasure.

— With irrepressible curiosity and immeasurable desire, we pursue joy through all its mazes ; and, oftentimes baffled in the search, wearily doubt and deny the object of search. One would suppose that amid so much importunity of reason, the thought of mankind would ever and anon fall back on the attempt to determine what is, and what are the attendant conditions of, this something, this nothing, this phantom called pleasure, which is continually dancing before our eyes and never to be felt within our grasp. Not so ; we attempt the scientific disclosure of any mystery — Knowledge, Being, Cause, Will—sooner than that of pleasure.

Sir William
Hamilton's
history of
opinions
regarding
pleasure.

Whatever may be thought of Sir William Hamilton as a philosopher, no one has ever doubted his trustworthiness as a historian of philosophy. His analysis of pleasure has been impugned by Mr. Mill, but his historical account of what has been done towards a science of pleasure every one will accept with confidence. We, who travel for the most part only in the highways of philosophy, when we find of what small account pleasure is in science, must so wonder at the neglect of it as to begin to doubt the fulness of our own information with regard to previous inquirers. In this case, it is satisfactory to find that he who in modern times has done most to elaborate a science of pleasure, is

also the man who beyond all others, in our day, was acquainted with every by-way and hidden haunt of philosophy, and who has been most careful to gather together, from every the furthest corner, all the traces of speculation as to the nature of pleasure. Sir William has devoted more than thirty pages to the history of the investigation into pleasure, and the cream of his record may be given in a very few words.

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The scientific analysis of pleasure was in ancient far more than in modern philosophy deemed worthy of research. Discussion as to the nature of pleasure occupies a considerable space in the systems of Plato and of Aristotle. It occupies considerable space in the system of no great modern thinker save Sir William Hamilton himself; and his doctrine is but the junction and elaboration of the views put forward by the two philosophers of the ancients. He, indeed, quotes a number of modern philosophers who have given definitions of pleasure, but very few of these have given to it more than a passing word or two; and Sir William Hamilton would have added to the curiosity of his history if he had also ventured to quote those who, when they came to speak of pleasure, never dreamed of defining it, or defined it in terms that mean nothing. Thus Locke never attempts to explain what we are to understand by it. Pleasure is pleasure in his eyes, to be

Summary
statement
of his ac-
count.

And how
far that
account is
defective.

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described in synonyms and circumlocutions, but not to be crumbled into a definition. Sir William Hamilton quotes a short sentence from one of Descartes's letters, in which he casually put forth a sort of definition, that has been much, but needlessly, praised for its depth and its novelty: "All our pleasure is nothing more than the consciousness of some one or other of our perfections." He does not quote the sentence in which Descartes, in his work on the *Passions of the Soul*, proposes, with all the formality of an article headed "Article 91. La Définition de la joie," to lay bare the nature of pleasure, and in which the philosopher slips into synonyms it was useless to write but is not useless to note. "Joy is an agreeable emotion of the soul, wherein consists its enjoyment of some good." In this tautology of the father of modern philosophy we have the sum and substance of nearly all modern speculation on the subject. Pleasure, says Bossuet, is an agreeable feeling according to our nature; pain a disagreeable one contrary to our nature. And so with a hundred other great authorities.

Sir William Hamilton's own speculation on pleasure.

I have one more preliminary remark to make before I ask the reader to launch with me upon the great theme of pleasure. As Sir William Hamilton is the thinker who more than all others in modern times has closely examined into the nature of pleasure, and as his theory,

although by no means perfect, is the most complete that has yet been produced, being, indeed, entitled to the praise which he claims for it, of embracing and containing nearly all previous theories, we should naturally begin this inquiry by a statement of the position in which it was left by him. It may be necessary to correct his definition, it may be possible to advance upon it, but begin with it we must. Just at this moment, however, there is here in London a presumption against any doctrine which Sir William Hamilton could claim as his own. He has been roundly attacked by Mr. Mill. The followers of Mr. Mill have been shouting in the journals that the pretensions of Sir William Hamilton as a philosopher are demolished for ever ; and it is undoubtedly the fact, that until Mr. Mill shall be answered, there is a presumption against the dead giant whom he has assailed. Any one, however, who looks down upon the controversy from a height will see that this presumption is only temporary, and that the leading minds of Europe will always be, as they have always been, on the side espoused by Sir William Hamilton, not on that espoused by Mr. Mill. The side of the latter in philosophy has always hitherto been the losing one. That is no reason why Mr. Mill should not now make it win ; but it is a presumption against him, and the presumption gains in force when we consider that he has nothing to expect

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And his
character
as a philo-
sopher.

His cha-
racter is
assailed by
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from popular favour to compensate for being among philosophers in a very small minority. Still, whatever be the end of the campaign which Mr. Mill has opened, there is no doubt that he has opened it with rare spirit and ability, that he has fought a great and bloody battle in a style which even his adversaries must admire, and that he has achieved for himself and his school this grand result—that whereas hitherto they have been treated with supreme contempt by all the other schools of thought in Europe, their very existence not being recognised, they have now vindicated their right to be heard, and heard they shall be. Accordingly, for the moment, the voice of the living prevails over that of the dead philosopher, and men who ought to know much better indulge in unseemly triumph over the supposed defeat of the greatest thinker that Britain has produced in the present century. Although it would be out of place here to attempt an answer to the elaborate attack of Mr. Mill, yet it may not be improper, while the full answer is withheld, to justify the terms in which I speak of Sir William Hamilton as the highest of all authorities on the subject of pleasure.

And needs
consideration.

The view of
it given by
Mr. Mill.

It must be remembered that while reviewers, on the strength of Mr. Mill's battery of arguments, venture to sneer at Sir William Hamilton as a nobody, and to trample under

foot his philosophical pretensions, Mr. Mill, more CHAPTER
cautious than his disciples, and better acquainted X.
with his antagonist, never ventures on any such
expression. He is careful to assure us that
really and truly his subject "is not Sir W.
Hamilton, but the questions which Sir W.
Hamilton discussed. It is impossible," he
says, "to write on these questions in our own
country and in our time without incessant re-
ference, express or tacit, to his (Sir William's)
treatment of them. On all the subjects on
which he touched he is either one of the most
powerful allies of what I deem a sound philo-
sophy, or, more frequently, by far its most for-
midable antagonist; both because he came the
latest, and wrote with a full knowledge of
the flaws which had been detected in his pre-
decessors, and because he was one of the ablest,
the most clear-sighted, and the most candid.
Whenever any opinion which he deliberately
expressed is contended against, his form of the
opinion and his arguments for it are those which
especially require to be faced and carefully
appreciated." This estimate of Sir William
Hamilton's mode of thinking is no more than
just, but to understand all that it implies we
must refer to a previous passage, and, indeed,
to the whole tenour of Mr. Mill's book. From
the above quotation it will be seen that Mr.
Mill, by his own showing, proposes to attack

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not so much Sir William Hamilton, as that system of thought of which, in his opinion, Hamilton is the most powerful exponent. Now, what is that system of thought? Many readers and reviewers are running away with the idea that it is something peculiar to Hamilton. It is true that Mr. Mill attacks points of doctrine which are peculiar to Hamilton; but that is not his main object; that is but a subsidiary one, adopted for the purpose of rendering his attack (since he has chosen to express himself in the form of attack) as complete as possible. He is careful to tell us in the outset that what he attacks is the established philosophy of Europe, of which Sir William Hamilton is the most formidable soldier; and this point must be thoroughly understood, or we shall fail to understand the position which Mr. Mill takes up, and the meaning of his book. We shall fail also to take a true measure of the success which he has now achieved in assaulting Sir William Hamilton.

How far the attack concerns Sir W. Hamilton's individual reputation.

On the personal question as to the effect of Mr. Mill's attack on Sir William Hamilton's philosophical reputation, I do not now propose to touch, save in the most general terms. The opinion, I have said, has been expressed rather exultingly in some of the critical journals that Sir William Hamilton has been demolished for ever. To enter into that question, however, I

should have to trouble the reader with a controversy of details into which he would not care to follow me. In several details it can be shown that Sir William Hamilton is at fault; but also in several it can be shown that Mr. Mill is wrong, and has either mistaken the opinions of Hamilton or has failed to overturn them.* It is not necessary, however, to enter into details in order to form a fair opinion as to the merits of this controversy. There are three main considerations which ought to be remembered in Sir William Hamilton's behalf, and which will induce all but mere partisans to pause before they determine that to praise the recent performance of Mr. Mill is to imply the defeat and utter rout of his adversary.

The first is, that, according to Mr. Mill's own showing, to demolish Sir William Hamilton is to demolish what is accredited in the chief schools of philosophy throughout Europe. He is selected

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An argu-
ment in
Hamilton's
behalf.]

* "Mr. Mill's method of criticism," says Mr. Mansel, "has reduced the question to a very narrow compass. Either Sir W. Hamilton, instead of being a great philosopher, is the veriest blunderer that ever put pen to paper, or the blunders are Mr. Mill's own. To those who accept the first of these alternatives it must always remain a marvel how Sir W. Hamilton could ever have acquired his

reputation; how he could have been designated by his illustrious opponent, Cousin, as the 'greatest critic of our age,' or described by the learned Brandis as 'almost unparalleled in the profound knowledge of ancient and modern philosophy.' The marvel may perhaps disappear, should it be the case, as we believe it to be, that the second alternative is the true one."

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for attack because he is the leading representative of modern philosophy, and because "whenever an opinion which he deliberately expressed is contended against, his form of the opinion, and his arguments for it, are those which especially require to be faced and carefully appreciated." Therefore, if Hamilton is to fall before the assault of Mr. Mill, what other European philosopher is likely to fare better? and who is to stand? Mr. Mill may have succeeded, but the presumption is against him. It is possible, though not probable, that in the person of Sir William Hamilton he has cut to pieces and ground to powder the European system of philosophy. But if he have succeeded in this object of refuting the established philosophy, we must still remember his own admission, that he has found in Sir William Hamilton "by far his most formidable antagonist."

A second
consideration
in his
behalf.

Another consideration is that philosophers have generally proved themselves to be invincible in attack and powerless in defence. There is no fact in philosophy on which Sir William Hamilton himself was more apt to dwell than this; and, indeed, what was more peculiarly his own in speculation was directed to the proof and illustration of it. Perhaps the statement should be supplemented or balanced by that other of Leibnitz's, that philosophy is generally right in what it asserts, and wrong in what it

denies ; but still, as an effort of reasoning, it holds for the most part that the reasoning of attack is more unanswerable than the reasoning of defence. No man, for example, believed more firmly than Sir William Hamilton in the freedom of the will, and Mr. Mill, indeed, points out that "the doctrine of Free Will was so fundamental with him that it may be regarded as the central idea of his system." But, on the other hand, Sir William Hamilton was never weary of observing that the arguments against the freedom of the will, as likewise those against necessity, are perfectly unanswerable, and he strenuously set himself to show how we may be justified in accepting as a fact what is incapable of proof. No doubt, if the doctrine be pushed to its consequences, it will go far to show the futility of nearly all metaphysical research, and, perhaps, there are not many men in England who would seriously shrink from such a conclusion. Be that as it may, we have here but to note the simple fact that in the attack and defence of any philosophical system we expect the superiority to be always with the attack ; and, therefore, if Sir William Hamilton undergoing attack appears at a disadvantage, if the batteries of the enemy make many a breach in his walls, and if the strong tower in which he intrenched himself seems to be tottering to its fall, it is no more than we should expect—it is

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 no more than the weakness which any other system of philosophy, overwhelmed by a similar cannonade, would display. We have yet to learn whether Mr. Mill's own system of philosophy will stand before one-half the weight of shot that can be directed against it.

A third
 considera-
 tion.

And still a third consideration is at hand. It is that the reputation and the standing of a philosopher are not always to be measured by the amount of positive truth which he has been able to dig out and to establish. There is no greater name in philosophy than that of Plato, but how much of Plato stands? And is the influence of Plato small, is his work of slight importance, because we can refute his dialectics and repudiate his doctrines? Plato must live by the spirit which he infused into men's minds, even if every one of his special doctrines were scattered to the winds. He is a great power in philosophy, although his philosophy is exploded. And with regard to Sir William Hamilton we may pursue a similar line of remark. He has obtained a position among the thinkers of Europe which Mr. Mill, so far from denying, is the foremost to acknowledge. But it is impossible that any thinker should attain such a position without exerting a vast influence which is quite independent of the truth or falsehood of his particular doctrines. Let us suppose that the doctrines are false, still they have a momentum

which is catching, and which has had a powerful effect on Mr. Mill himself. Mr. Mill would be inclined, I imagine, to underrate the force of this consideration, and to estimate a man's worth as a thinker by the amount of positive truth which in the course of his labours he has been able to quarry out. But, in reality, it is difficult to exaggerate the influence of a great thinker's spirit and methods upon the thinking of his time, apart from the results which he himself may have been able to reach. This may be illustrated, if we are allowed to compare such a thinker to Columbus. Columbus had a great spirit and a grand method; but he crossed the Atlantic only to discover an island. It was his follower that discovered the main land, and from his follower it is named America. Obviously, however, it would be unfair to Columbus to estimate his achievement by fixing upon a little spot on the map, and saying "This is his." And in like manner it is unfair to a great thinker to spread out the chart of human knowledge and to say, "Here is one small truth which he discovered—this is the little all which he contributed to human knowledge."

It is not, however, Sir William Hamilton as an individual that Mr. Mill attacks. He begins his book by pointing out that "among the philosophical writers of the present century in these islands no one occupies a higher

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But in truth it is not so much Hamilton as European philosophy that Mill attacks.

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position than Sir William Hamilton." As a thinker, he is "one of the important figures of the age;" and it is his "acknowledged position at the head of the school of philosophy to which he belongs" that has enticed Mr. Mill into the present attack. But it cannot be too often repeated that, by this school of philosophy which Mr. Mill has set himself to destroy, we are not to understand what is special to Sir William Hamilton. In his very first paragraph our author describes as follows the system of Sir William Hamilton:—"It unites to the prestige of independent originality the recommendation of a general harmony with the prevailing tone of thought." And it is because of this harmony,—it is not because of Sir William Hamilton's differences from other thinkers, but because of his union with them, that he is attacked. He belongs to the current of European thought. If we look to fundamentals, there is but one school of philosophy now reigning throughout Europe. We speak of a German school, and a French school, and a Scotch school; but the differences between them, though great in reality, are still greater in appearance, says Mr. Mill. The fundamental doctrines of Hamilton's school "are those of the philosophy which has *everywhere* been in the ascendant since the setting in of the reaction against Locke and Hume, which dates from Reid among ourselves,

What is the
European
philosophy?

and from Kant for the rest of Europe." And it is this, the dominant philosophy of Europe, that Mr. Mill now gallantly challenges. Here, then, is not a mere duel between himself and Sir William Hamilton, in which the reputation of Sir William is alone at stake. Mr. Mill has a nobler ambition; he attacks a system. And that system is not merely the Scotch, it is the European system of philosophy, of which he regards Hamilton as the most illustrious captain. He flings down his gauntlet to Europe, and challenges controversy in the most gallant style. He has a philosophy of his own, and of his father, and of his school, which the leading thinkers of Europe have hitherto agreed to overlook and to treat with a silent contempt, but which he chivalrously vaunts as worthy of our acceptance, and well worthy to displace the established system.

Mr. Mill's philosophy may be described in a very few words. It is a re-assertion, upon revised grounds, of Hume's philosophy. It is well known that the philosophy which has now for nearly a hundred years been current in Europe is a reaction from Hume. This, indeed, is the great fact which gives unity to the thinking of the great schools of Germany, France, and Scotland; they are united in a revolt from the conclusions of Hume. Reid began this revolt in Scotland, and started the Scottish school of philosophy. Kant began this revolt in Germany,

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What is the
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and started the German school of philosophy. Finally, an eclectic school arose in France, to combine the systems of Germany and Scotland, which, indeed, it was not difficult to harmonize. This, then, putting aside minor differences, is the great European system of philosophy which a Goliath has come forth to defy. He proclaims war to the knife; he defies it root and branch. His is no mere partial opposition to be appeased by partial concessions. As the fundamental principle of modern philosophy is a protest against Hume, the essential nature of Mr. Mill's counter-philosophy is a re-assertion of Hume. It is what, in the language of the current philosophy, would be called Nihilism. But one rather objects to such a word, as being too nearly allied to a nickname, though it would be difficult to find any other which can be substituted for it. The great fact to be noticed is that, under whatever general name we choose to describe them, Mr. Mill's chief conclusions are a new rendering of Hume's.*

A re-assertion of Hume's philosophy.

* They are not, however, put forward as such, but as the product of a different school of thinking. In this disguise they may not all at once be recognised as old acquaintances; and a few sentences may be devoted to showing what Mr. Mill's doctrines are, and how he has ar-

rived at them. As Hume's line of ancestry is traced back to Locke, Mr. Mill's line of ancestry recedes to Hobbes. From Locke came the idealists, such as Berkeley; and from their idealism sprung, by natural succession, what is called the Nihilism of Hume. The idealists

Thus then it is not Sir William Hamilton by himself, but Sir William Hamilton the most powerful representative and mouthpiece of the

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said there is no such thing as matter; there is but one substance — mind; all is mind. Then came Hume, and worked their arguments to the disproof of mind also. There is no sub-

stance at all, he said; there is no such substance as we call mind, any more than there is a substance which we call matter. All that we know to exist are ideas and impressions.

David Hume eat a mighty big dinner,
Grew every day fatter and fatter,
And yet the huge hulk of a sinner
Denied there was spirit or matter.

Now, parallel with the line of thinkers who very brilliantly worked their way through idealism to what, for want of a better term, one must continue to call the Nihilism of Hume, there was a more obscure line of thinkers among us, who, starting from materialism, have at last worked their way through Hobbes, Hartley, and James Mill, to the Nihilism of Mr. Stuart Mill. They began by denying the existence of mind, and resolving all the movements of thought into vibrations of matter, which was the one substance they allowed. And now at length they have worked their way to the disproof also of that one substance. They have reached Nihilism—the denial of substance altogether. Mr. Mill says that “matter may be defined a Permanent Possibility of Sensation. If I am asked whether I believe

in matter, I ask whether the questioner accepts this definition of it? If he does, I believe in matter; and so do all Berkeleyans.” But what if the questioner does not accept his definition? The common belief of mankind is that there are things and substances which produce in us sensations, and to these things and substances we give the general name of matter. Mr. Mill says, in effect, “No, you cannot prove the existence of these things and substances which you call matter,—all you can prove is your belief in the Permanent Possibilities of Sensation.” Or, to quote his exact words:—“The belief in such permanent possibilities seems to me to include all that is essential or characteristic in the belief in substance. I believe that Calcutta exists, though I do not perceive it, and that it would

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Sir William
Hamilton
is thus
according to
Mill the re-
presentative
of the esta-
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philosophy.

prevailing system of thought, that Mr. Mill attacks. He attacks Sir William Hamilton, but much more, through him, he attacks the thinking of the age. He, John Stuart Mill, is the most accomplished representative of an isolated class of thinkers, beginning with Hobbes and coming down to our own day through Hartley and James Mill, who have never had much influence in the world at large, but have maintained a precarious existence in England. They cannot be said to have flourished, but they have held their own with a certain rude vigour, like the gipsies who live among us, yet are not of us, and have, with all their fortune-telling, no influence on our modes of thinking. Mr. Stuart Mill, the wisest and broadest thinker of this school, has latterly, by reason of his political philosophy and his elucidations of the logic of science, been acquiring an influence which the school has never before enjoyed, and which its conception of human nature will long keep it from enjoying. Hobbes was a man of genius, but his view of the human mind, and the cognate views of those

still exist, if every percipient inhabitant was suddenly to leave the place or be struck dead. But when I analyse the belief, all I find in it is that, were these events to take place, the Permanent Possibility of Sensation,

which I call Calcutta, would still remain." Thus Westminster, which Mr. Mill represents in Parliament, is, in his phraseology, but "the Permanent Possibility of Sensation, which I call Westminster."

truly Hobbesian thinkers, David Hartley and James Mill, have never been of much account in the world, and have never become linked in the procession of European thought.

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Now, when Mr. Stuart Mill, the great champion of this isolated knot of thinkers, stands forward and, with much ability, challenges Sir William Hamilton, partly for himself, but chiefly as the most able representative of European thought and his most formidable foe, the presumption is that the thinking of Europe is in the main right, and that of the small Hobbesian sect wrong; also that Sir William Hamilton, whom Mr. Mill regards as the most formidable figure in the great array of European thinkers, is in the main right, and that Mr. Mill, the doughtiest hero of that scheme of philosophy which Sir William Hamilton and men of his school too contemptuously stigmatise as dirt-philosophy, is in the main wrong. For the moment, by dint of Mr. Mill's brilliant powers, and until he is fairly answered, the presumption is turned the other way; but no one who is tolerably well acquainted with the great currents of European thought can have a doubt as to the side that will be ultimately victorious.

Hamilton's
position in
relation to
Mill.

I put forward these statements not as a sufficient reply to Mr. Mill's arguments, but as a sufficient reply to those who, under the shield of Mr. Mill, have begun too soon to deride Sir

And the
conclusion
is that we
have no
right to dis-
regard his
authority

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when he
comes to
treat of
pleasure.

William Hamilton, as if, because he is silent in death, and cannot answer for himself, he were fallen for ever. There are weak places in his philosophy; it would be strange if there were not; and Mr. Mill has the credit of hitting him in the joints of his armour. In particular, there is a defect in his theory of pleasure, and Mr. Mill has done good service in helping on the discussion; but his theory, so far as it goes, is sound, and must be the starting-point of all future speculation on the subject. To that theory we must now turn, and I hope that the reader will be prepared to regard it without prejudice.

Hamilton's
definition of
pleasure,
the basis of
the follow-
ing chap-
ters.

Sir William Hamilton's definition is as follows: "Pleasure is a reflex of the spontaneous and unimpeded exertion of a power of whose energy we are conscious: Pain a reflex of the overstrained or repressed exertion of such a power." In another passage he gives the same definition in other words: "Pleasure is nothing but the concomitant or reflex of the unforced and unimpeded energy of a faculty or habit, the degree of pleasure being always in proportion to the degree of such energy." On the definition thus variously worded, he descants at great length, showing how it embodies all that is important in the conclusions of previous inquirers, and how it applies to the many forms of pleasure. Its chief points which ought to be

Its chief
points.

seized are these:—First of all, that pleasure is evolved from energy; secondly, that it is not mere energy, but the reflex or concomitant of energy; thirdly, that this energy must be perfect in strain and in all its relations harmonious; lastly, that we must be conscious of it. On all these points, except the last, which he quietly takes for granted, he has much to say; but the point on which he dwells most is the main one—the relation of pleasure to exertion.

Hamilton's doctrine, however, is incomplete, and especially in that portion of it which touches on the relation between pleasure and consciousness. It needs both to be explained and to be carried further. I propose to work out the explanation and further development of it under three heads. For, in truth, there are three states or stages of pleasure which, although they shade into one another, and must ultimately be classed together, yet are to be treated as distinct and apart. First of all, we have to consider the pleasure which is evolved in the midst of pain; and it is here chiefly that we have to consider pleasure as involving energy. Next in order, we are to consider the pleasure which is unmixed with pain, and is in full view of consciousness; and here we are impressed less with the energy upon which the pleasure is based than with its harmony. Lastly, we

CHAPTER
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the defini-
tion.Division of
the inquiry.

CHAPTER X. come upon the wonderful paradox, which Sir
— William Hamilton has totally ignored, of bliss
unconscious, the trance and pleasance of the
hidden life to which the poet referred when he
says—

In that high hour
Of visitation from the living God
Thought was not ; in enjoyment it expired.



MIXED PLEASURE.





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MIXED PLEASURE.

THE first thing which must strike any one who will look into his pleasure is the difficulty of separating it from the sense of pain. It is attended with pain; it easily turns to pain; and we have constantly to ask ourselves—is not this pleasure a pain? is not this pain a pleasure? Says Keble :

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The difficulty of separating pain from pleasure.

There is an awe in mortals' joy :
A deep mysterious fear
Half of the heart will still employ,
As if we drew too near
To Eden's portal, and those fires
That bicker round in wavy spires,
Forbidding to our frail desires
What cost us once so dear.

That no doubt is the song of a divine, who in connection with such a topic naturally has in his thoughts the fall of our first parents, and the

Theological
statement
of the fact.

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loss of Paradise, never more in this life to be regained; but the fact itself, the singular intimacy and union of pain with pleasure, we all acknowledge. There are tears and pangs of joy; there is laughter of grief and luxury of woe; and as we look upon such contradictions we are lost in wonder of a mystery that seems to pass understanding; we appear to be on the verge of unreason; we doubt whether we are dealing with realities at all; we are half afraid to speak what we think, and the language of prose is too rough, too poor, to tell of the delicacy, the complexity, and the changeableness of a feeling that is, and is not, and is again, swifter than the tints of a bubble—swifter than the tints of a coryphene that dies.

And the mystery that belongs to it.

The earliest well-wrought theory of pleasure that it is an escape from pain.

How the doctrine was expounded by Kant.

This *couleur changeante* which we know as pleasure, but which is shot with pain, suggested the earliest well-wrought theory of pleasure, namely, the Platonic. The theory of Plato, starting from that of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics, is that pleasure is nothing of itself, but only a momentary escape from pain, or a passage from one pain to another. In modern times this view has been maintained independently by Kant, whose exposition of the doctrine will be more intelligible now-a-days than that of the ancient philosopher. "Pleasure is always a consequent of pain," says Kant, in Sir William Hamilton's translation. "When we cast our eyes on the

progress of things, we discover in ourselves a ceaseless tendency to escape from our present state. To this we are compelled by a physical stimulus, which sets animals and man as an animal into activity. But in the intellectual nature of man there is also a stimulus which operates to the same end. In thought, man is always dissatisfied with the actual; he is ever looking forward from the present to the future; he is incessantly in a state of transition from one state to another, and is unable to continue in the same. What is it that thus constrains us to be always passing from one state to another, but pain?

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“And that it is not a pleasure which entices us to this, but a kind of discontent with present suffering, is shown by the fact that we are always seeking for some object of pleasure, without knowing what that object is, merely as an aid against the disquiet—against the complement of petty pains, which for the moment irritate and annoy us. It is thus apparent that man is urged on by a necessity of his nature to go out of the present as a state of pain, in order to find in the future one less irksome. Man thus finds himself in a never-ceasing pain; and this is the spur for the activity of human nature. Our lot is so cast that there is nothing enduring for us but pains; some indeed have less, others more, but all at all times have their share; and our

Man never
is but
always to
be blest.

And lives
in a never-
ceasing pain.

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enjoyments at best are only slight alleviations of pain. Pleasure is nothing positive; it is only a liberation of pain, and therefore only something negative. Hence it follows, that we never begin with pleasure but always with pain; for while pleasure is only an emancipation from pain, it cannot precede that of which it is only a negation. Moreover, pleasure cannot endure in an unbroken continuity, but must be associated with pain, in order to be always suddenly breaking through this pain—in order to realise itself. Pain, on the contrary, may subsist without interruption in one pain, and be only removed through a gradual remission; in this case we have no consciousness of pleasure. It is the sudden, the instantaneous removal of the pain which determines all that we can call a veritable pleasure. We find ourselves constantly immersed, as it were, in an ocean of nameless pains, which we style disquietude or desires, and the greater the vigour of life an individual is endowed with, the more keenly is he sensible to the pain. Without being in a state of determinate corporeal suffering, the mind is harassed by a multitude of obscure uneasinesses, and it acts, without being compelled to act, for the mere sake of changing its condition. Thus men run from solitude to society, and from society to solitude, without having much preference for either, in order merely, by the change of impressions, to obtain

Pain may
subsist
without
pleasure,
but pleasure
cannot
without
pain.

a suspension of their pain. It is from this cause that so many have become tired of their existence, and the greater number of such melancholic subjects have been urged to the act of suicide in consequence of the continual goading of pain—of pain from which they found no other means of escape.

“It is certainly the intention of Providence that, by the alternation of pain, we should be urged on to activity. No one can find pleasure in the continual enjoyment of delights: these soon pall upon us—pall upon us in fact the sooner the more intense was their enjoyment. There is no permanent pleasure to be reaped except in labour alone. The pleasure of toil consists in a reaction against the pain to which we should be a victim did we not exert a force to resist it. Labour is irksome, labour has its annoyances, but these are fewer than those we should experience were we without labour. As man, therefore, must seek his recreation in toil itself, his life is at best one of vexation and sorrow; and as all his means of dissipation afford no alleviation, he is left always in a state of disquietude, which incessantly urges him to escape from the state in which he actually is.

“Men think it ungrateful to the Creator to say that it is the design of Providence to keep us in a state of constant pain; but this is a wise provision in order to urge human nature on to

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The object
of the
Creator in
such an
arrange-
ment.

And it is
not un-
grateful to
say that He
keeps us in
pain by
design.

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exertion. Were our joys permanent, we should never leave the state in which we are—we should never undertake aught new. That life we may call happy which is furnished with all the means by which pain can be overcome; we have in fact no other conception of human happiness. Contentment is where a man thinks of continuing in the state in which he is and renounces all means of pleasure; but this disposition we find in no man."

Here in all the cold blood of philosophy and in all soberness and plainness of speech is a melancholy tale, such as we expect to find only in the exaggerations of poets :

Our sweet is mixt with bitter gall,
Our pleasure is but pain,
Our joys not last the looking on,
Our sorrows aye remain.

The doctrine is true, but inadequate.

And there is no doubt that it contains a true though inadequate view of pleasure. What is false about it is the assumption (in support of which, however, a goodly list of authorities might be quoted—Montaigne one of the most important) that pleasure is nothing positive—is only a negation. On the other hand, it is true that much of our pleasure consists in an escape from pain; that much of it is a mere change of pain; and that much again lies in the endurance and conquest of pain.

The great point to be

In the analysis of all this pleasure derived from

pain, the great point to be noticed is that the pleasure comes of change—transition—action. Pleasure, said the Cyrenaics—pleasure, said Plato—pleasure, said Kant, is a state not of being, but of becoming. Pleasure, said Aristotle—pleasure, says Sir William Hamilton, is an energy, or the obligato accompaniment of energy. This perhaps is not telling us much, since all life is conceived as energy and as becoming. Neither does it help us much to a knowledge of heat to have discovered that it is a mode of motion; but it is a step to knowledge that may be more ample hereafter. And so we advance a step towards the science of pleasure in ascertaining that the first condition of it is a rush into activity. So sure is this rush into movement of producing pleasure that it succeeds even if it be but a rush through a succession of pains and hardships. This is the meaning of what is called a fast life. We exclaim against the several moments of such a life, and see neither dignity nor pleasure in them. It is a rapid round of hurts and famishing desires; but its very rapidity kindles a pleasure which is not to be denied because it may be despised. And so likewise in lives of peril and wild adventure; the several moments are full of toil and trouble, edges of wounds and company of death, but the united sum is the joy of battle and the ecstasy of motion. He who scorns delights and lives laborious days finds in

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observed is that action is the prime law of pleasure.

Significance of this fact as to the law of energy.

CHAPTER XI. the agony which he courts but another form of
 ——— delight. The condition of his delight, however,
 is always action :

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,
 To all the sensual world proclaim,
 One crowded hour of glorious life
 Is worth an age without a name.

Many poems have been written on various kinds of pleasure—the pleasures of Memory, of Hope, of Imagination, and so forth. Who would expect to find one written on those of Vicissitude? But that is the very subject chosen by Gray for a poem which through one of its stanzas has become celebrated. It is a poem that involves in it the Cyrenaic definition of pleasure as change; and I am now reminded of it because the stanza which has become most famous (imitating, by the way, some verses of the French poet, Gresset, which have become equally famous) is a happy description of the simplest form of pleasure derived from pain—pleasure produced by the mere ebb of pain :

Vicissitude
 but another
 name for
 energy.

See the wretch, that long has tost
 On the thorny bed of pain,
 At length repair his vigour lost,
 And breathe and walk again :
 The meanest floweret of the vale,
 The simplest note that swells the gale,
 The common sun, the air, the skies,
 To him are opening paradise.

That plea-
 sure is
 heightened

And as there is pleasure in the mere retreat
 and negation of pain, so also, when the pleasure

is more positive, is it heightened by contrast with pain. "We see in needleworks and embroideries," says Bacon, "it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome ground : judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart by the pleasure of the eye." The most dazzling light which a painter can produce on his canvas is not the result of the most dazzling colour. A comparatively dull tint, if duly surrounded and contrasted with darker hues will make a brighter blaze in a picture than it is possible to get from a lavish diffusion of the purest whites, and yellows the most radiant.

So far, the derivation of pleasure from pain, whether it be produced by the stoppage of ache or enhanced by its proximity, is a fact of daily occurrence and observation. We are less acquainted with an equally certain fact that pain is oftentimes destroyed in the agitation which attends it. It is notorious, that small ills are worse to bear than great ones. The great ones produce an agitation which is a source at times of positive pleasure. Says Nestor, in the play :

The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
Than by the tiger.

Thus, again, wounds are not felt in the shock of battle, and Livingstone, the African mis-

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by proximity to
pain.

How pleasure is produced in the agitation of pain.

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death.The pleasure of
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violence of
death.

tionary, assures us that when he was being crunched in the jaws of a lion he had no pain. The lion shook him as a terrier does a rat, and broke his bones; but the shake brought on a sort of dreaminess in which there was no sense of pain nor of terror, though the victim remained fully conscious of all that was happening. Thereupon Livingstone speculates a little on the painlessness of death that comes to animals by violence. Sir Benjamin Brodie tells the story of a fox which goes to corroborate Livingstone's idea. The fox was being pursued by the hounds and evidently was near his end, when a rabbit crossed his path. His own trouble was so little felt amid the agitation of the chase, that, forgetting his danger, Reynard turned aside to catch the rabbit, and he was immediately afterwards seized by the hounds with the rabbit in his mouth. Livingstone, however, might have made his speculation more general. It is a well-ascertained fact that some modes of violent death are not only painless but happy. Sir Benjamin Brodie gives us to understand that hanging and drowning are not unpleasant. Men have been known to hang themselves temporarily for the enjoyment of it; and, absorbed in this dangerous amusement, have been so unfortunate as to kill themselves outright. People who have been recovered from drowning declare that they have been in heaven, and lament their restoration to

life as a hardship. All violent deaths are not thus painless; neither is the absence of pain in every case a pleasure; but examples such as these of violence quenching the torment we expect it to produce, and even turning it to the opposite sensation, illustrate to some extent the effect of any agitation in yielding pleasure, and may prepare us to find in mere pain the gleams of pleasure.

See the faveer, as he swings on his iron,
 See the thin hermit that starves in the wild;
 Think ye no pleasures the penance environ,
 And hope the sole bliss by which pain is beguiled?
 No! in the kingdoms those spirits are reaching,
 Vain are our words the emotions to tell;
 Vain the distinctions our senses are teaching,
 For pain has its heaven and pleasure its hell.

The pleasure
 of
 martyrdom.

“Vain are our words,” says Lord Houghton, in these vigorous lines;* but despite the contra-

* Lady Georgiana Fullerton has in one of her novels, *Too Strange not to be True*, expressed a similar thought. She makes Madame de Moldau say, “I wonder if suffering softens or hardens the heart.” Colonel D’Auban replies, “I suppose that, like the heat of the sun in different substances, it hardens some and softens others. But the more I live, the more clearly I see how difficult it is to talk of suffering and happiness without saying what sounds like nonsense.” M. de Moldau: “I do not understand you.” Colonel D’Auban:

“What I mean is this; that there is very little happiness or suffering irrespective of the temper of the mind or the physical constitution of individuals. I have seen so many instances of persons miserable in the possession of what would be generally considered as happiness, and others so happy in the midst of acknowledged evils—such as sickness, want, and neglect—that my ideas have quite changed since I thought prosperity and happiness, and adversity and unhappiness, were synonymous terms.”

CHAPTER XI. dictions of language, the fact holds good that there are bitter thrills of joy and happy throes of pain in all experience beneath the moon.

A change of pain is pleasurable.

It is but a part of the same law that a change of pain may be a source of pleasure. A new trouble is not always an increase of trouble: it may be welcome as a distraction and diversion from the old. Animals in their hunger have been known to eat themselves—even animals like the hare, which are not carnivorous, and which thus do a double violence to their nature, first in eating flesh at all, next in eating their own flesh. And men so constantly seek for pleasure, through the encounter of some pain, that a considerable number of critics have determined to define the pleasure which art yields as nothing else than the pleasure of surmounting difficulty, or of seeing it surmounted. It is, of course, impossible to maintain this theory, the logical result of which would be that the greatest artists known to fame are Cornelius Ketel, who painted with the brush between his toes, and Miss Biffin, who painted by means of her mouth.

And we long for pain in the midst of pleasure.

But it is worthy of note as illustrating some of the modes in which from pain we look for pleasure. Nay, in the height of our joys we sometimes count pain a relief, would fain acidulate the sweetness of our lives, ruffle their calm current with storm, and soften their sunshine

with shadow. Massinger, in the *Virgin Martyr*, CHAPTER XI. makes Diocletian cry out to the gods in the excess of his happiness :

Queen of Fate!
Imperious Fortune! mix some light disaster
With my so many joys, to season them
And give them sweeter relish. I'm girt round
With true felicity.

And it is excessively difficult to describe the state of mind which is thus produced. Lord Houghton speaks of the vanity of our words when we attempt to describe it; and Lady Georgiana Fullerton of the nonsense we seem to be uttering. It is even so. For we know not how to describe pleasure and pain, except as opposites one of the other; and yet we find ourselves on occasion dismissing our joys as a torment, and reaching to pain as a relief. "For pain has its heaven, and pleasure its hell."

Perhaps the most familiar form of oxymel or bitter-sweet is that which is known to us as the luxury of grief. We find that

Men who wear grief long
Will get to wear it as a hat, aside,
With a flower stuck in it.

The most familiar form of pleasant pain—the luxury of grief.

One of our novelists has recently pointed out that, whereas it is recorded of Henry Beauclerc that after the death of his only son he was never again seen to smile, and so he gets the credit of inconsolable affection, it is also recorded of him,

CHAPTER XI. — and it should be remembered, that he died of a surfeit of lampreys. The human heart is very tough; it stands an immense amount of breakage; and often, when we are most dismal in our lamentations, we are slyly taking comfort in some dainty dish of lampreys. Not only is this the case when our grief is of long standing and we have become used to it, but even in the earlier stages of an overwhelming sorrow, when Rachel refuses to be comforted, there are subtle under-currents of pleasure, which we are loth to acknowledge—which in the first access of grief indeed we are utterly unable to acknowledge, as if they were an injury to the dead, but which are not on that account the less real.

How the heart takes a sly comfort.

Mon deuil me plait et doit toujours me plaire ;
Il me tient lieu de celui que je pleurs.

On the under-currents of pleasure in even acute sorrow.

More than any other passion, the sorrow of bereavement finds an according beat in every breast, and is never willingly criticised. To study the chemistry of tears may, to some, seem as heartless as to botanise upon a mother's grave. What eye has not been dimmed with tears? what heart has not been wrung with anguish? who but must feel for those who in the dark valley have lost the joy of their lives, and are down upon their faces, choking with grief? But if one cannot quite feel, with the Friar, that "nature's tears are reason's merriment,"

one may be permitted to feel that sometimes they are reason's gazing-stock. For, even when this grief is most certain, and most entitled to our sympathy, there is in it a cross-light which is worthy of note. Those who are torn with sorrow, will not, I have said, hear of such a thing, because it seems to be robbing the departed of their tribute, and pain that is alloyed with any pleasure seems to lose its reality. Nevertheless, there is in woe a luxury which induces us to feed it until sometimes it becomes needlessly and foolishly inflated. It is not that people shed crocodile tears; but in the indulgence of a genuine sorrow they find such a relief, that desiring to have more of this delicious balm, and to yield in greater abundance the sweet incense of their sighs, they nurse their grief, and force it into an exaggerated show. They have all the longing of the prophet, who cried, "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" and, without knowing it, they really pump their tears.

Nor does the luxury of sorrow only err in leading to such insincerity: it also ends in conceit. When the first paroxysm of our grief is past, we are pleased with ourselves for being capable of such fine feeling. It is the noblest burst of emotion which many of us have in

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the whole course of our lives. Hard in our manners, and worldly in our tastes, we are astonished to find so much of romance and sentiment left in our hearts, which we imagined had become cold as the winter snow, and dry as the summer dust! We are vain of our exceeding passion, and grow self-righteous over it, fancying that nobody has any heart but ourselves; that ours is the true sorrow; and that the common-sense of those who do not let unavailing sentiment lead their judgment into captivity, is a sign of cold-blooded indifference. A great part of the querulousness and petulance of those who are plunged in affliction is due to a vanity of this sort, though they will not confess it. Nothing is more mortifying, more irritating, or more exacting, than vanity. It is wonderful to see how often and how much a mourner is consoled when he is told that his sorrow is appreciated—that his grief is observed—that his tenderness is understood. It is a comfort to be thus flattered. It is satisfactory to know that our lamentations have reached the due level, and that in presence of the most dread mystery and the most cruel deprivation which mortal man can encounter, we have been equal to the occasion, have faced its terrors, and have fairly wrestled with them.

The pride of
tears.

I am reminded of a favourite stage-trick, which is not a trick at all, but a true touch of

nature. An actor has to exhibit great distress. Using the appropriate language, he works his features a little till he gets a tear into his eye, or imagines that one is there. He then takes out his handkerchief and wipes his wet cheek—or if his weeping should not be copious enough for such a performance, he lifts his middle finger, brushes with it the corner of his eye, and then looks at the slight moisture on the tip of his finger with a look of pleased astonishment; “A tear!” he says, “I thought that tears had left me for ever.” Every tear-drop is a pearl of price to the mourner’s vanity. He is in the humour to chuckle over it as a hen chuckles over every egg she lays. If he is vain, he of course wishes these pearls to be admired by others besides himself. If he is proud, he goes to weep in solitude, but he takes with him, as it were, a bottle in which to cherish his tears. It may be, even, that prostrate before the most high God, the language of his heart is, “Put thou my tears into thy bottle—are they not in thy book?” Vanity of vanities! alas for the vanity of grief, and alas for the vanity of the tears which we shed for the vanity of life.

It is time to bring to a point these rambling illustrations of the pleasure of pain. I have hurriedly touched on most of the forms of pleasure generated in pain—as pleasure from

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Summary
of the fore-
going illus-
trations.

CHAPTER XI. the remission of pain, pleasure from change of pain, pleasure from combination with pain, pleasure from the endurance and conquest of pain. And now, in bringing these observations to a close, there are two points in particular which demand attention.

The great fact to which they bear witness as to the pleasure of activity.

The first is, what all along, under the present head, I have been insisting on, that here in connection with pain we have to note chiefly the active nature of pleasure. It emerges from action of some sort—agitation—motion—transition—change—novelty. We conceive of it as a chase—a pursuit. “Things won are done,” says Cressida in the play; “joy’s soul lies in the doing.” In the same sense another poet of our own day, Mr. Browning, dwells on the transitory character of enjoyment :

“Heigho!” yawned one day king Francis,
 “Distance all value enhances!
 When a man’s busy, why, leisure
 Strikes him as wonderful pleasure.
 Faith and at leisure once is he?
 Straightway he wants to be busy.
 Here we’ve got peace; and aghast I’m
 Caught thinking war the true pastime.”

We sigh for change, and find our pleasure only there. Ever we rush off on some new quest. Thus Keats :

Ever let the fancy roam!
 Pleasure never is at home:
 At a touch sweet pleasure melteth,
 Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;

Then let winged fancy wander,
 Though the thought still spread beyond her.

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The pleasure is in the chase. The French poet whom I quoted a few pages back, states with unusual distinctness the cause why sorrow is a pleasure. It is the very same cause as we find suggested in the colloquy between King Philip and Lady Constance. Says Philip :

Philip. You are as fond of grief as of your child.

Constance. Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
 Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me ;
 Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
 Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
 Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form :
 Then have I reason to be fond of grief.

The flat prose of all which is that it fills and occupies the mind—it sets the mind going.

The other point on which I desire to make a few remarks is foreign to the present inquiry, but bears on the use to which it may hereafter be turned. I have had more than once to inform the reader that, in the chapters which I now lay before him, I profess no more than to elucidate first principles ; that these principles are worthy of regard, even if we cannot see their precise bearing on the practical difficulties of criticism ; and that all question as to their special applications must for the present be reserved. Yet it may not be amiss to break so far through this reserve as to point out that the form of pleasure we have just now been peering into is that

Critical
 application
 of this law
 of pleasure.

CHAPTER XI. which rules in dramatic art, and provides its canon. It would, of course, be out of place here, to enter into details; and I need point out only so much of the fact as may give the reader of critical tastes a feeling that this inquiry about pleasure, its painfulness and its activity, into which I have dragged him, is not altogether aimless.

The painfulness of the pleasure produced by the drama.

Dramatic art has many forms, but is best known to us under two leading types, which may fairly be taken to represent every species of it—Tragedy and Comedy. No one will have a doubt about the fact that the pleasure of tragedy is evolved from pain; but there may be some hesitation as to the acceptance of this other fact, that the pleasure of comedy is also a development of painfulness. My thesis, however, is that all dramatic art, including comedy as well as tragedy, deals in pleasure struck from pain.

On tragic pleasure.

I have said that there is no doubt as to the painfulness of tragic pleasure; but yet this point may deserve some little further notice, not to make it clearer, but, in Leibnitzian phrase, to make it more distinct.* We are told that the

* The difference between clear and distinct knowledge has been determined by Leibnitz. We have a clear knowledge of a face, for example, if we know enough

of it to distinguish it from other faces. We have a distinct knowledge of it if we are acquainted with its constituent features,—can tell, say, the colour of the

varying passions of life, ambition and jealousy, love, hate and anger, with which, when we see them imitated in the drama, we heartily sympathize—all in tragedy lead up to the two grand emotions of pity and terror. This is a statement as old as Aristotle, which nobody has ever questioned. But though nobody questions it, one may doubt whether at first sight it satisfies every mind, or seems to rest on a rigid analysis. Why are terror and pity selected as, above all others, the tragic emotions? How do we get at these two and shut out the rest? I do not remember to have seen this point explained, and therefore venture on the following statement.

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There is some disparity between the words pity and terror, which goes to veil the true significance in tragedy of the things they stand for. Thus pity is the emotion of a spectator at the grief which he sees in another; it is sympathy with grief. Terror, on the other hand, stands equally for terror and sympathy with terror. We have no special term for sympathy with terror, as we have for sympathy

And why the tragic passions are summarised under the names of pity and terror.

eyes. Such knowledge is often clear, and yet not distinct. The best portrait of Lord Melbourne has been painted by Sir Edwin Landseer, who is very much greater as a painter of men than even of animals. Everybody

who is able to judge recognises the wonderful likeness. "Yet none of you seems to have discovered," says Sir Edwin, "that I have painted the eyes the wrong colour."

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with grief. Therefore, for the sake of exactness, and that the words may go perfectly in pairs, let us fall back on a circumlocution. It will then appear that, according to Aristotle's famous definition, the object of tragedy is to produce the pleasure of sympathy with grief, and of sympathy with terror. And then also we are in a position to see that this analysis of painful emotion is exhaustive, and to present the definition of tragedy as follows. It is the object of tragedy to excite pleasure through a discipline of pain. But pain is either of the known or of the unknown. As of the known it awakens grief; as of the unknown, fear. The one is a painful feeling, based on experience; the other a painful feeling born of anticipation. And therefore all the painfulness of the passions with which tragedy has to do must work up either to pity or to terror—that is, to sympathy either with the known or with the unknown of pain.

On the
painfulness
of comedy.

And now for a word or two on the painfulness of comedy. We are little in the habit of associating laughter in our minds with the idea of pain; and in Aristotle's definition of the ridiculous, the contemplation of pain is expressly denied. On the other hand, it is impossible that laughter should be an unmixed pleasure, seeing that it arises from some aspect of imperfection and discordance; and we may set against the

opinion of Aristotle that of Plato, who expressly defines the pleasure of comedy as mingled with pain. The weight of authority no less than of argument leans to the same side. Malignity is the germ of comedy, says Marmontel. "La malignité, naturelle aux hommes, est le principe de la comédie." Nearly all the French critics take the same view. "La comédie," says M. St. Marc Girardin, one of the latest, "plait à la malignité de l'homme." That is a hard statement, and we need not accept it in its entirety; but we may see in it a manner of recognising the painfulness of comedy. Sir Henry Wotton reminds us that the least touch of a pencil will translate a laughing into a crying face, and Shelley says truly that—

We look before and after
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught.

But the most lively indications of the painfulness of laughter are given by Sir Philip Sidney: "Our comedians," he says, "think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong; for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter; but well may one thing breed both together. Nay, in themselves they have as it were a kind of contrariety; for delight we scarcely do but in things that

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by Sir
Philip
Sidney.

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have a conveniency to ourselves or to the general nature. Laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature; delight hath a joy in it either permanent or present; laughter hath only a scornful tickling. For example: we are ravished with delight to see a fair woman, and yet are far from being moved to laughter; we laugh at deformed creatures, wherein certainly we cannot delight; we delight in good chances, we laugh at mischances; we delight to hear the happiness of our friends and country, at which he were worthy to be laughed at that would laugh; we shall, contrarily, sometimes laugh to find a matter quite mistaken, and go down the hill against the bias, in the mouth of some such men as for the respect of them one shall be heartily sorry he cannot choose but laugh, and so is rather pained than delighted with laughter. Yet deny I not but that they may go well together; for as in Alexander's picture well set out we delight without laughter, and in twenty mad antics we laugh without delight; so in Hercules, painted with his great beard and furious countenance, in a woman's attire, spinning at Omphale's commandment, it breeds both delight and laughter; for the representing of so strange a power in love procures delight and the scornfulness of the action stirreth laughter." And not only in the laughter of comedy is there pain: Thalia can

also weep as well as Melpomene. Not hers to weep for beauty in distress, for goodness foiled and for greatness vanquished ; but she has tears and lamentations of another kind for vice and folly, for weakness and disease. She has the fierce arrows of Thersites, and the bitterness of Diogenes ; she has the lash of Aristophanes and the rage of Juvenal.

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Next, let us note here as to the tickling of comedy, a fact parallel to that which it was necessary to indicate as to the pleasant pain of tragedy. I recalled the fact that tragic emotion has always been regarded as of two kinds, the pitiable and the terrible, and I showed how these two terms may be taken to cover the whole area of pain, the known and the unknown. In the region of the comic the same division holds. The common division of the sense of the ridiculous into wit and humour is strictly scientific, and goes upon precisely the same principle as that which separates pity from terror.

How the comic sense is divided into wit and humour.

Wit, as its very name may prove, is of the known and definite ; humour is of the unknown and indefinable. Wit is the unexpected exhibition of some clearly defined contrast or disproportion ; humour is the unexpected indication of a vague discordance, in which the sense or the perception of ignorance is prominent. Plato's definition of the ridiculous is inadequate, and

And how this division of the comic emotion corresponds with the division of tragic emotion into pity and terror.

CHAPTER XI. most people pass it by as if to a true theory of the comic it bore the same infinitesimal relation as a little plot of ground to the whole earth ; but, I take it, that what he wanted to express in his definition is nothing less than a hemisphere of the comic. He describes the ridiculous as a discovery of ignorance, and then he enumerates the forms of this ignorance. But his enumeration is so poor as to excite our wonder at his trifling, and to make us overlook the merit of the general statement, which he has failed to work out by sufficient examples. Notwithstanding its onesidedness and deficiency, however, his general statement stands and will stand. It applies to one of the hemispheres of the comic. As wit is the comedy of knowledge, that is, comedy evolved from the detection of definite relations, so humour is the comedy of ignorance, felt, perceived, exhibited or suggested, that is, comedy evolved from a reference to indefinite and indefinable relations.

On a curious relation between wit or humour on the one hand, and pity or terror on the other.

Lastly, in this connection, it may be observed, that between wit and humour, on the one hand, pathos and terror, on the other, there is a pretty constant balance. Grief is of the known, I have said, and wit also of the known ; terror, on the contrary, is of the unknown, and humour sports in the sense of ignorance. Taking account of these pairs, we might expect that he who excels in wit might also excel in pathos ; that he who is great

in humour might also be a master of the terrible. CHAPTER
In point of fact, it is quite the other way. It is XI.
rarely that the wit can reach to the pathetic; it
is rarely that the master of terrors can reach to
the humorous. It would be very wrong to say
that wit is never found with pathos nor terror
with humour. There are men who seem to have
it in their power to ascend and descend at will
through the whole gamut of human emotion. I
speak only of what is most common; and the
common fact is, that in most minds there is a
sort of see-saw between comedy and tragedy.
The known of comedy pairs with the unknown
of tragedy. The known of tragedy pairs with
the unknown of comedy. Those of us whose
minds in laughing mood run chiefly on
the relations of wit, fly to the relations of
terror in the opposite mood. Those who are
most at home in pathos are also most at ease
in humour.

But apart from these details, the grand fact
to be seized in the present chapter is that the
primary law of pleasure is action, and that in
art its chief domain is the drama. There may
be some dispute as to the sense in which the
drama is to be defined as action. From Aris-
totle downwards the critics have laid much
stress on the literal meaning of the word, which
means a deed; and some of them take care to
point out that not only is the entire play called

Summary of
the chapter
as to the
connection
between
action, plea-
sure, and
the drama.

CHAPTER XI. a drama, that is a deed, but that its several parts are called acts. It is, therefore, concluded that the essence of the drama is action. Granted: but what is action? and how is action peculiar to the drama? Schlegel waxes very eloquent as he tells us that action means the show of life, that it is the glory of life, that it is life itself. According to the received canons as applying to the drama, it means plot, incident, the movement of events, the display of energetic purpose. Doubtless this is most essential to the drama, but it is not enough to tell us what is essential, we desire to know what is peculiar to the art. In the sense defined, action is not less necessary to the epic than to the drama; it is even to be found in song. We are, therefore, driven to ask whether there may not be a more determinate sense in which action belongs to the drama, and to it alone of the poetical arts?

The nature
of dramatic
action.

In point of fact the action which distinguishes dramatic from epic and from lyrical art, and gives it a name, is the action—action—action which it has in common with oratory; it is acting; it is representative or vicarious action—the assumed action of a player.* The drama means action in

* We are familiar with the use of the verbs to *do* and to *act* not only in the primary sense of displaying energy, but also in the secondary sense of displaying mimic energy, as when we speak of doing or acting Hamlet; but the reader may have some diffi-

the original sense of the word—as a deed or thing done, only in so far as this action or deed is capable of being acted (in the secondary sense) that is, played. Now, as all action or vital movement is not fit for representation, does not afford scope for what, in the artistic sense, is known as acting, it is not strictly accurate to say that the drama is so called because of the activity which it embodies. In all art there is an embodied activity. Still it is a fact that, when we think of the drama as action, we do not confine ourselves to the idea of action as mimetic. If acting or vicarious action be the peculiar property of the drama, it is at the same time true that we have a natural tendency to regard action (using the word now in its original sense of something done) as also its property. The reason is that all such movements as are fit for dramatic show must have in them an emphasis and decision which seems to entitle them peculiarly to the name of action. Just as we give the name of working classes to a special class

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The double meaning of the word action as applied to the drama.

culty in ascertaining that the old Greek verb δράω, from which *drama* comes, had the same double range of meaning. The dictionaries I have glanced at, all miss it, including Liddell and Scott. Hence an argument that since the name of the drama comes from a verb which had no reference to acting in the

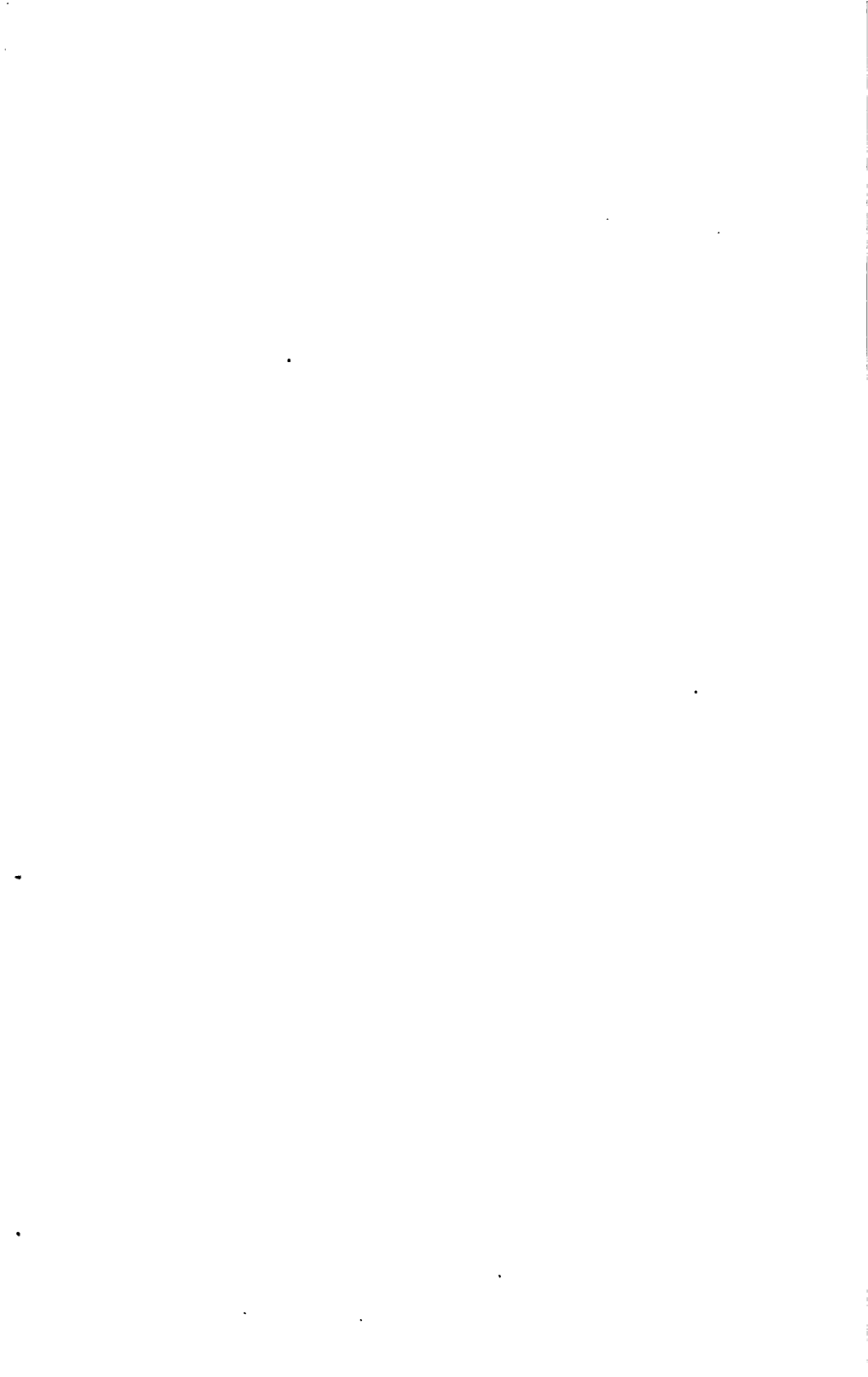
mimic sense, the action to which it refers is action in the original sense of the word, that is, any display of energy. But see Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, where the verb is evidently used in the secondary sense of playing a part.

CHAPTER XI. of workers, and as we call men of action men who act in a particular way, so in art we deem that class of movements which are fit for the purposes of the drama as especially entitled to the name of action. Perhaps, in the last analysis, this is but a question of words. I maintain that the drama is so called, not because it means action in the original sense of the word—that is, a display of energy—but because it means action in the secondary sense—that is, a display of mimicry. On the other hand, I am obliged to allow that a display of mimicry is possible only when there is an emphatic display of energy to be the subject of mimicry.

But the sum of all is that the dramatic is in a peculiar sense a show of strong action, and that in the development of a strong action it educes that mixed or painful pleasure which it has been the object of this chapter to identify with strength of action.



PURE PLEASURE.





CHAPTER XII.

PURE PLEASURE.

IS there such a thing as positive CHAPTER pleasure—pleasure which is not only XII. void of pain, but also something distinct from riddance of pain? Is pleasure ever free from pain? The poetical, and perhaps too, the common answer to the question is given by Metastasio.

Entra l'uomo, allor che nasce,
In un mar di tante pene,
Che s'avvezza dalle fasce
Ogni affanno a sostener.
Ma per lui si raro è il bene,
Ma la gioja è così rara
Che a soffrir mai non impara
Le sorprese del piacer.

These lines will be found in the sacred drama of *Isacco*, and are spoken by Abraham. Sarah had seen him return from the sacrifice with the bloody knife in his hand, and had no doubt that

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her only son had been slaughtered. This she bore ; she had schooled herself to bear it. But when she learns that her son lives, it is more than she can bear ; the joy of it is beyond her ; she breaks down ; and Abraham is calm enough to moralize upon the event. Man, he says, is born to trouble, and is so trained in adversity, that pain he can always endure ; but good comes to him so seldom, and joy is so rare, that the shock of pleasure is insufferable. Probably this, the gloomy view of life, is the prevalent one. It is certain that we talk more of our miseries than of our joys, and there are moments of agony, which, while they last, seem to outvie whole ages of bliss. In the next chapter, I shall have to point out one of the most important laws of pleasure that may account for the tendency of the human mind to make much of its woes, to think little of its delights, and to regard pain as the normal condition of life. Here we have only to consider the question—Is there such a thing as pure pleasure, pleasure free from any shadow of pain ?

Statement
of the
common
doctrine.

Plato main-
tains the
existence of
pure plea-
sure.

Sir William Hamilton has overstated Plato's doctrine of enjoyment in describing it as only the negation of pain. In point of fact no one more clearly than Plato acknowledged the reality of pleasure, pure and unmixed ; and as I opened the subject of mixed pleasure by quoting Kant's account of it, so now I cannot do better than

open up this subject of unmixed enjoyment, by starting from Plato's account of it, which is to be found in the dialogue called after Philebus, and which I present in Mr. Poste's translation.

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“SOCRATES.—In the natural order after the Mixed pleasures, we proceed by necessary sequence to the Unmixed in their turn.

The dialogue in which this doctrine is urged.

“PROTARCHUS.—We ought.

“SOCRATES.—I will try to start in a fresh direction and point them out; for those who say that pain alleviated is the whole of pleasure seem to me to be mistaken. However, I use these persons, as I said, as witnesses that some pleasures are apparent but unreal, and that others, which are seemingly great, are really blended with pain, and alleviation of the pangs of bodily and mental distress.

“PROTARCHUS.—And true pleasures, Socrates, which are they?

“SOCRATES.—Those from beautiful colours, as they are called, and from figures, and most of those from odours, and those from sounds, and any objects whose absence is unfelt and painless, while their presence is sensible and productive of pleasure.

“PROTARCHUS.—And what answer to this description?

“SOCRATES.—I confess they are not obvious,

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but I will try to indicate them. By beautiful figures, I do not mean what the mass of men might imagine, animal shapes or painted forms; but straight and curved lines, says my theory, and the planes and solids they generate with turning lathes and rulers and goniometers, if you understand. These have not a relative beauty, like other things, but are eternally and intrinsically beautiful, and attended with pleasures of their own, to which those of scratching* have no resemblance; and I refer to colours of a similar kind. Do you understand my meaning?

“PROTARCHUS.—I am trying, Socrates; but will you try to make it plainer?

“SOCRATES.—I say that voices soft and clear, uttering a pure and simple note, are not relatively but absolutely beautiful, and are linked to corresponding pleasures.

“PROTARCHUS.—They are.

“SOCRATES. — Odours occasion less divine pleasures than the other things, but as to freedom from admixture of pain, and the reason of this freedom, and their seat in the soul, they may be ranked as analogous to the rest. So here, if you have followed me, are two kinds of what I call pleasure.

* That is, pleasures attended with pain, and educed from uneasiness.

“PROTARCHUS.—I have followed you.

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“SOCRATES.—To these may be added the pleasures of knowledge, if you grant that no hunger or pangs of hunger precede their acquisition.

“PROTARCHUS.—I grant it.

“SOCRATES.—Well, and after knowledge has filled the soul, if a man loses it by forgetfulness, do you think there is any consequent pain?

“PROTARCHUS.—Not in the nature of things, but only from reflection, if the loss is regretted on the score of utility.

“SOCRATES.—But, my dear friend, it is the nature of the thing that we are examining, independent of reflection.

“PROTARCHUS.—It is true, then, that no pain attends the obliteration of knowledge.

“SOCRATES.—Then intellectual pleasures may be assumed to be unmixed with pain, and the lot not of the many, but of extremely few?

“PROTARCHUS.—They may.”

There is here a distinct statement as to the reality of pure pleasure, and as to the sources whence it is derived. And the passage from Aristotle, which Sir William Hamilton quotes as if it were a refutation of Plato, is little more than a summary of the above dialogue. The

Aristotle's
doctrine is
the same.

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Stagirite denies that all pleasure is the removal of pain, the satisfaction of desire, the repletion of want. "It appears that this opinion originated," he says, "in an exclusive consideration of our bodily pains and pleasures, and more especially those relative to food. For when inanition has taken place, and we have felt the pains of hunger, we experience pleasure in its repletion. But the same does not hold good in reference to all our pleasures. For the pleasure we find, for example, in mathematical contemplations, and even in some of the senses, is wholly unaccompanied with pain. Thus the gratification we derive from the energies of hearing, smell, and sight, is not consequent on any foregone pain, and in them there is, therefore, no repletion of a want. Moreover, hope and the recollection of past good are pleasing; but are the pleasures from these a repletion? This cannot be maintained; for in them there is no want preceding which could admit of repletion. Hence it is manifest that pleasure is not the negation of a pain."

Summary of
the views of
Aristotle
and Plato.

It will thus be seen that practically the two Greek philosophers are agreed; and the sum of their doctrine may be stated as follows:—In the first place, there is such a thing as pure pleasure, which has this characteristic, that it is not preceded by the craving of desire. Virtually the distinction between mixed and unmixed pleasure

as thus established corresponds with the distinction between the Cyrenaic and the Epicurean notions of pleasure. The doctrine of Aristippus and the Cyrenaics is that pleasure exists only in energy. The doctrine of Epicurus is that it belongs only to peace of mind. The result is that the Cyrenaics had sensual pleasures chiefly in their view, while the Epicureans (much misrepresented) made most of intellectual pleasures. On the one hand, Aristippus excluded from his idea of pleasure the delights of hope and of memory, because he could not trace in these the process of actual change—the passage from one state of being to another—which seemed to be essential to the generation of enjoyment. On the other hand, the true Epicureans excluded from their notion of pleasure the gratification of appetite, as inconsistent with that perfect peace wherein the highest enjoyment is to be found. There is no peace in hunger; there is no peace in the satisfaction of hunger. In the sense and in the repletion of appetite, there is an agitation which little consorts with pure enjoyment. And this brings us, in the second place, to what both Plato and Aristotle define as the source of unmixed or pure pleasure. Pure pleasure, they say, may be described as of two kinds—the delights of sense which are unattended with the craving of desire, and the satisfaction of knowledge as knowledge. Perhaps it would be more

CHAPTER XII. simple to say that this pure pleasure is to be found
 — either in sense or in conceit.

On pure
 pleasure, in
 so far as it
 exists in
 sense.

Examples of
 painless
 pleasure in
 sense.

I. In their enumeration of unmixed pleasures, the Greek philosophers place foremost the simple delights of sense, making particular mention of lovely sights and sounds and odours. And certainly as we look on the shapeliness of swans on still waters, of the commonest trefoil in the meadows, or of exquisite crystals of ruby and bismuth, it would be difficult to find in our feeling of delight the faintest touch of pain. Nor again, as the eye dwells on the glories of an evening sky, or the lustrous tints of humming birds, or the more delicate colouring of flowers and fruits, is there any trouble of pain to ruffle the sense of enjoyment. And there is no cross of suffering in the pleasure with which the ear drinks in the liquid notes of mavis and merle in our gardens, the song of the lark, and the chanting and piping of children. Nor yet in the fine fragrance of roses, carnations, and violets, of sandalwood, cedar and bergamot, is there naturally a trace of pain. That is to say, these sensations in themselves are not evolved from pain, nor properly accompanied thereby. Sometimes it may be that they are accidentally attended with painful associations; but this is a fact which does not affect the statement that originally and naturally they are painless. The

strain of the nightingale sounds to some ears as though it brimmed with melancholy, and is almost always associated in modern poetry with the idea of suffering; but Miss Rossetti says truly enough:

We call it love and pain
 The passion of her strain;
 And yet we little understand or know
 Why it should not be rather joy that so
 Throbs in each throbbing vein.

In like manner Jessica says — “I’m never merry when I hear sweet music;” and Mr. Ruskin will have it that there is no such thing as fine colour which is not sad.* It is of course always difficult to disentangle a sensation from the attendant sensations which have become associated with it, and seem to be essential to it. Thus gay colour may be an offence to the eye by means of its brightness, in the same way that to some palates any sweet is unpleasant.

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And their painlessness is not to be denied because they may be associated accidentally with pain.

The sweetest honey
 Is loathsome in his own deliciousness,
 And in the taste confounds the appetite;

because the prolongation and surfeit of pleasure produces a pain, which is afterwards through

* “Of all God’s gifts to the sight of man colour is the holiest, the most divine, the most solemn. We speak rashly of gay colour and sad colour, for colour cannot at once be good and gay. All good colour is in some degree pensive; the loveliest is melancholy, and the purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.”—*Stones of Venice*, vol. ii. p. 45.

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memory associated with the return of the pleasure. But such experiences as these do not interfere with the plain fact that naturally there are sensations which give pleasure unalloyed with pain. In and by itself, we conceive of the delight produced by the simple charm of form and colour, sound and perfume, as pure delight.

The condition of pure pleasure.

Now, before we pass on to consider other forms of pure pleasure, it may be well to point out, with regard to the pure pleasure of sense, that when we attempt to ascertain the condition of its rise within us, we find that Sir William Hamilton's definition of it, as action, suggests to us no clear idea, and throws on it no new light. This is the chief point of Mr. Mill's criticism on Sir William's doctrine of pleasure, and he seems to have made it good. In the pleasures that work through pain we see the all-importance of great action—in tragic pleasure, swift changes and intensity of movement; in comic pleasure, suddenness and novelty of movement. But in the delight with which we regard, say, the tender hues of an apple blossom, we by no means feel that action is the ruling principle, save in so far as it is the essence of every mental manifestation. The mind is nothing, save as it acts; and so far, we know that in all pleasure, as a mood of the mind, there must be action of some sort. What strikes one as most characteristic of pure pleasure is, not its activity, but the fitness,

Its harmony.

the harmony, the agreeableness of the activity. CHAPTER XII.
 And yet were we to try to describe wherein
 this harmony and agreement consist, we should
 find ourselves hard put for an answer, and should
 be driven to explain ourselves in the very terms
 that require explanation. Thus, if to the ques-
 tion, What is pleasure? we answer, that it is the
 sense of the agreeable, we must then proceed to
 ask, What is meant by being agreeable? and
 what is the measure of agreement? to which,
 however, the only reply is a return to the
 original answer stated in a converse proposition
 —That is agreeable which pleases us, and the
 only test of agreement is the pleasure it affords.
 Thus the precise nature of the pleasure which
 we explain to ourselves as an agreeableness
 we do not know; but, nevertheless, we always
 revert to the sense of agreement and fitness as
 the only approach we can make to an explana-
 tion of pure pleasure. We always dwell on the
 fact that the thing which yields us pleasure is
 somehow fit for us, and we for it; and we can-
 not help noting by what fine differences of too
 much or too little the relation of fitness is dis-
 turbed, and the sense of pleasure destroyed. It
 is impossible to say why a certain musical note,
 if properly struck, should give us a keen delight;
 but struck the least thing too sharp, or the least
 thing too flat, should afflict us with a sense of
 pain and discordancy. The pain which we thus

But it is
 difficult to
 define in
 what this
 harmony
 consists.

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feel is intelligible only as a discord. When we announce that this or that disagrees with us, we mean no more and no less which can be expressed in definite terms, than that it fails to afford us pleasure; but we suggest a good deal more. For not in all pleasure is the sense of suitability and harmony prominent, and when it is prominent it deserves notice. We distinctly realise to ourselves the double fact, that in the unmixed pleasures we are now speaking of, there must be a fitness for us in the thing that pleases us, and also that in us there must be a fitness for it.

An example to illustrate the difficulty of defining what constitutes fitness.

Take a perfume for example. Some of the most delicious of perfumes, as those of the pineapple series, can be made from the most noisome substances with the slightest chemical change. A few years ago there was a sweetmeat held in great regard by the palates of the young. It was called a pear-drop; it was a ball of sugar shaped like a pear, and it had the perfect flavour of jargonelle. Suddenly it went out of repute; nobody would buy it; hardly would one venture to speak of it; the confectioners who had invested in this wonderful sweetmeat found that their stock was useless. In a single night it had been blighted. A chemist had been heard to say in a popular lecture, that he could go into any stable and take from its drains a product which, by a very small amount of alteration in one of

its elements—to be expressed by the veriest fraction—he could convert into this delicious pear-juice. Intelligence of the fact speedily spread far and wide, and all the little boys in the land resolved that henceforth for them there should be no more pear-drops. And for us, in our present discussion, the fact remains, that the smallest fraction of a fraction in its ingredients makes all the difference between enjoyment and disgust of what we taste. A musical note loses its pitch, is out of tune, and displeases us if the number of its vibrations is below or beyond what they should be, by a fraction which may have to be expressed by the thousandth part of a second; and a lovely perfume loses itself, and becomes to us noisome, if it swerves from its level of composition by the infinitesimal fraction of any of its ingredients. Why it should happen that it is this precise compound of odour which gives us pleasure, and not that other which differs from it so slightly; or why again it is this musical note which will alone satisfy the ear, and not that other which is wonderfully near it, we cannot tell. But a fitness of some kind from which there must be no deviation we distinctly recognise.

And on the other hand, in ourselves also we recognise equally that there must be a fitness. None of us can say that sweet is not sweet, and yet many can say that it is not agreeable. The

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And the fitness must be in the mind as well as in the object it regards.

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 muscatelle flavour of the grape is surely delicious; but to how many connoisseurs is the wine of the Moselle, which has the muscat flavour, agreeable? For some reason or other it does not suit every man's taste. It may be that we have begun to dislike it by beginning to doubt it; for much of the flavour of Moselle is due, not to the peculiar bouquet of the grape, but to an infusion of elder flowers. However it be, the palates of many are not prepared for it, and so they refuse to drink Moselle of this quality. To them it is not agreeable. The sense of fitness is gone.

On the pure
 pleasure of
 conceit.

II. But that last example leads us on to a further conclusion as to the sense of fitness and consequent pleasure. It is that much of it lies in conceit, and is a mere creation of the mind. We conceive that this is agreeable to us, and that is not: straightway this becomes agreeable, and that becomes disagreeable. How the conceit may be produced is a matter of no moment. When Socrates tells us that knowledge, as knowledge, is one of the great sources of pleasure unmixed, he is both right and wrong. Whether it be or be not a pleasure will, for the most part, depend, not on the knowledge, but on our conceit of it. If when a man comes to know that the square described on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares

described on the other two sides, he should think that the intellectual discovery raises him in the scale of being, or is in any way good for him, then this conceit gives him a delight which does not depend on the nature of the knowledge. It is not the philosopher alone who enjoys the pleasure of knowledge. Mr. Paul Pry takes a mighty pleasure in knowing that there is a remarkable affinity between your gustatory organ and the Château Yquem of twenty years ago. Mrs. Paul Pry takes a pleasure in finding out what you are going to give your daughter for a dowry. If Pythagoras when he peeped into the secret of the forty-seventh proposition vowed a hecatomb to the gods, there are persons of a less philosophical turn who count it the height of felicity to peep into a letter or to demonstrate the truth of a rumour. The knowledge may be useful or useless; but if people conceive that it does them good, and ought to give them pleasure, there is pure pleasure in the conceit. And the mind in this sense may be said to create its own joy and its own misery.

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

I have said that the manner in which the conceit of pleasure may be produced is of no moment; but the two chief sources of it are habit and sympathy, and deserve to be separately considered.

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That the
pleasure of
conceit has
two chief
sources—
habit and
sympathy.

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On conceit
engendered
by habit.

Sometimes it is the result of habit. We are accustomed to a thing; we conceive that we cannot do without it, and the conceit of custom engenders a second nature, which is often even more importunate than the real tastes with which we are born. Prince Napoleon, a few years ago, went in his yacht to Greenland. He thought he would gratify some of the Esquimaux by giving them a trip to Paris and showing them all its wonders and its pleasures. They came to the French capital in the height of the season; they were lodged well; they fared well; they had a guide to look after them and to explain everything. They had the run of Paris; they saw it in all its brilliance; they tasted of all its enjoyments. All the delicacies of cookery in the Palais Royal were at their service; all the masterpieces of art in the Louvre were given to their view; they drove in the cool of the day through the glades and by the waterfalls of the Bois de Boulogne; later they gazed their fill upon the wonders of the shop windows in the Boulevards; and when evening fell they wandered in the Champs Élysées, now amusing themselves with horses and monkeys in the Cirque, now with music and ices in the pale of the Alcazar Lyrique, now with fair women that danced and dazzled in the fairy gardens of Mabilie. Nothing was spared that the most pampered taste could desire. All Paris was theirs, with

its blaze of pleasures. After a few days, the Esquimaux fell on their knees before the interpreter, clasped their hands, and begged for mercy. A boon! would he take pity on them and grant them a boon? Oh, that they might be permitted to shut the shutters, to pass their time in darkness, and to feed on dried fish and tallow!

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Perhaps it is scarcely accurate to speak of the force of sympathy as something different from the force of custom in producing the conceit of pleasure; for, in strictness, custom has no power over us, except as it implies sympathy with ourselves in past conditions. But it is not usual to speak of sympathy with ourselves; and the sympathy to which I now refer as creating a conceit of pleasure to be contrasted with that of custom, may be more popularly understood as imagination contrasted with memory. We see our neighbours apparently happy; we think that we might be happy in their way; and very often, by sheer force of sympathy, we create a pleasure for ourselves in positions that naturally would yield us no pleasure whatever. It is said that stolen waters are sweet, and in Randolph's play of *Amyntas*, there is a pretty song of the elves to illustrate the saying:

On conceit
engendered
by sym-
pathy.

That is, the
pleasure of
imagina-
tion.

Furto cuncta magis bella;
Furto dulcior puella;
Furto omnia decora;
Furto poma dulciora.

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Cum mortales lecto jacent
 Nobis poma noctu placent ;
 Illa tamen sunt ingrata
 Nisi furto sunt parata.

The apples would not be worth the eating if they were not stolen ; if imagination did not give them a flavour ; if the elves did not imagine that these apples were pleasant to the taste of man, and if they did not, by sympathy, transfer the supposed pleasure to themselves.

But is this
 conceit of
 pleasure a
 reality or
 an illusion ?

But then arises the question—Is the conceit of pleasure a reality, or is it only an illusion ? We make a distinction between true joys and false joys, utterly forgetting that this is an incongruous manner of speech ; that the measure of enjoyment is not to be found in the amount of truth and error ; that a joy may be real, though produced by a mistake. And especially when we discover that a great part of the pleasure of life consists in the mere conceit or supposition of pleasure, we stumble on one of the most curious facts of human nature—a fact which we are too apt to misinterpret, as if the pleasure generated by the supposition of pleasure were a mere illusion. There is a saying of Sir George Cornewall Lewis, which has become celebrated—that life would be tolerably agreeable if it were not for its pleasures. The epigrammatic force of this phrase, which the Esquimaux of Prince Napoleon would have thoroughly understood, charms us ; but perhaps

it may also mislead us ; and I must beg for some indulgence if I venture to split a jest " 'twixt north and north-west side." Cornewall Lewis's happy saying derives its force from the fact that what are pleasures to some are not pleasures to all ; but it also seems to suggest a scepticism of the reality of so-called pleasures. We may not be able to sympathise with those who think it a pleasure to go through the masquerade of what is called society ; but if there are people like those lately described by Mr. Dickens—people, like Veneering, who *think* they are happy in giving dull dinner parties—people, like Twemlow, who *think* they are happy in dining out stiff and starched—then it is mere intolerance to deny that they are happy. A man is happy if he thinks he is happy.

For let it be observed that we may not only suppose ourselves to be happy now, and are happy in consequence ; but we can also conceive ourselves to be happy in the future, and the hope of that future bliss is a greater bliss than the bliss itself when it comes. There is, perhaps, no greater delight than that which comes of hope, as there is no greater pain than that of fear. Fear is notoriously worse to bear than anything we have to fear ; and hope is better to us than aught we can hope for. Similarly, there is a pleasure of memory—that is, a real pleasure in the conceit of pleasure past. But the argu-

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Proof that
the pleasure
of conceit is
real.

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ment from these facts is inevitable. Aristippus, who denies the pleasure of hope and the pleasure of memory, may be allowed to deny also the pleasure of conceit in the present. But if the pleasures of memory be real, or if the pleasures of hope be real, why should not the pleasures of conceit in present circumstances be the same? If the mere conceit or supposition of pleasure to come be at any time a greater pleasure than the pleasure itself when it comes; and if, again, there be a real pleasure in the mere conceit or supposition of pleasure past; by parity of reasoning, also, there is a true pleasure in the conceit, supposition, or belief of pleasure present. If a man eating tallow candles thinks that he is pleased, then he is pleased, and no argument of ours can explain away his enjoyment as a delusion. If Twemlow thinks it pleasant to sit at Veneering's table, it will not be easy for Mr. Dickens to laugh him out of his pleasure, nor for Cornewall Lewis to stab his evening with an epigram. It cannot be too often repeated that if a man thinks he is happy, then he is happy. Madame de Sévigné long ago stated this great fact very pointedly in one of her letters to her daughter. "Nous trouvions l'autre jour," she said, "qu'il n'y avait de véritable mal dans la vie que les grandes douleurs; tout le reste est dans l'imagination et dépend de la manière dont on conçoit les choses"—that is, on conceit. She here speaks of pain;

but the converse of her proposition is that there is no certain pleasure in life but that of the senses, and that all else is conceit. This, too, is the fact which Lord Houghton has in his head when he says :

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For not to man on earth is given
The ripe fulfilment of desire :
Desire of heaven itself is heaven,
Unless the passion faint and tire.

It is this also very much that Shelley had in his mind when he wrote that "pain or pleasure, if subtly analysed, will be found to consist entirely in prospect." Perhaps Lord Houghton would have been more accurate if he had said that the hope of heaven itself is heaven; and perhaps Shelley would have been nearer the mark, if he had said that most of our pains and pleasures consist in the belief or supposition of pain and pleasure, whether it be past, present, or to come. The fact that joy flourishes most of all in idea cannot make the joy a nullity.

It is a kind provision of nature that man, who is always professing to be satisfied with nothing, is after all satisfied with nothings. Pleased with a rattle and tickled with a straw, we do not need much to make us happy, and we find that pleasure is produced by means not only the most simple, but also the most unlikely. In the Mahommedan Hades, there is a narrow wall between paradise and hell, which is called Araf.

Man wants
but little
here below.

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How much
of pleasure
depends on
conceit.

Examples.

It is neither heaven nor hell; it is the place of indifference; and on it are perched the souls of those who have done neither good nor ill in this world. But even here upon earth there is an Araf, a place of indifference, only it is by no means a narrow wall. With regard to how much of our pains and our pleasures may we not say "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." The Hindoo dies happy if he can but grasp the tail of a cow. The Eastern princess tosses wretched on her royal bed because of three hard lumps, raised by three small peas underneath the countless layers of feather and down. John Philips, the poet, when at school, would, instead of playing with the other boys, retire to his chamber to enjoy the sovereign pleasure of having his hair combed by the hour. I have read somewhere of an enthusiast in bell ringing, who has written a book to show that this will be one of the chief occupations of the blest in heaven. Miss Marsh tells us of a navy who said to his mate—"I wonder, Bill, whether it is true what they say of heaven being so happy; whether it can be happier than sitting in the public over a jug of ale with a fiddle going? I don't know a pleasure as comes up to that." And I have known a man (but then he was lovesick) declare that the Inferno was no Inferno, but a veritable Paradiso to Paolo and Francesca da Rimini, because they

were together and went on loving. Hundreds of other examples are at hand of what may be called the egotism of pleasure—men finding enjoyment in some source which is barren to their fellows. The shepherd said to De Rancé that he was happy as a king, and that his idea of heaven, was to live on a large plain with large herds to watch. Philip of Macedon reckoned a horse-race won at Olympia among his three fearful felicities. Fontenelle declared that the secret of happiness is to have the heart cold and the stomach warm.

It is said that the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and that a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. No more pregnant saying was ever penned, and no saying is less heeded. We see each other glad or sad; but we do not understand the sources of each other's joy and misery; often we do not know the sources of our own. We are transported with trifles; we are tormented with grits. I like to think of the monk Karileff, and the great joy which he spun out of air. Binding up and pruning one day in his little vineyard in the sunny south, he felt rather warm, took off his frock and hung it upon an oak. When at the end of his labour he took it down again, he found that a wren had laid her egg in it. The holy man was so touched with joy and admiration of what the smallest of birds had done, that he passed the whole night in

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larity of joy.

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praising God. Which of us can intermeddle with the joy of the simple-hearted monk, can say why he joyed, can give any intelligible reason for the psalm singing that went on all night? And Karileff is human nature itself, excited with a joy which it cannot account for, buoyant over a conceit which is thinner than air.

We are always intermeddling with each other's joy.

Fact though it be that we do not intermeddle with each other's joy, it is equally a fact that we are always trying to do so. We set up our own feelings as the standard, will not let our neighbours enjoy themselves in their own way, and fail to see how much of the world's happiness depends upon conceit. If Mein Herr is happy with his fat frau and fifteen humid children, why not? Only Mein Herr is not content to accept his happiness as a fact: he pushes it as an argument, and pities those who are in different case. Or let me change the illustration. M. de Montalembert means an argument when he tells us that the monks were a very happy race of beings; that "God by a permanent miracle of his mercy caused them always to find a joy and felicity unknown to other men." I do not deny the happiness of the monks. They chose pleasant places for their abode, by the still waters where the fish was abundant, amid the loveliest scenery of hill and valley, green woods and rich fields, in gay orchards and vineyards

and gardens of delight. There they lived free from the rude cares of daily existence, and far from the noise and frightening tumult of the world. In such quiet the affections had room to play, and monks who crushed the passion of love in their hearts, fanned friendship into an equivalent passion. "Souls, well beloved of my soul," wrote Anselm from the Norman Abbey of Bec to two of his relatives, whom he wished to draw into his abbey, "my eyes ardently desire to behold you; my arms expand to embrace you; my lips sigh for your kisses; all the life that remains to me is consumed in waiting for you." That the monks were happy enough in spite of passion like this of Anselm's which has the taste of cold porridge, in spite of much fasting and scourging, sitting in the cold and wearing hair shirts, no one need deny. But M. de Montalembert is disposed to argue, here is a proof of the excellence of monastic institutions. It is the most common of all fallacies. The gay cavalier imagines that the sour visaged roundhead has no happiness, when he is happy as man can be. The surly Puritan thinks that the carnally minded cavalier has no real pleasure, when he is glorious in his joys. It is the greatest mistake to suppose that happiness is the test of truth. I can be thrice happy under conditions which you would despise. You can be thrice happy under conditions which I could not endure. After all,

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And setting
up pleasure
as the stan-
dard of
truth.

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we need not contemn each other's joys, nor think we can understand them. Happiness is an affair of constitution and of conceit; and among the religious and the irreligious alike, there are people happy and unhappy. Pietists, whether of the Protestant or the Catholic sort, are much too fond of magnifying their joys, and hugging the secret of happiness which they possess; but in this they are like epicures, who are their great rivals in being fanatical as to the sources of pleasure. Well for the world that God has granted happiness to men who would not thank Lucullus for his dish of nightingales' tongues, and who would be done to death by the holiness of a Dominican monk at his complines and his matins, or of a Cameronian elder in his observance of the Sabbath.

The pleasure of conceit is not only real but pure.

The pleasure of conceit is not only real; it is also, for the most part, pure. This will be admitted, if the reader has distinctly apprehended how much is implied in conceit. The pleasures of hope, of memory, of imagination, are comprised under the more general name of conceit. We think of pleasure—whether past, present, or to come—as ours, and ours it instantly becomes by the mere conceit. Now, the pleasures of memory, of imagination, and of hope, which I have comprised under the general name of conceit, are confessedly the highest and purest of which the human mind is capable. It would be

too much to say that they are always, but they are for the most part, painless ; and we are most happy in conceit. The highest ideal of earthly happiness which our poets have conceived is that of a lover who is beloved by the object of his affections. But can there be a clearer case of conceit than the happiness of this love ? Wilkins falls in love with a female of his kind who goes by the name of Dinah. She has great goggle eyes, blowsy cheeks, an exuberant bust ; hands which are not hands, but paws ; and feet which are not feet, but hoofs. I happen to know, from a study of statistics, that the earth is peopled with about five hundred millions of the fair sex. Wilkins tells me that there is only one woman in the world ; that Dinah is the fairest fair ; that she alone can give him content ; and that without her life is a waste, howling wilderness ! Be it so. The world is peopled with millions of Wilkinsees. I do not deny that Wilkins may be supremely blest : I only say that the supreme blessedness comes of conceit. Every woman cannot be the perfect chrysolite and the pearl of womanhood ; but if Wilkins thinks that his ungainly squaw is entitled to this praise, it is the same to him as if she were.

But happy in conceit, we must still recur to the definition of this happiness from which we set out. We understand it only in the sense of

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The pleasure of conceit we must always

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 explain as in
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 a fitness.

agreement. We think that this or that suits us, and then it does suit us. And to bring about this sense of harmony is what is commonly understood as the office of imagination. In the language of Carlyle, poetry is the attempt which man makes to render his existence harmonious. In the language of Bacon, imagination is the faculty which submits the shows of things to the desires of the mind. "A gentleman," says good old Fuller, "having led a company of children beyond their usual journey, they began to be weary, and jointly cried to him to carry them, which, because of their multitude, he could not do, but told them he would provide them horses to ride on. Then cutting little wands out of the hedge as nags for them, and a great stake as a gelding for himself, thus mounted, fancy put metal into their legs, and they came cheerfully home." Whatever be the faculty that operates, the mind creates for itself a sense of harmony with the facts which environ us, and in this harmony lies pleasure.

The difficulty of defining pleasure without falling into contradictions.

Now observe the distinction between mixed and unmixed pleasure, and observe in either case how difficult it is to describe a pleasure without falling into contradictions. With regard to pleasure, in so far as it engaged our attention in the last chapter—pleasure crossed with pain—the most we could establish is that

its law is action. Give us great action, and even if it be action through a succession of hurts, we shall have pleasure. You may deny this pleasure by showing that its individual moments are pains, but in that denial you will only sacrifice facts to words. It is like the old Eleatic puzzle about motion. There can be no such thing as motion, said Zeno; for if we try to define it, we can only say that it is the passage of a thing from one place to another. Now, a thing must be somewhere, and it cannot be in two places at once. If it is here it is not in motion; if it is there it is not in motion; and as we can always demonstrate that it must be either here or there, we can always demonstrate that it is never in motion. So of the pleasure that comes through pain. It is painful in detail. No form of words has yet been invented to get rid of this contradiction—a logical lie and a metaphysical truth—that a heap of pains may be a mass of pleasure.

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The contradiction involved in speaking of painful pleasure.

Our torments also may in length of time
Become our elements.

If, now, we turn by contrast to the pleasure which has engaged our attention in the present chapter, we find ourselves in front of another contradiction. For in that feeling of content and agreement which yields the purest pleasure, the sense of action is lost in the sense of

The contradiction involved in speaking of pure pleasure.

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repose. The repose, too, is often so perfect that we cannot assert its existence without seeming to deny the reality of that action, which is an essential condition of life. The idea of action is indeed so essential to our notion of pleasure, that Hobbes, while he places the felicity of this life in action, denies it repose, and declares that the joys of the next world are to us upon earth utterly incomprehensible—he means, because they are said in Scripture to partake so much of rest. Of course Hobbes is quite right, if we are to understand by repose what he understands—the stoppage of movement—“desire at an end—sense and imagination at a stand.” When Socrates said that true happiness lies in the quiet of the mind, one of the sophists jeered at him, for placing it in what seems no better than the stillness of a stone. But even those Indian mystics, who would push the Socratic doctrine to an extreme, making it the highest happiness to sit still upon a stone and think of nothing, cannot be understood to place their content in the absolute annihilation of thought, inasmuch as the end which they propose is so far beyond our powers that in struggling to reach it, the utmost energies of the mightiest minds may be called forth in vain. When Socrates praises the stillness of pleasure and the quietness of the mind, it is not to the denial of its real activity, but in contrast to that sort of pleasure which, as

The contrast
between
repose and
action.

instinct with the craving of desire, has not less pain in it than pleasure, has action without ease, and has its type, to use his own illustration, in the doubtful enjoyment of scratching. It is not in language to escape the apparent contradiction, and we get rid of it only by ignoring its terms. We may say of true pleasure that it consists in a harmony, but when we attempt to define this harmony, we are obliged to use terms of content and repose that by their very nature seem to imply hush of feeling and lull of action.

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But just as painful pleasure, so also pure pleasure, finds its expression in art. The drama, and all that outside of the drama in other arts we characterise as dramatic, builds palpably upon action, and produces, through our sympathy with vigorous change, a pleasure which is crossed with the sense of pain. But art, also, has its pure, its unmixed pleasure ; only pleasure is not to be obtained thus pure in any stress of action, which may properly be defined as dramatic. Pure pleasure is a product of the beautiful ; and in so far as art aims at the beautiful, it aims at pure pleasure. It is in this sense that we may understand the saying of Schlegel, that the poetry of the ancients was the poetry of enjoyment, while ours is the poetry of desire. It is a false statement, as I have already had occa-

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sion to show, if we are to regard desire as distinct from and opposed to enjoyment. The statement will hold good, however, if, by desire, we may understand the range of feelings which in their evolution have a delight mingled with pain. Classical art as aiming more distinctly than Christian art at pure enjoyment, aims more evidently at that harmony, that sympathy, that repose which belongs to the idea of the beautiful. And it is because Winckelmann and the critics of that school set up Greek art as the standard, that in all their criticisms they gave an exaggerated importance to the accomplishment of beauty as the aim of art. Most certainly Greek art aims chiefly at the presentment of beautiful impressions; and at the creation of that pure pleasure which comes of beauty. But it is needful to bear in mind that there are other pleasures than those of the beautiful—pleasures, too, which, in spite of the much and many pains mingled with them, we, at least in this age of the world, court more eagerly.

On the contrast between the dramatic and the beautiful.

But in describing the contrast between mixed pleasure as it appears in art, and pure pleasure as it there also appears, I have not yet been sufficiently precise: because, while on the one hand between mixed pleasure and unmixed pleasure there is a contrast which the mind readily seizes, on the other hand, it is not so evident that there is an equivalent contrast between the artistic ex-

pression of these pleasures in the dramatic and the beautiful. We are not in the habit of making a distinction between what is dramatic and what is beautiful, and some might urge that what is dramatic may be beautiful, and that what is beautiful may be dramatic. I do not wish to fight about words, and especially in the present stage of the discussion, when as yet we have reached no adequate definition of what is to be understood by the beautiful, and have been at no great pains to determine sharply what is dramatic. I am using popular language with all its looseness. Everybody will allow that it is one of the great objects of the artist to produce dramatic effects—whatever that may mean. Everybody will allow that it is another of the great objects of the artist to produce beautiful effects—though we may differ as to the constitution of the beautiful. It would be impossible to name any other object of art subordinate to pleasure that is of more importance. And if between the dramatic effects of art, and its beautiful effects, there does not seem to be any natural antithesis, as between the painful pleasure evolved by the one, and the pure pleasure evolved by the other, still we have only to deal with facts, whether or not they fit with logical precision into our common modes of speech. A fact it is that the drama, and all art in so far as it is dramatic, runs to pleasure through a discipline of pain. Conversely, it is

CHAPTER
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first sight
evident.

CHAPTER XII. in what may be called dramatic displays that such painful pleasure as art cultivates is chiefly (though not wholly) produced. Again, it is a fact that what is beautiful yields pleasure without pain; and conversely, that whenever art contrives a pure pleasure it is mainly through the display of beauty.

Yet it is in a manner recognised in the current phrases of criticism.

If, however, we pursue our inquiries, we shall find that to speak of a contrast between the dramatic and the beautiful is not so much opposed to the accepted phrases of criticism as might at first sight be imagined. No doubt, if we looked for the strict opposite of the dramatic, we should search for it in some of the *forms* of art, and might pitch upon the statuesque from one point of view, or upon the lyrical from another. And no doubt again, if we looked for a strict contrast to the beautiful, we should search for it among the *ideas* of art, and might pitch at one time upon the sublime, at another upon the true or the good. But on the other side, let it be remembered that in attempting to define the limits of the beautiful in modern times, nothing is more common than to insist upon the contrast between the beautiful and the picturesque. If we are not startled in being told that the ideas of the picturesque and the beautiful are exclusive of each other, need we be startled by the parallel but stronger statement that dramatic effects and beautiful effects are equally distinct?

If we are startled by the statement, it is because we have fallen into a lax mode of describing everything good or pleasurable, as beautiful. We speak of beautiful weather, a beautiful sermon, a beautiful machine; housemaids tell us that "the fire burns beautiful;" farmers tell us that guano is a beautiful manure; physicians often assure us that their most abominable potions are elegant in preparation and beautiful in effect. When we can describe as beautiful whatever we like, or whatever goes well, it would be strange if we could not thus describe equally whatever is picturesque and whatever is dramatic. But then it is distinctly to be understood that this is a loose method of speech, and that after all there is a special meaning to be attached to the idea of the beautiful. I do not mean that with all the hard thinking of the last hundred years to go upon, we can get much beyond the definition of it, which I have indicated—that it is the correlative of pure pleasure; but for the present this is enough. And it only remains to be added that as when we insist on the contrast between the beautiful and the picturesque, we do not deny that a picture may contain beauties; so also when I venture to dwell on the great contrast which exists between the dramatic and the beautiful, I need not be taken to mean that any touch of beauty is profane to the drama. In point of fact all the arts, and all the ideas of art, interlace

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The looseness of the manner in which we speak of the beautiful.

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Further examples to show that in strictness we recognise the dramatic as opposed to the beautiful.

and entwine one with another; and it is part of the glory of the drama that, more than any other art, it represents all the facts of human life, appropriates all the ideas of the human mind, and takes into its service whatever is most excellent in the other arts. Still, in our ordinary speech we recognise, however vaguely, that the drama as an art lies beyond the precincts of the beautiful. We separate between plays and poems. Ask for Shakespeare's poems: will the bookseller hand you any of his plays? Ask for Dryden's poetical works: will you find among them one of his tragedies? Shakespeare's grandest title to the name of poet is to be found in his plays, and yet we never speak of these plays as poems. It is because in our conception of the drama, and all that is dramatic, we give the first place to the idea of the true; whereas in other forms of art we attach more importance to ideas of the beautiful and the good.

That in the dramatic we look mainly for truth of action.

But here arises a seeming contradiction which must be explained. I have just now said that, by a form of speech, into which we have naturally and gradually slipped, dramatic works are distinguished from poetical works, because it is their chief business to be true, and not necessarily to be beautiful. If the dramatist entertains us with truth, we applaud him even if his truth be ungainly. But in the beginning of this discussion I dwelt upon action as the chief necessity of

the drama ; and how then can it now be said that its chief business is to be true. The contradiction which seems to be involved here is no more and no other than the apparent contradiction to which reference has already been made when we had to consider the nature of repose. We are always in danger of confounding rest and repose with the cessation of activity. That rest and repose—that peace of the mind, in which the Greek philosophers saw the highest happiness, did not in their view mean the termination of activity, but activity harmonised, the mind at ease. And so in whatever strikes us as beautiful there is always present some force of action, although the sense of action is lost in that of repose and harmony. Therefore, between the dramatic and the beautiful, the difference is not that in the former there is action and in the latter none ; but that in the one the sense of action is prominent, and that in the other it is lost in the sense of repose. What is this, however, but saying, that in dramatic action we look for the distinct appearance and the full form of action—for action so forcible that there can be no mistake about it—for action so natural that we shall believe it as a present reality—in other words, for truth as against beauty of action.

Strength, and indeed excess, of action is an important evidence of dramatic truth, and is chiefly valuable as a proof of sincerity. M.

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And truth
of action ap-
pears chiefly
in strength.

CHAPTER XII. St. Marc Girardin compares the successive appearances of Madame Roland and Madame Dubarry on the scaffold, and estimates their dramatic attributes. The former lady appeared with a countenance as gracious, a demeanour as calm, as if she were in a drawing-room. With a proud contempt of the outrages of the crowd that pushed to see her die, she exclaimed, as she mounted the scaffold: "Oh, Liberty! what crimes have been committed in thy name!" No complaint, no agitation, no cries, no convulsions: she gave herself to death with the majesty befitting a great character. The people were quite unmoved; there was nothing dramatic in such an end, and they could not see its beauty. But, a few days afterwards, from the same prison, came forth Madame Dubarry. The unhappy woman, who had no notion of courage or of dignity, but such as one might learn at the supper table of Louis XV., could not resign herself to death, uttered fearful yells, and cried: "Oh, Mr. Executioner! I pray you, one little moment!" The little moment was denied her, and her head rolled down, while her mouth still gaped with her dying shrieks. The people were touched; there was no beauty in such an end, but it was dramatic. Here there was strength of action that gave evidence of sincere emotion.

Examples of It has been said that the five acts of a tragedy

may successively be labelled—They will kill, they will not kill, they will kill, they will not kill, they will kill. And so we may ticket the five acts of a comedy—They are fools, they are wise, they are fools, they are wise, they are all fools and accept their folly. But if this be the character of dramatic action in its main lines, we may say that it is truthful, or that it is powerful, but we can scarcely describe it as beautiful. For beauty of action we must turn to other forms of art. In the epic, for example, there is no lack of vigour; but yet amid all the havoc and woes innumerable of the *Iliad*, the poet takes care, from the opening lines of the poem to the end, to show that God is about us, and “the purpose of God was aworking;” as amid all the ruin and terror of a *Paradise Lost*, the poet never loses sight of his object—“to justify the ways of God to men.” In the drama we have only to make sure that the action is real. In the forms of art where beauty predominates, we must make sure that it is balanced and in perfect law.

There are many definitions of the beautiful, but nearly all involve in them the notion of harmonious activity. The difficulty is to determine in what the harmony consists—why certain combinations are to be pronounced harmonious and others not. This difficulty is so great that many persons choose to deny altogether the existence of beauty as independent of truth and power of dramatic action in its main lines, but want of beauty.

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truth and power of dramatic action in its main lines, but want of beauty.

What is beauty?

The question is so difficult, that in despair of

CHAPTER XII. dent of individual fancy. As the representative of such philosophers we may take Sir John Suckling, who, in one of his prettiest sonnets, gives the substance of modern speculation in this direction :

answering
it the philo-
sophers
have turned
sceptics.

Of thee (kind boy) I ask no red and white
To make up my delight;
No odd, becoming graces;
Black eyes, or little know-not-whats in faces;
Make me but mad enough; give me good store
Of love for her I court—
I ask no more:
'Tis love in love that makes the sport.
There's no such thing as that we beauty call:
It is mere cozenage all;
For though some long ago
Liked certain colours mingled so and so,
That doth not tie me now from choosing new.
If I a fancy take
To black and blue,
That fancy doth it beauty make.
'Tis not the meat, but 'tis the appetite
Makes eating a delight;
And if I like one dish
More than another, that a pheasant is.
What in our watches, that in us is found,
So to the height and nick
We up be wound,
No matter by what hand or trick.

And the
answer of
those philo-
sophers
who are not
sceptical of
beauty are
of little
value.

This is an easy way to get out of the difficulty of defining the nature of the harmony in which beauty consists. Practically, however, it makes little difference whether we deny altogether that there is such a thing as beauty, and so laugh the question out of court, or beguile ourselves with the stupid and luckless answers of those philoso-

phers who, with all the fearful clatter of meta-
physical phrases, pretend that they can define
the beautiful. Kant defines the beautiful as
that which pleases generally and not generally:
—generally, inasmuch as it satisfies not a
particular faculty of the mind, but the whole
mind; and not generally, inasmuch as the
pleasure which it affords is not mediatized by
abstract or general ideas. Does anybody see
better for such a definition? Or take it in the
terms set forth by Schiller. Beauty is a quality
which stands in relation to the entirety of our
powers, not to any one in particular. Who of
us after reading such phrases can lay his hand
upon his heart and say honestly that now he
knows more about beauty than he did before?
Said Goethe to Eckermann, “I cannot help
laughing at the æsthetical folks who torment
themselves in endeavouring by some abstract
words to reduce to a conception that inex-
pressible thing, to which we give the name of
beauty. Beauty is a primeval phenomenon
which itself never makes its appearance, but the
reflection of which is within a thousand different
utterances of the creative mind, and is as various
as nature herself.”

In point of fact the utmost that science can
reach, in dealing with this difficult subject, is a
scientific ignorance. We are ignorant, and we
ought to know our ignorance. Sir John Suck-

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ling is quite right in one of his lines: "There's no such thing as that we beauty call." Beauty is not a thing; it is a relation of things—a relation of harmony.

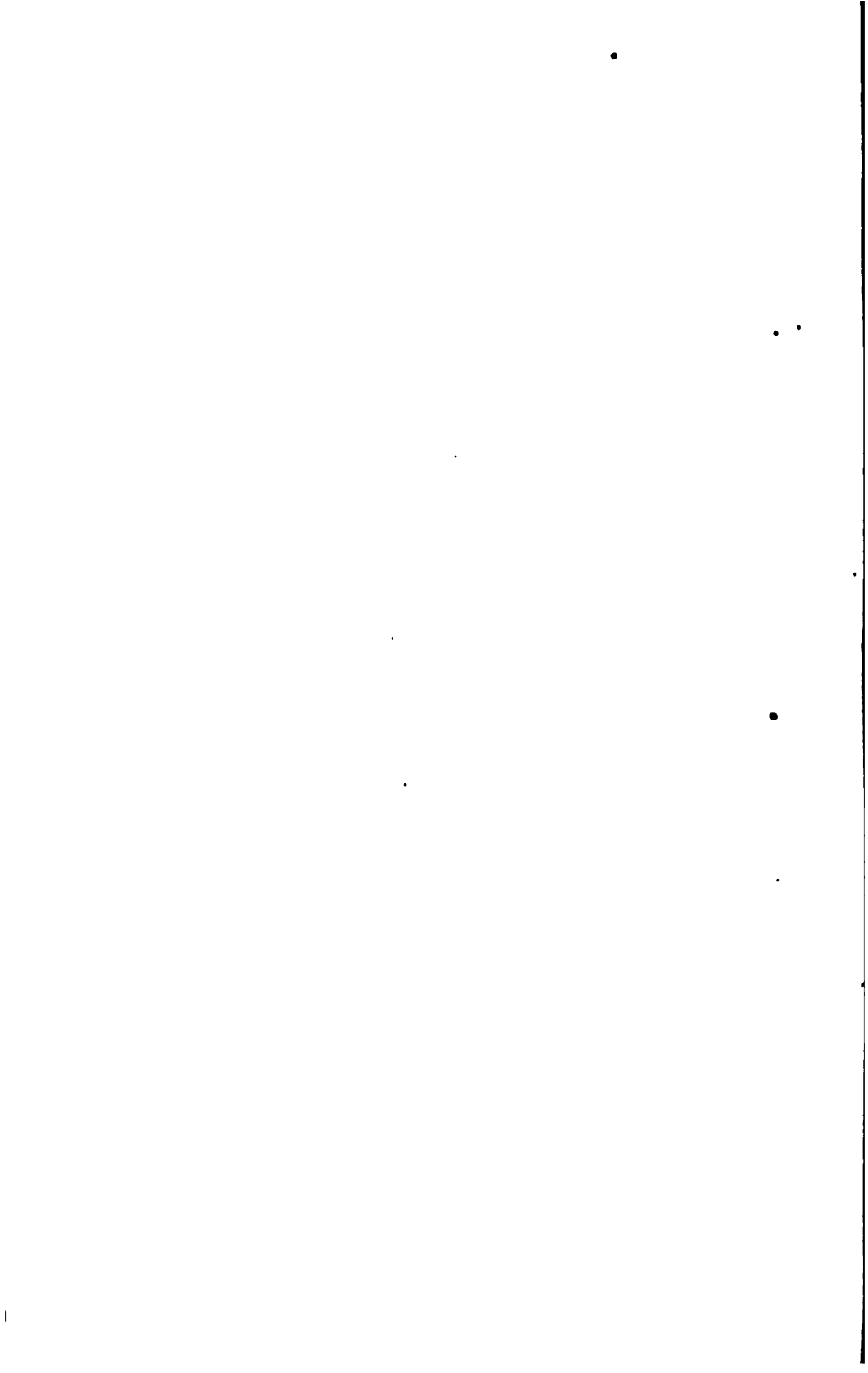
"Tis not a lip or eye we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.

This, however, is all we know. What is the relation of the parts one to another that constitutes beauty—why this relation of parts is beautiful and not that other—what is the harmony that exists between our minds and the objects we call beautiful—we know not. We talk of concord of forms, concord of sounds, concord of colours, nay, we can mathematically determine in many directions what are and what are not concords. But why they are concords—why they agree, is beyond our reckoning. They please us and that is all we can say.

Summary
of the
chapter.

If this be all we can say, the burden of the present chapter will not at the stage of the inquiry we have now reached seem to be much. It is something, however, that we have been able to insist upon the reality of pure pleasure; that we have found this pure pleasure both in sense and in idea; that we have recognised as its distinguishing character the feeling of harmony; and that we have identified with pure pleasure—also with the feeling of harmony and repose, whatsoever is beautiful in art.

HIDDEN PLEASURE.





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HIDDEN PLEASURE.



SO far, in this discussion as to the nature of pleasure, we have followed a beaten path. The road may be rather difficult and not very clear, but at least it stretches through a region where the great landmarks may be readily recognised. We have now to break new ground and to direct our steps through an untravelled country. For Sir William Hamilton's definition of pleasure, the most complete which has yet been put forth, does not by any means cover all the facts with which we have to deal. It ignores and denies what is beyond all others the most curious and the most mysterious array of facts relating to pleasure. It tells us of a pleasure growing in pain, and it tells us of a pleasure which is without pain; but it excludes the marvellous phenomenon of hidden

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It is necessary now to examine a series of facts connected with pleasure which have been hitherto neglected.

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pleasure. It tells us of the activity which goes to produce pleasure, and of the harmony which tends to its perfection ; but says not a word of that self-forgetting, which is its crowning grace and its peculiar glory. •

All pleasure
self-forget-
ful.

All pleasure has a tendency to forget itself, and there is no escape from the paradox that a large group of our joys, including some of the highest; scarcely, if ever, come into the range of consciousness. I shall try anon to make this paradox, if not quite clear, at least acceptable ; but in the meantime, observe that if the statement, spite of paradox, be correct, it has the merit of at once accounting for an extraordinary fact about pleasure. We should imagine that the Creator intended life to be enjoyable, and had accorded to each of us, in the sum of experience, a balance of happiness. But in point of fact, if our joys on the whole outweigh and outnumber our sorrows, we seem to be little aware of it ; and we are better acquainted with the misery than with the happiness of life. The words to express what is good and pleasurable, are fewer by a great deal than those for the bad and painful. Dante succeeds in painting hell, he fails in painting heaven. Who does not remember Bacon's fine saying in one of his finest essays—"If you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols ; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more

And as compared with pain, difficult to be described.

in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon?" We have colours to paint every shade of wickedness, and strokes for every stage of woe: let the crime be the blackest, we can give it a name; let the cup be the bitterest, we can tell of the very lees. But to tell of the varying lights of pleasure, and all the winning ways of goodness, we are wholly at a loss; and the most we can say of the greatest goodness is, that there is an unknown, indescribable charm about it; the most we can say of the highest bliss, that it is unutterable. What does all this mean, but that we are keenly alive to suffering, and anything disagreeable, but on the other hand, little conscious of our joys, and whatever is pleasant? So likewise it happens that the sense of pleasure more than aught else in human experience, eludes our scrutiny. We know less about it than about any other marvel of our being, and attempt less to understand it. We seek to fathom the mysteries of life, and of knowledge, and of will; but for the exceeding mystery of delight we have only the set phrase, that it passeth understanding.

No truth is more certain than this, although it is not always acted on, that there is little pleasure in the conscious pursuit of pleasure. It is because pleasure is naturally unconscious, and we cannot well by a conscious effort, become unconscious. One might as soon expect by looking

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We say that
it passes
understand-
ing.

Conscious-
ness in plea-
sure a mis-
take.

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We become
conscious of
our happi-
ness when it
is passing
away.

Some fur-
ther illus-
trations of
the uncon-
sciousness of
enjoyment.

not to see, and by remembering to forget. It is a killjoy to think of pleasure and to ask ourselves are we happy? We must, like receivers of stolen goods, accept our pleasures and ask no questions. Pleasure says to every one of us what we say to children, Open your mouth and shut your eyes. She turns from the man that woos her, and to the heedless child flies unbidden. She seldom gives note of her coming; she comes like an angel, unheard, unseen, unknown, and not till she is gone or is parting from us, are our eyes opened, to see what we have enjoyed. In this sense, not only some, but all of us have "entertained angels unawares." It was when the Saviour was vanishing from his disciples, that they knew it was he; it was when the blissful vision on Tabor was passing away, that Peter began to feel how good to be there.

In other respects, too, the behaviour of the disciples, to whom was given a foretaste of heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration, is suggestive. The bliss was too strong for them, and so blinded their souls that they were overpowered with sleep. When they had somewhat recovered, they were so bewildered, that of Peter it is told—he knew neither what to say nor what he said: indeed, what he could have meant by proposing to build three booths it is hard to understand. In like manner, when Saint Paul

was caught up into the third heaven, he knew not whether he were dead or alive, in the body or out of the body. Perfect joy will not keep house with perfect knowledge. In so far as we become self-conscious, there is no room for joy; and on the other hand, as Hooker finely brings out (Eccles. Pol. v. 67), “the mind, feeling present joy, is always marvellous unwilling to admit any other cogitation, and in that case casteth off those disputes whereunto the intellectual part at other times easily draweth. A manifest effect whereof may be noted if we compare with our Lord’s disciples in the twentieth of John, the people that are said in the sixth of John to have gone after him to Capernaum. These leaving him on the one side of the sea of Tiberias, and finding him again, as soon as themselves by ship were arrived, on the contrary side, whither they knew that by ship he came not, and by land the journey was longer than according to the time he could have to travel, as they wondered, so they asked also, *Rabbi, when comest thou hither?* The disciples, when Christ appeared unto them in far more strange and miraculous manner, moved no question, but rejoiced greatly in what they saw. For why? The one sort beheld in Christ only that which they knew was more than natural, but yet their affection was not rapt therewith through any great extraordinary gladness; the other when they looked on Christ were

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CHAPTER XIII. — not ignorant that they saw the well-spring of their own felicity; the one, because they enjoyed not, disputed; the other disputed not, because they enjoyed."

The unconsciousness of pleasure has different degrees of intensity.

We are familiar with the fact of this unconsciousness when it is imperfect.

The strange phenomenon which now demands our attention is of varying degrees of intensity. In its lower forms we accept it without hesitation. Thus without ever fully understanding how much they involve, we are accustomed to such statements as this of Cyril Tourneur's in *The Revenger's Tragedy* :

Joy's a subtle elf:
I think man's happiest when he forgets himself;

or this of Thomas Gray's :

Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise;

or this of Sir John Suckling's :—

Stay here, fond youth, and ask no more; be wise;
Knowing too much long since lost Paradise;

or this again of Wordsworth's, which I had to quote in a previous chapter :

In such high hour
Of visitation from the living God
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

When, on the other hand, Joubert gives utterance to that saying :—Vivre, c'est penser et sentir son âme, which seems to have taken Mr. Matthew Arnold's fancy, and which he translates—The essence of life lies in thinking, and being conscious of one's soul; we all know that this is

but the strut of philosophy much enamoured of itself, and setting up its own methods as the standard of living. It would be a dull world if we were all philosophers, always thinking, and always conscious of our souls. Look, says George Herbert,

Look at meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit,
And say withal, Earth to earth I do commit.

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We refuse to believe with some philosophers that the worth of life lies in strong consciousness.

That is what much thinking comes to. You destroy life by thinking of it. And against those philosophers who place the essence of life in thinking and in being conscious of one's soul, there are many others ready to pronounce woe upon the man who will brood over his own self. Thought, said Goethe, widens but lames; action narrows but quickens. Eat not thy heart, was the sage advice of Pythagoras; and Lord Bacon has, in similar terms, described those who live on their own thoughts, as cannibals of themselves. I borrow, at second-hand from an extinct review, the statement of Joubert's countryman, Maine de Biran, who was a great invalid as well as a most acute thinker, and who thoroughly knew what he was speaking of. "In health," he said, "the sense of existence vanishes, because it is continuous. Except when we suffer, we scarcely dream of our own being. Either disease or the habit of reflection is necessary to induce us to search into ourselves. There are few persons besides invalids who are aware of the

In health the sense of existence vanishes.

CHAPTER XIII. process of existence: healthy people, even philosophers, are more occupied with the enjoyment of life than with its investigation." In point of fact there is no more wasting malady than that of incessant introspection. It is the height of Manfred's woe that he cannot forget himself, even in sleep:

My slumbers, if I slumber, are not sleep,
 But a continuance of enduring thought,
 Which then I can resist not: in my heart
 There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
 To look within.

Suicide
 springs out
 of extreme
 self-con-
 sciousness.

In point of fact, it is out of a flourishing self-consciousness that suicide springs. Suicide is a catastrophe which is little understood, and least of all by the French, who speculate on it most. Montesquieu had an idea that climate had very much to do with it; and hence its frequency in England. But I do not know that the English climate is so very bad, since Charles II. could say, with some truth, that in England, throughout the year, we can spend a greater number of hours during a greater number of days, in the open air, than in any other country in the world; and I do know, that in proportion to the population, the suicides are three times as many in France as with us. France, indeed, is the country of suicide. Does this mean that it is more full of misery than any other land? It is a common mistake to suppose that suicide

How the
 French
 speculate on
 suicide.

is the result of mere misery. If that were the case, however, we in England ought to be as forward as the French in cultivation of the remedy. On the contrary, we are surrounded with people whose life is a continuous groan, and yet who never think of destroying themselves; for suicide is, in most cases, the result of a special form of misery. M. de Montalembert finds a solution of the whole mystery in religion, or rather the want of it; and looking back on those happy days when Europe swarmed with monks, he argues that the ruin of the religious orders has contributed much to the frightful increase of suicides certified each year by the criminal statistics. At the first glance one is disposed to make light of his argument. One might ask, What does he know about the statistics of suicide in the Middle Ages, that he should raise a comparison, in this respect, of ancient with modern times? Or again, what comparison can there be between the number of suicides committed in an age of peace, when the life of the meanest pauper is regarded as inexpressibly precious, when not a sparrow can fall to the ground without the kind inquiries of Lord Townshend and half a dozen societies, when through the skill of our physicians the weak among us are enabled to prolong a sickly existence, out of which any number of suicides may arise, and those com-

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—M. de Mont-
alembert.

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mitted in an age of war and danger, when disease made short work with a patient, when life was cheap, when blood was poured out like water, and when he who wished to die, if he did not choose to slay himself in the high Roman fashion, might court death in the shock of battle or of single combat? Or once more, if one chose to be argumentative,—when the Comte de Montalembert insists that in the Middle Ages the multitude of monks led to a paucity of suicides, may it not be replied that the monks were themselves all suicides? But M. de Montalembert is so far right. We may accept the increase of suicide as a fact pretty well ascertained. This increase, however, is not owing to the downfall of the monasteries nor to the decay of religion. It is the result of the modern disease—excessive civilization and overstrained consciousness.

St. Marc
Girardin on
suicide.

I have said, too sweepingly, that the French, who speculate on this subject most, understand it least. They certainly tease one with constant discussion of it, ending in irrelevant explanations. But perhaps no one has come so near to a true view of the matter as M. St. Marc Girardin. “To verge on suicide,” he says, “there is needed a certain play of intellect, and a certain fermentation of the passions. Men who are not studious, and women who do not read romances, have not usually recourse in their

misery to suicide. Also, there are more suicides CHAPTER XIII. among civilized than among barbarous nations. A man may be the most wretched in the world, the most destitute, the most nearly reduced to the dunghill of Job; but if he has not tasted of the tree of knowledge, if he has not added to his miseries the torment of thought, he will not dream of self-slaughter. Suicide is not a malady of men with simple hearts and mother wit: it is a malady of the subtle and the philosophic; and if in our day we find that even artisans are troubled with the disease, this only shows that their minds have been stirred and "fretted by modern science and civilization." So also we may add that if France be the hotbed of suicide, it is because that self-consciousness, which predominates in modern civilization, is there developed to the highest point.

Nor is it alone in what is specially called Suicide and love. thought that this excess of consciousness—the root of suicide—is to be found; we find it in what is called love. The French are supposed to be the most amorous people of the West. But what is love? And how is it that love so often ends in suicide? We give fine names to the tender passion, forgetting that it is by no means so common as people suppose, and that it is far oftener vanity than love. Men and women fancy that they love each other, because they love each other's flatteries. The French

CHAPTER XIII. themselves are very ruthless in their dissection of such love. Thus La Rochefoucauld has it, that we always love those who admire us, but do not always love those whom we admire. Again, he says in one of his most pungent sentences: "The reason why lovers never weary of each other is, that they are always talking of themselves." Let me quote another French author, the most brilliant letter-writer in France. "We like so much to talk of ourselves," says Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, "that during whole years we never tire of a tête-à-tête with a lover; and that is why the devout, too, like to visit their confessor—they have the pleasure of talking about themselves, though they have only ill to say." The fact is that most love, and nearly all the sickliness of love, is mere egotism. The lover, who makes believe that he is enamoured of his mistress, too often is a Narcissus enamoured of himself, and doting over the foolish praise he receives. Cross him in love—rob him of adulation; and the self-consciousness which has been nurtured within him to an extreme will lead to a form of misery that culminates in suicide. He soon finds that the pleasure of thinking about one's self is of all pleasures the most precarious; and that the essence of life by no means lies in being conscious of one's soul.

When we speak in these general terms of the

alliance between pleasure on the one side, and self-forgetting or unconsciousness on the other, the doctrine may be allowed to pass. But if we come to close quarters with it, and venture to speak definitely of pleasure existing in absolute unconsciousness, we find ourselves in view of a most perplexing mystery—difficult of apprehension, still more difficult of description. Beset though it be with the difficulty of clouds and darkness,—though it elude our logic and defy our language, the fact is there from which we cannot escape—the pleasure of trance, the pleasure of sound sleep. There are few things so strange in human life as the joy of ecstasy and of trance in which consciousness is lost. That account, to which I have already referred, of the disciples on Mount Tabor, full of bliss and full of sleep, is typical. Oriental legends, indeed, abound in suggestions of the activity and the delightfulness of sleep, and its allied conditions. Al Farabi, the philosopher who spoke seventy languages, composed a piece of music which was played before Seifeddoula, Sultan of Syria. Its first movement threw the prince and his courtiers into fits of laughter; its next melted all into tears; and the last, grandest of all, lulled even the performers to sleep. The story may be taken as an allegory showing that the nobler activities of the mind require the unconsciousness, not only of those in whom

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If the doctrine of the unconsciousness of pleasure be allowed to pass when stated mildly, it is difficult of acceptance when stated in full force.

The pleasure of trance.

Oriental legends in illustration of the pleasure of unconsciousness.

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they are awakened, but also of the awakeners. Sir William Jones tells us that there is a place called Pirisebz, or the Green Old Man, about four Persian leagues from Shiraz; that, according to the popular creed, a youth who will pass forty successive nights in Pirisebz without sleep, will infallibly become an excellent poet; and that Hafiz, the Persian poet, having accomplished the feat, became inspired. The argument seems to be that long want of sleep will induce the unconsciousness out of which the rarest pleasure and the highest thought arise. If we go still further east, we find in the Indian doctrine of Nirvana, and of absorption into the deity, a view of happiness in keeping with that which we are now considering. The Buddhist could seriously contemplate Nirvana as the height of his ambition. The grand object of science is to show the way to Nirvana. But this delightful Nirvana to which the Buddhist looked forward we can describe only as the extinction of thought, and the way to it lies through that state of ecstasy or trance to which the Buddhist gave the name of Dhyana. We may not be able to understand this; but at least we can see that the Buddhist who regarded pleasure as the object of supreme desire, and who regarded life as but a succession of pains, could soberly calculate on the paradox of bliss unconscious. And so the Brahmin philosophers,

Oriental
philosophy
in illustration
of the same doc-
trine.

who deemed it life to sit curled on a stone and to think of nothing, could reckon it as the highest happiness, that the soul of man, after passing through endless transmigrations and cycles of existence, should at length be swallowed up and lost in the Godhead. Here again we may not understand such felicity ; but we must recognise the fact that certain sages of the east were somehow able to connect in thought the fulness of joy with the absence of consciousness.

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I know not what else a modern poet—Charles Tennyson, brother to the Laureate—can mean when, in one of his sonnets, he writes thus firmly :

Illustrations
of the same
doctrine in
English
writers.

Call for aid
Of joy, that quenches being and its gall :
Sad ! that the consciousness of life must fade
Before the bliss it yields be felt at all.

Charles
Tennyson.

Here is a distinct and very bold assertion of the fact, on which I desire to insist, that knowledge and pleasure hold together in an inverse ratio ; that as the joy of life waxes, the consciousness of life wanes ; that as consciousness rises, pleasure sets ; that we recognise the presence of our bliss only when the bliss begins to fade ; and that the heaven of our existence begins where the consciousness of it passes away. Of pain we can say nothing similar. George Eliot, in her last novel, speaks of “ that higher consciousness which is known to bring higher pains.” And I am eager to seize upon that

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—George
Eliot.

phrase of hers, because, with all her depth of thinking, she is always clear, and writes what they who run may read. But if it be clear to say that the height of consciousness is the height of pain, and if, as George Eliot tells us, it is known that the higher the consciousness the higher the pain, then I have to point out that this clear statement and this known fact, are but the necessary converse of the hard statement and the little known fact, which I have been trying to make good, as to the unconsciousness of pleasure. If you accept without difficulty the statement as to the pain of much consciousness, need you strain at the converse statement, which is implied in it as to the unconsciousness of exceeding pleasure? If at such a statement you start back, then let me ask what are we to make of those passages in the poets wherein the connection between the drowsiness of trance and the perfection of enjoyment is firmly maintained. Take this from Keats, where he addresses the nightingale :

Keats.

My heart aches, and a *drowsy numbness* pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk ;
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Or better than all, let us consult Shakespeare : CHAPTER
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 "When love speaks," says Biron in that magnificent speech in which he sounds the praises of love,

The voice of all the gods
 Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.

Shake-
speare.

That is a statement surely at variance with all our common ideas of the manner in which intense delight is manifested. Nor is this the only passage in Shakespeare in which the same or similar effects are described. Thus Pericles has to say of fine music :

Most heavenly music !
 It nips me into listening, and thick slumber
 Hangs upon my eyes : let me rest.

But the speech of Pericles and the splendid outburst of Biron occur in two of Shakespeare's earliest plays. Let us therefore turn to one of his latest. Miranda fell asleep when her father told his story to her, and waking up again, exclaimed :

The strangeness of your story put
 Heaviness in me.

Whereupon Samuel Johnson asks the question, Johnson.
 "Why should a wonderful story produce sleep?" His answer is, "I believe experience will prove, that any violent agitation of the mind easily subsides in slumber, especially when, as in Prospero's relation, the last images are pleasing."

Still in all these expressions, quote from

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Word it
how we
may, the
doctrine is
startling
and needs
justifica-
tion.

Sir Wm.
Hamilton's
objection to
it.

whom we may, there is an extravagance shocking to common sense, and needing to be justified. Sir William Hamilton states the objection to the view of pleasure as unconscious in very decided language. "There are powers in man," he says, "the activities of which lie beyond the sphere of consciousness. But it is of the very essence of pleasure and pain to be felt, and there is no feeling out of consciousness." It is by no means clear, however, why consciousness should be essential to feeling and not to thought. I had to point out, when treating of the hidden soul, that Sir William Hamilton rejected the old Cartesian doctrine that we are, only in so far as we know; and that we know, only in so far as we know that we know. But if consciousness be not essential to the exercise of thought, nor yet to the possession of knowledge, it is difficult to understand why it should be essential to feeling, which is notoriously blind. If we can know, if we can think, and yet be unconscious, it would seem that much more can we feel. The blindness of passion, and the unconsciousness of instinct are proverbial, and the sense of pleasure has the same characteristic. Yet Hamilton's statement, as to the necessity of consciousness in pleasure, is virtually an assertion, that mere feeling implies the presence of a clearer light than reason, a fuller consciousness than knowledge.

Sir William Hamilton got into this way of thinking, doubtless, from following out with too much ingenuity that division of the mental powers which he learned from Kant. The division is threefold. We have faculties of knowledge, of feeling, and of endeavour—under this last named, including all those tendencies to act which we call will and desire. But not content with this rough and ready division, Sir William took a pleasure in showing how admirably it was ordered, so that each member of it implied an advance on the previous one. We may have knowledge for example, and there an end—knowledge without feeling, and without desire; and here we see the operation of the simplest act of mind. But we advance to a second division of the mental phenomena, when we discover that we have feelings of pleasure and pain. These feelings, he said, imply knowledge to produce them, but they do not necessarily imply anything further, as desire or will to act upon them. But when we reach to the third and last division of our faculties—the will, the desire, the tendency to act—these imply a feeling to set them in movement, as the feeling implies a knowledge to start from.* The speculation is pretty, but

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Sir Wm. Hamilton's view naturally follows from his division of the mental states.

Statement of his doctrine.

* "Let me illustrate this by an example. I see a picture. Now, first of all,—I am conscious of perceiving a certain complement of colours and figures,—I recognise what the object is. This is the phenomenon of Cognition or Knowledge. But this is not the only phenomenon of which I may be here conscious. I may

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Refutation
of his doc-
trine, as to
the chrono-
logical order
of our
feelings.

unsound. It is not true that knowledge always precedes the tendency to act. We act without knowledge and without feeling. The new-born child is endowed with many tendencies to action—tendencies which have no origin in antecedent feeling or knowledge. There is an action of plants and zoophytes, that has no root in feeling

experience certain affections in the contemplation of this object. If the picture be a masterpiece, the gratification will be unalloyed; but if it be an unequal production, I shall be conscious, perhaps, of enjoyment, but of enjoyment alloyed with dissatisfaction. This is the phenomenon of Feeling,—or of Pleasure and Pain. But these two phenomena do not yet exhaust all of which I may be conscious on the occasion. I may desire to see the picture long,—to see it often,—to make it my own, and, perhaps, I may will, resolve, or determine so to do. This is the complex phenomenon of Will and Desire.

“The faculty of knowledge is certainly the first in order, inasmuch as it is the *conditio sine qua non* of the others; and we are able to conceive a being possessed of the power of recognising existence, and yet wholly void of all feeling of pain and pleasure, and of all powers of desire and volition. On the other hand, we are wholly unable to conceive a being possessed of

feeling and desire, and, at the same time, without a knowledge of any object upon which his affections may be employed, and without a consciousness of these affections themselves.

“We can farther conceive a being possessed of knowledge and feeling alone—a being endowed with a power of recognising objects, of enjoying the exercise, and of grieving at the restraint, of his activity,—and yet devoid of that faculty of voluntary agency—of that conation, which is possessed by man. To such a being would belong feelings of pain and pleasure, but neither desire nor will, properly so called. On the other hand, however, we cannot possibly conceive the existence of a voluntary activity independently of all feeling; for voluntary conation is a faculty which can only be determined to energy through a pain or pleasure,—through an estimate of the relative worth of objects.”—*Hamilton's Metaphysica*, vol. i. pp. 183, 184, 188.

or in knowledge. And whereas Sir William Hamilton makes knowledge the base of mental life, and the endeavour to act as its pinnacle, the very reverse is the fact. Man begins like a plant to act without knowledge, and at length by cultivation he ceases to act blindly,—comes to act with deliberation. And so likewise in the order of development is feeling in advance of knowledge. We do not necessarily know first, and then find our knowledge bud and bourgeon into feeling. We feel before we know. How often have I referred to Shakespeare's couplet :

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Love is too young to know what conscience is ;
But who knows not, conscience is born of love ?

Wordsworth speaks of the enjoyment of a plant which yet has no consciousness :

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

If these views be correct, then, in opposition to Sir William Hamilton, the existence within us of hidden pleasure, that is a hidden feeling, ought to be more easy of acceptance than that of hidden thought. If we can believe in hidden thought, much more in hidden pleasure. But even granting that it is easier to conceive the existence of latent thought than of latent pleasure; still Locke's argument holds good that if the one is naught so is the other. In the chapter on the Hidden Soul, I had to mention that Leibnitz, the great opponent of Locke, was the first modern philosopher

It follows that Hamilton, who believes in the existence of hidden thought, ought much more to believe in the reality of hidden feeling.

CHAPTER XIII. to render intelligible the doctrine of a latent activity in the mind. But in Locke's system of philosophy, the doctrine of a concealed activity could have no place. Accordingly we find him denying strenuously that, in sound sleep, the mind thinks, or in any way moves; and one of his arguments is, that if it can think, then also it can be pleased. "I grant," he says, "that the soul in a waking man is never without thought, because it is the condition of being awake: but whether sleeping without dreaming be not an affection of the whole man, mind as well as body, may be worth a waking man's consideration; it being hard to conceive that any should think and not be conscious of it. If the soul doth think in a sleeping man without being conscious of it, I ask, whether during such thinking it have any pleasure or pain, or be capable of happiness or misery? I am sure the man is not any more than the bed or earth he lies on; for to be happy or miserable without being conscious of it seems to me utterly inconsistent and impossible. Or if it be possible that the soul can, whilst the body is sleeping, have its thinking, enjoyments, and concerns, its pleasure or pain, apart, which the man is not conscious of, nor partakes in,—it is certain that Socrates asleep and Socrates awake is not the same person; but his soul when he sleeps, and Socrates the man, consisting of body and soul when he is waking, are two persons; since

Locke's
answer to
Hamilton
by antici-
pation.

waking Socrates has no knowledge of, or concern-
 ment for, that happiness or misery of his soul
 which it enjoys alone by itself, while he sleeps,
 without perceiving anything of it; any more
 than he has for the happiness or misery of a man
 in the Indies, whom he knows not. For if we
 take wholly away all consciousness of our actions
 and sensations, especially of pleasure and pain,
 and the concernment that accompanies, it will
 be hard to know wherein to place personal iden-
 tity.”

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This argument is successful as against
 Hamilton, who maintains that though we have
 hidden thought we cannot have hidden pleasure.
 But it was met and set aside by Dr. Isaac Watts,
 who answered it at all points. The one point,
 however, in his answer, which is of importance
 to the present discussion, is that in which he re-
 fers to the pleasure of sleep: “There seems to be
 a constant sense of pleasure in sound sleep, which
 appears by a reluctancy to be disturbed in that
 pleasure, and strong tendencies to re-enjoy it
 when we are suddenly awakened; this is at least
 as demonstrable as that we have no consciousness
 at all.” It is one of Hamilton’s arguments to
 show the acting of the mind in the soundest sleep
 that when we are suddenly awakened out of it we
 find ourselves checked in a train of thought. But
 I have not the least fear of being contradicted in
 saying, that far more often, when thus awakened,

Locke’s
 argument
 successful
 against
 Hamilton’s,
 but really
 unsound,
 and refuted
 by Watt.

Hamilton’s
 own argu-
 ments in
 proof of
 hidden
 thought
 used to
 prove the
 existence
 of hidden
 feeling.

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we find ourselves disturbed in the pleasure of repose. If it be a fact, that when roughly shaken out of sound sleep, we may always discover ourselves preoccupied in a train of thought, at least it is a fact which few of us have observed. But there is no man, however stupid, who has not observed that, when profound slumber is invaded, he is balked of his pleasure. The sluggard turns over and prays for "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Is it possible to resist the argument that if, by observing how the mind is engaged when we wake from deep sleep, we may convince ourselves that in a state of profound unconsciousness it thinks, we may with not less logic conclude from similar premises that in profound unconsciousness it can have a real pleasure?

Here we come to the prime difference between pleasure and pain—the one unconscious, the other conscious.

Here we have the crowning point of difference between pleasure and pain. We always know when we are wretched; we do not always know when we are happy. Which of us has ever been blamed for ignorance of our misery? which of us has *not* been chidden for ignorance of our joys? We underrate, we overlook, we forget our blessings; we seldom underrate, or overlook, or forget our troubles. A man's life flows on smoothly in the sun; he does not know how happy he is; at least in all his felicity we never hear a word of it. But some day it chances that he catches a cold, or his boot pinches

him, or his dinner is a little behindhand, or some other trifle chequers the calm joy of his life; instantly he knows and prates of his annoyance. The chief part of his pleasure is a modest, retiring, hidden pleasure; and he knows not how happy he has been, until his happiness is gone. Nay more, as I have already suggested, the very thinking of his happiness destroys it or scares it away. Eurydice, our greatest joy, goes back to hell, if, Orpheus-like, we turn to look at her; and all our joys are somewhat like those shy creatures that, whenever they are watched, roll themselves into a ball, and pretend to be dead.

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The analysis of pleasure then, in this and the two previous chapters has led to the following conclusions:—that there is a painful pleasure; that there is a pure pleasure; that there is a hidden pleasure; and that in these three descriptions of pleasure we may trace the sway of three several laws or ruling principles,—activity, harmony, and unconsciousness, which are all more or less essential to the begetting of enjoyment. In each state or stage of pleasure also we have found that any attempt to define the nature of enjoyment lands us in a curious contradiction. We cannot reconcile language to the fact, which is nevertheless a fact, that the orbit of pleasure may be a succession of pains. Again, we cannot

Summary.

CHAPTER XIII. — reconcile language to the fact, which is nevertheless a fact, that pleasure, the very essence of which is activity, becomes perfect and painless in repose. Lastly, we cannot reconcile language to the fact, which is nevertheless a fact, that most of our pleasure—often the best of it—is hidden out of sight, and that we are ignorant of our own felicity. Thus in every notion of pleasure which we can form, we learn to defy reason. Our knowledge can be reduced to logic; not so feeling.

Continuation of the summary in a statement of the relation of hidden pleasure to art.

But the summary is deficient, for we have still to discern the relation of hidden pleasure to art. We have seen that painful pleasure, wherein the sense of action is dominant, finds its artistic reflex in the drama and whatever is dramatic. We have seen that pure pleasure, wherein the sense of repose and perfect harmony prevails, finds its artistic reflex in the beautiful, and whatever forms of art, such as sculpture, aim chiefly at the beautiful. And now in turn comes the inquiry: What is the relation of hidden pleasure to art? How is art moved by our hidden pleasure? How is hidden pleasure moved by art?

The most vital of all the elements of art.

Here, at last, we reach the most wonderful, the most vital, of all the elements of art—the element of mystery, that sense of the unseen, that possession of the far-away, that glimmer of infinity, that incommunicable secret, that know-

not-what, of which I tried to give some account in the first volume of this work. It is the suggestion of this unknown something in art which we are in the habit of signalling as in a peculiar sense poetical. As we have seen that an artistic effect may be dramatic and yet not beautiful; so it may be very beautiful and yet not poetical. Observe the passages which people select as most entitled to the name of poetry. These are not necessarily instinct with dramatic passion; nor are they of necessity beautiful; but they are always weird. When Petruchio says to the tailor :

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How the know-not-what is distinct from the dramatic and the beautiful.

Thou liest, thou thread, thou thimble;
Thou yard, three-quarters, half-yard, quarter, nail;
Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket, thou ——
Braved in mine own house with a skein of thread?
Away, thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant,
Or I shall so bemeate thee with thy yard,
As thou shalt think of prating whilst thou liv'st.
I tell thee, I, that thou hast marred her gown;

Examples of the dramatic which are neither beautiful nor weird.

or when Lady Constance bursts upon the Archduke of Austria with :

War! war! No peace! Peace is to me a war!
O Lymoges! O Austria! thou dost shame
That bloody spoil: thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward;
Thou little valiant, great in villany;
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!
Thou fortune's champion, that dost never fight
But when her humorous ladyship is by
To teach thee safety! thou art perjured too,
And sooth'st up greatness. What a fool art thou,
A ramping fool, to brag, and stamp, and swear,
Upon my party! Thou cold-blooded slave,

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Hast thou not spoke like thunder on my side?
 Been sworn my soldier? bidding me depend
 Upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength?
 And dost thou now fall over to my foes?
 Thou wear a lion's hide! doff it for shame,
 And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs:

all this is full of passion, and highly dramatic;
 but it is neither beautiful nor weird. On the
 other hand, when Southey sings:

Examples
 of the
 beautiful
 which are
 neither
 dramatic
 nor weird.

How beautiful is night!
 A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
 No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
 Breaks the serene of heaven:
 In full-orbed glory yonder moon divine
 Rolls through the dark blue depths;
 Beneath her steady ray,
 The desert circle spreads
 Like the round ocean girdled with the sky.
 How beautiful is night!

or when Milton:

Alas! what boots it with incessant care
 To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,
 And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
 Were it not better done, as others use,
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
 Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
 Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 (That last infirmity of noble mind)
 To scorn delights and live laborious days;
 But the fair guerdon, when we hope to find,
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
 Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
 And slits the thin-spun life:

there is nothing here dramatic, nothing weird,
 although it is all most beautiful. And so, lastly,
 there are weird effects of art which need not be
 dramatic, and which are not always beautiful.

Here is a piece which is neither dramatic nor beautiful; but it is weird,—the ballad of *The* ^{XIII.}
Twa Corbies :

As I was walking all alane
I heard twa corbies making a mane;
The tane unto the tither did say,
“ Whar sall we gang and dine the day ? ”
“ In behint yon auld fauld dyke,
I wot there lies a new-slain knight :
And naebody kens that he lies there
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.
“ His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady’s taen anither mate ;
Sae we may mak our dinner sweet.
“ Ye ’ll sit on his white hause bane,
And I’ll pick out his bonny blue e’en ;
Wi’ ae lock o’ his gowden hair,
We’ll theek our nest when it grows bare.
“ Mony a ane for him maks mane,
But nane sall ken whar he is gane.
O’er his white banes, when they are bare
The wind sall blaw for evermair.”

Examp-
s
of the
weird
or
poetical,
which are
neither
dramatic
nor beau-
tiful.

The same character belongs to Coleridge’s de-
scription of the silent sea : it is neither dramatic
nor beautiful, but weird and poetical :

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
’Twas sad as sad could be ;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea.
All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand
No bigger than the moon.
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion ;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

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Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink ;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot : O Christ !
That ever this should be !
Yea slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night :
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt blue, and green, and white.

How the
weird or
know-not-
what com-
bines with
the dra-
matic and
with the
beautiful.

It is almost needless to observe, however, that these art-effects which we feel to be in a peculiar sense weird and poetical, and which are connected most intimately with the hidden working of the mind, do not always appear in single blessedness, but combine easily and naturally with those which we know as dramatic and as beautiful. It is often difficult to wed the dramatic and the beautiful. They are so opposed that what is highly dramatic cannot be wrought into perfect beauty, and what is all beautiful cannot be made thoroughly dramatic. But there is no antagonism between that quality of art which we know as weird or poetical and the dramatic ; no antagonism between the weird and the beautiful. You may have any amount of dramatic action, and there is nothing to prevent its being weird. You may have symmetry the most perfect, beauty the most lovely, and not only is there nothing to prevent its being weird—it has

a native tendency to become so, to appeal to the secret heart, to ally itself with unknown delights, and to win from us epithets in which we recognise it as a dream of enchantment. Therefore that quality of art which we understand as the know-not-what, which comes of the hidden soul and which appeals to a hidden pleasure, is the most constant of the characteristics of art. It underlies all art. You can have great art which is not dramatic, and you can have great art which is not beautiful; but you cannot have great art which is not weird. It is true that I have only a few pages back quoted some passages of poetry which are dramatic without being either beautiful or weird, and which again are beautiful without being either dramatic or weird. But these are only bits removed from the context in order to illustrate certain definitions. A poet is allowed to relieve his lights with shadow. He may be prosaic on this page, if poetical on the next. We are content with the pleasures of plain truth in one scene if we are to be sated with beauty in another. Passing, however, from these details to the works viewed in their totality, we always find that they must pierce to the Hidden Soul and engage it in Hidden Pleasure. They need not always be dramatic; and they need not always be beautiful; but they must always suggest the incommunicable secret of the know-not-what.

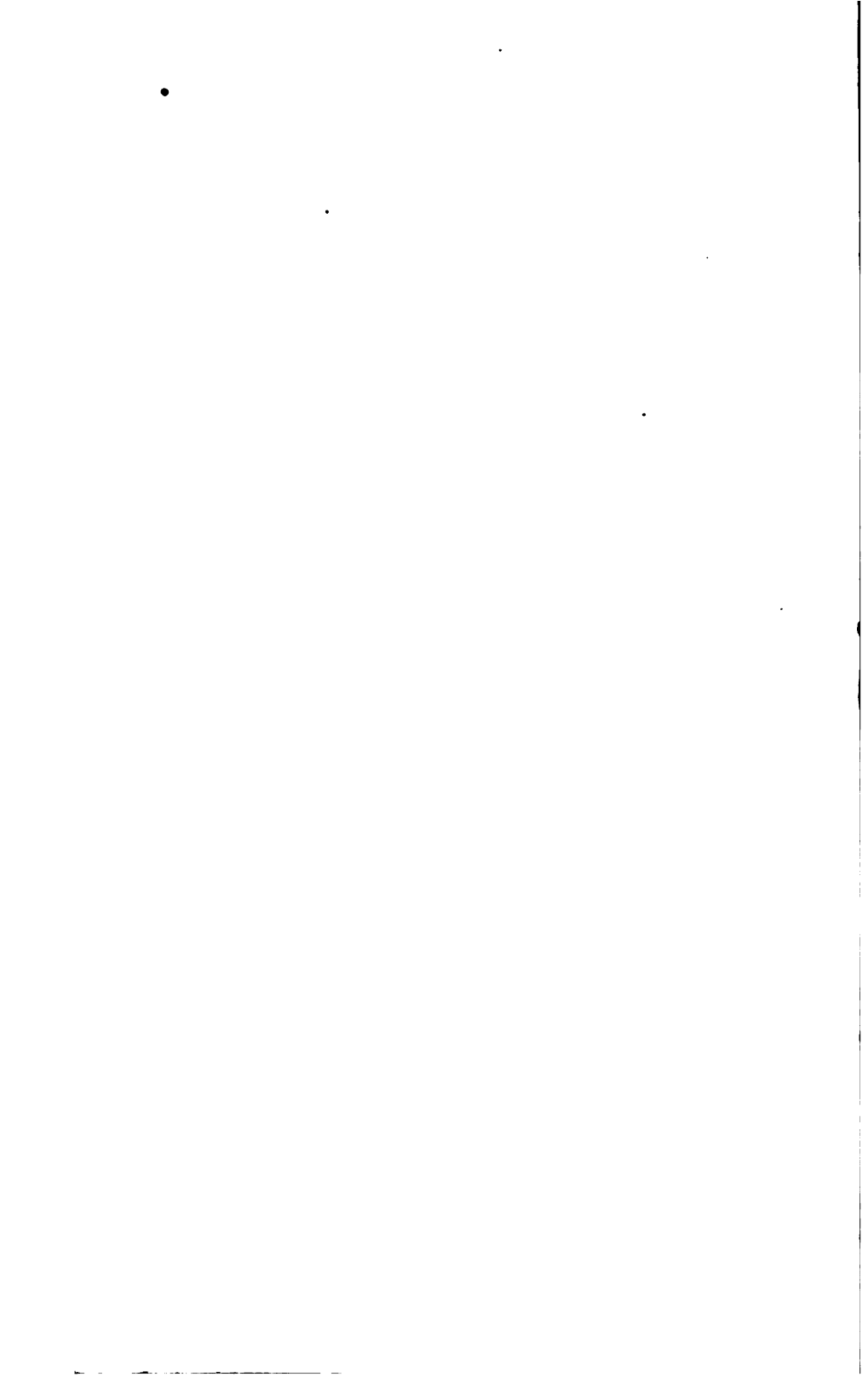
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A caution to
the reader as
to the use of
terms in this
chapter.

I have only to say, in conclusion, that since this chapter contains many paradoxical expressions, I hope no reader will pronounce judgment upon them unless he has done me the honour to make himself acquainted with those chapters of the first volume in which they are explained. When a man talks of the Hidden Soul, and Hidden Pleasure, incommunicable secrets and know-not-whats, he seems to be on the verge of nonsense; and if the reader who stumbles upon the present chapter will be kind enough to go back to the previous volume, in which its paradoxes are more deliberately set forth, I undertake that—whether he agree with me or not—at least he will not accuse me of obscurity.



THE ETHICS OF ART.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE ETHICS OF ART.

NEAR the beginning of this treatise, CHAPTER
XIV. when pointing out the various lines Retrospect
of the argu-
ment. of comparison which criticism, to be really scientific, ought to pursue, I stated that the present instalment of my work should be mainly psychological, for that nothing is so much wanted in criticism as a correct psychology. It is in art as in life, and it is in criticism more than all—we know little, and our little knowledge is of little use to us until we know our own minds. Accordingly I have at some length attempted to ascertain what is the mind of art. We have touched on nearly all the psychological questions relating to criticism which need elucidation, and which criticism must fully master before it can with effect The discus-
sion hitherto
has been re-
stricted to
psychology. advance a step. And now it may be expected,

CHAPTER XIV. in the course of this inquiry, that we should proceed to apply the principles which have thus been worked out to a solution of the great problems of criticism. That is a task which in due time will have to engage our attention ; but in the meantime it may be right to complete the psychological view of the subject. It is best that all the psychological questions should, as far as possible, be treated by themselves; and, therefore, although strictly an inquiry into the ethical influence of art ought, in point of time, to be the last of all critical discussions, it will be most convenient to attempt it now.

And to psychology belongs an inquiry into the ethics of art.

The question of supreme interest in art relates to ethics.

After all, the question of supreme interest in art, the question upon which depends our whole care for art is, What are its relations to life ; to life individual, to life national ; to the life here, to the life hereafter ? Is it divine as the lyre of Amphion, that raised the walls of Thebes ? or fatal as the fiddle of Nero, that warbled to the flames of Rome ? or is it neither the one nor the other—neither good nor bad—but a harmless, worthless plaything ; in poetry, what Malherbe suggests, a game of ninepins ; and in sculpture, what Newton supposed, a stone doll ; only so far to be scouted, if—as when the king Al Haquem, instead of fighting a battle loitered in his tent to mend the notes of his albogon—it lure us from more serious work ? Although these are the questions which in formal criticism

we discuss last of all, they are the questions which in our own minds we settle first of all. Before we begin to criticise, we have the foregone conclusion in our minds that criticism will not be wasted upon unworthy objects. And it may be well, therefore, before we enter upon criticism proper, to articulate and reason out our belief as to the moral influence of art. Is it good, or is it bad, or is it nought?

We may at once dismiss the idea that art is a toy to be tossed aside like a toy. It may have sprung out of trifles. There are fables which trace painting to the shadow of a candle, and music to the stroke of a hammer, Corinthian capitals to acanthus leaves overhanging a basket, and cathedral naves to forest avenues. But the seed which was small of size and of promise has grown to a mighty tree that spreads abroad its branches, and shelters under them civilization itself. It is in art that the history of the world is enshrined—almost in art alone that the far past survives. When we draw near to modern times there may be found in works of mere utility the monuments of what has been : but as musical notes carry further than common sounds, so the more we go back we discover that of the useful arts there are few relics, and that it is to the fine arts we owe the record of grey antiquity. In Rome where the people are degraded and inert, where the Cæsars are forgotten and the

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endures and
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Pope is moribund, the Antinous is as beautiful and rounded as ever, and the Dying Gladiator is as keen in his expression of agony as when first chiselled. Art is as green and as fresh there as the people are withered and effete. The pomp of empires has faded in their purple dyes, the bravery of armies has gone with the flashing of their spears, the busy hum of countless generations has come like a cloud and cloud-like fled. What remains when the bones of the warrior lie undistinguished from the wreck of his horse, and when the dust of kings is of less account than the lithe worm which inhabits it? There remain the songs of the people, the engravings upon their friezes, the marbles they loved, their carved cups, their painted vases, their curious coins, their seals, their palaces, the altars of their gods and the tombs of their friends. The bard, the painter, the sculptor, the potter, the architect, the musician—theirs is the cunning that outlasts time, and supplies us with the only sure fragments of ancient life. The statesman and the soldier, the merchant and the mechanic, leave but few marks: they live chiefly in the artist, and with his handiwork they die.

The memorial character of art

Many were the heroes before Agamemnon, says Horace, yet all are forced into the long night for want of a bard. This has been so often repeated that it has lost some of its meaning. But it is no rhetorical flourish: it is a

fact. People have lately been complaining that there is no monument to Shakespeare, and have been proposing to build him one. Those who make the proposal overlook the most striking characteristic of that which they desire to honour. The essence of art is a secret, but it is an importunate secret that insists on being flaunted before us in visible and attractive disguises. It is a secret that demands to be seen and to be known. Its monument is like that of Wren in his cathedral—circumspice. Raise pyramids to your warriors and your statesmen who leave no monuments behind them, and after they have lived their lives are as a wind that is past. Nelson and Wellington sleep side by side under the dome of St. Paul's; but where is the visible semblance of their power as of Wren's? There is nothing to be seen at Trafalgar—nothing on the field of Waterloo. Of all Pitt's vast combinations there remain only the ugly columns of the national debt. Build rows of stately columns for these men if you will, but not for men who build their own memorials. Art is its own remembrancer. Men's works of labour die; their works of pleasure live. Their science pales, age after age is forgotten, and age after age has to be freshened; but the secret thinking of humanity, embalmed in art, survives as nothing else in life survives. And the argument seems to hold

CHAPTER good, that what is thus enduring cannot be
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Illustrated
 in the least
 important
 of the arts.

The art of
 the potter

I will pick out that one of the fine arts which is reckoned of the least importance—that artistic taste which is most frequently decried as frivolous—the art of the potter, and the taste for old china. Let me ask—Is porcelain, in very truth, a bauble? As gardeners like to point out that gardening was the first man's trade, potters are fond of tracing their art to a still higher antiquity, and declare that the first member of their guild was the Deity himself, who moulded Adam out of clay. It is needless, however, to insist on such an origin in order to prove the dignity of the potter's calling and the worth of his toil. His productions are, indeed, to all seeming, the most fragile of human works, and they are often turned to commonest uses. But if they are the most fragile, they are also the most enduring, of the monuments of human art; and if they are common, they sometimes derive from that very circumstance a higher historical rank. Men have had their epitaphs written in brass, and their effigies made immortal in bronze; their deeds have been inscribed in sacred books, and etched on the walls of stately palaces; fanes have been built for the perpetuity of their names, and mausoleums for the safety of their ashes. No contrivance has been spared by which an eternity of fame might be secured; and what has been

the result? The result is, that after all our efforts to render imperishable the record of our lives, nothing has been found more enduring than the fictile vase which a light knock will break into innumerable pieces. Brass and iron soon rust; silver and gold are a temptation to the spoiler; stone crumbles and paper decays; but the despised clay of the potter, if only deposited in some quiet corner, survives all changes of history and chemistry, and even in its fragments preserves some traces of the hand which formed it. At once the creature of a day and the heir of immortality, man finds in the modelled brick or turned vase, dug out of the same earth, a monument that in its fragility and its permanence represents with peculiar force its maker's tenure of existence. The Nebuchadnezzars and Sennacheribs of old are in their graves, and are no more to mankind, save as they fertilize the roots of trees and are brushed in comminuted dust from the garments of the wayworn; but the impress of their thumbs remains on the clay tablets where, still moist and unbaked, the kings of Babylon set their seals. The psalmist, in the depth of despair, likened himself to a potsherd; but the potsherd lives for aye.

Let the fine arts be no more than black arts; let us, if you will, remember but the immoralities with which the craft of the potter is associated; let us think of the famous Henri Deux

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able.Summary
statement
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ness of art.

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 — ware only as consecrated to the memory of Diana of Poitiers ; let us not talk of the porcelain of Sèvres, except as calling to mind Madame de Pompadour, who nursed it into fame, and Madame Dubarry, who gave her name to its finest colour. Still to live is somewhat, and the arts, which stand when all else fall, are worthy of serious regard. The truth is, however, that they thus stand because they are worthy to stand. Art is a great power, for it has to do with great ideas, which are in this the antipodes of the desert mountain, that to touch them is to live ; and if so much as a beast go near them it shall surely live. Merely to look upon them is to partake of their being.

The immense intellect expended in art.

Perhaps it is needless to dwell upon this point. Yet before leaving it, I would say one word on the immense intellect which has been devoted to the lifelong practice of art. The names of Leonardo da Vinci, of Milton, and of Goethe, represent men of gigantic stature, who may be selected from the circle of mighty artists, for this particular reason, that possessing enormous power, and showing the ability to pluck fame from almost any occupation, they deliberately made art their chosen path. Milton, for instance, was a poet—but he was more. He was a statesman—but he was more. He was a great religious thinker and worker—but again he was more. He was one of the

Illustrated in the case of Milton.

most learned men of his time, he was certainly the most accomplished, he was perhaps the most masterly, Latin writer since the classical age had passed away. To state the matter shortly—he was the most complete man to be found in his day. Others were but fractions of men—he alone was an integer. In what other character can we find such an astonishing assemblage of qualities and sympathies, many of them apparently opposite; austerity combined with sensibility, rare tolerance combined in his maturity with dogmatism, learning combined with thought, poetry combined with politics, purity combined with passion, piety combined with the fullest enjoyment of earth?

The mere union of the poetical temperament with the active habit is rare; but where in the whole history of the world shall we find such a poet such a man of action? For among actions, and among the greatest, the most prolific, of all actions, is to be classed that noble speech of his for the liberty of unlicensed printing. It is rare also to find prodigious learning accompanied by large powers of thought. In him, on the contrary, we see a soaring grandeur of idea, which no amount of erudition could drag down. A man so able and so furnished must have been very decided in his own opinions, and he might have despised the opinions of other men; such, however, was

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The character of
Milton.

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the deep sympathy of his nature, that in the midst of intolerance, he was the foremost of all men to insist upon the perfect liberty of thought. And to crown all, though he rejoiced in a strong nature, though he was of the poet's impulsive complexion, though we find that in everything he undertook he was swept along with a rushing wind of passion, yet such was his self-control, such the exquisite balance of his faculties, that, in practice, excess was unknown to him, and even in hot youth his daily life was a marvel of purity; while in composition, it is amazing to watch the ease with which he can stay his thunder in mid volley, often interposing an elaborate parenthesis between the breathless pauses of some tremendous sentence, which ordinary writers would have been in a fury to finish.

His many
accomplish-
ments.

People talk of the myriad-minded Shakespeare, and the many-sided Goethe. No doubt there were many things done by Shakespeare which to Milton would have been impossible. Milton was not many-sided in the sense that he could easily adapt himself to every variety of character, from grave to gay, and from high to low, so that he could give the talk of a tinker not less readily than the chant of a poet, the wail of a widow, and the defiance of a mailed warrior. But he was, on the other hand, many-sided in a sense to which Shakespeare could lay no claim. Shakespeare was only a pos-

sible politician, a possible man of action, a possible theologian, a possible scholar. Milton had actually, and to the height of his great soul, a veritable connection, as well as a sympathetic union with the whole life of his time. As a citizen, as a churchman, as a student, as a man, Shakespeare's life is almost entirely a blank to us. In all these relations, and not less as a poet, Milton stands out clearly to view; and stands out, if not as the most bustling figure in the scene, yet as the manliest, kingliest, godliest. So that if any one choosing to narrate the history of his day, determined to gather the interest of his story around some central character, and for this purpose were to select the man then living of largest soul, of most varied culture, connected with his age by the greatest number of ties, and more likely than all his contemporaries to live in the estimation of the future—that man must of necessity be John Milton. Such an one chose poetry for his calling, and his name, not to speak of a hundred others that might be added to it, redeems art from the imputation of pettiness.

There is no difficulty so far. The difficulty is not to see that art is a power, but to say whether this power be as good as it is great. Is there wisdom as well as delight in it? What are its precise bearings on the every-day business of earth? and does it fit or unfit us for a higher

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than our worldly life? That these questions are not easily answered is proved by the contrariety of opinion to which they have given rise—honest opinion too, and the opinion sometimes of enlightened men. The opinion of proserers however able, and of small bigots however good, is of no weight, and may at once be put out of the account. No man abler in his walk than Sir Edward Coke; but who thinks twice of his declaration, that these five classes of men, chemists, monopolists, concealers, promoters and rhyming poets, are worthy of perdition? Of still less moment is the cavilling of such a weak wit as Stephen Gosson, who had the audacity to dedicate to Sir Philip Sidney the treatise in which, on the very title page, he ranked poets with pipers and players among the caterpillars of a commonwealth. It is wholly different when a strong poetical nature gives in to like doubts; when Macaulay tells us that no one can be a poet or enjoy poetry without a certain unsoundness of mind; when Malherbe, himself a poet of no mean fame, says, “Je ne fais pas plus de cas d’un bon poète que d’un bon joueur de quilles;” when Cowley, addressing Richard Crashaw, asserts that the union of poetical gifts with godliness is almost impossible:

Doubts expressed even by men of poetical temperament.

Poet and saint! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred names of Earth and Heaven!
The hardest, rarest union which can be,
Next that of Godhead and humanity!

More important however than any of these are the names of Plato and of Bacon. Plato began his career as a poet, and shows in his writings that he really enjoyed poetry; but he was all against art, for its want of truth and for its devotion to pleasure. Bacon too had a strong poetic bias, but he resisted it with all his might, and could never quite reconcile it to his reason that poetry was other than a mental debauch. Thus the two men, who are most remarkable in all history for the combination of poetical with philosophical gifts, are as moralists the enemies of poetry.

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The lover of art must be staggered by condemnation coming from such men, even though when he looks into the arguments they advance, he find that they are not cogent. In most questions of morality, the reasons by which men arrive at their conclusions are of little importance; what is of importance is the fact that they reach certain results and rest in them. Men ride their arguments as children their horses. They put their legs over a stick, run far afield, and make believe that the stick has carried them. We attain to certain conclusions in religion or in morals, and we fondly cherish the idea that our arguments have borne us. So Bacon more than once speaks of the evil of usury, because it runs on Sundays. So Northbrooke proved the sin of gaming from the third com-

These doubts important even if unreasonable.

The value to be attached to assertion apart from argument.

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Examples of
assertion
combined
with false
argument.

mandment, because to draw lots in idleness is to take the name and providence of God in vain. So, in a grave sermon, Francis Meres (the same to whom we are indebted for the earliest critical mention of Shakespeare) made out addition and multiplication to be God's arithmetic, because when he had made Adam and Eve, he bade them increase and multiply; but subtraction and division to be the devil's arithmetic, because the arch enemy subtracted Delilah from Samson, and divided Michal from David. So Leibnitz hoped that the Jesuit Grimaldi could convert the emperor of China to Christianity by his binary arithmetic, in which the idea of God creating the world out of nothing is figured by unity combining with zero to form every possible number. So John Foster proved that sleeping too long is constructive blasphemy, for by abridging our conscious existence we tell God that he created us too soon; and worse than atheism, for whereas the atheist believes only in future annihilation, we choose in this present world not to be. So a German divine, quoted by Colenso, points out that cattle-keeping, music, and smithery were first practised by descendants of Cain, and argues that therefore music and the arts have a Cainite element which renders them accursed from their birth. So Tertullian argues that the enemy of mankind set players to wear the buskin, that they might

give Christ the lie, who said that no man can add a cubit to his stature. So Plato proves that art is false, because the thing it copies is itself but a copy of the Divine idea; and that its effect is bad, because it aims at pleasure, which is not less unknown to the gods than pain. I have said that the arguments of men are as the horses of children. We arrive at certain conclusions we know not how, and any dead branch of reason will carry us there again. When we advance further in the present discussion we shall actually find such a fact as this—that in modern times the evil effect of poetry is demonstrated by the very same argument which in old times was employed in proof of its good influence. In sooth, it is not argument but assertion that rules the world, and manifold assertion, even without argument, is itself an argument, for it may indicate a general feeling, and a general feeling may be entitled to weight.*

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Vitality of
assertion.

But that is just the question. To what weight, apart from the reasons which they urge, is the multiplied assertion of great men and good, that

On the as-
sertion that
art is a
poison.

* Bacon makes an incisive remark on the tenacity of all doubt. "When a doubt is once received, men labour rather how to keep it a doubt still, than how to solve it; and, accordingly, bend their wits. Of this

we see the familiar example in lawyers and scholars, both which, if they have once admitted a doubt, it goeth ever after authorised for a doubt."—*Advancement of Learning*.

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art is a poison, entitled? The poetical mood has been diagnosed by many thinkers as a disease—some form of madness; and the masterpieces of art have been condemned as crimes—every crime under heaven. What are all these assertions worth as assertions? Sir Edward Coke had an excellent aphorism, that to track an error to its fountain head is the best method of exposing it; and we shall know the value, which is to be attached to the assertions referred to if we can trace them to their source in human nature. It is no doubt a great fact that many prophets and sages have ascended each his peculiar hill, to fling down curses on art; but it is a fact which must be resolved into a still more general phenomenon. The condemnation of poetry is but a part of the condemnation pronounced upon all pleasure. We are all more intolerant of pleasure than even of opinion. If we desire to crush the opinions of our neighbours, we at least hug our own; but the tyranny of taste is still more oppressive, for we not only frown on the pleasure of a neighbour—we are often dissatisfied with our own; it is our nature to pant after the bliss which is in store, and to find rottenness in that which we possess. We do not see the jokes of our ancestors. An Englishman imagines that it requires a surgical operation to make a Scotchman understand wit. A Frenchman long ago declared that the Eng-

The condemnation of art is but part of the condemnation passed upon all pleasure.

lish take their pleasure sadly. A ban goes forth now against the delights of knowledge; now against marriage; now wine is accursed; now poetry, as the wine of devils, shares that curse. We are restless beings who are never long happy ourselves, and will not let the world be happy in its own way. Blissful, we are at war with bliss. We cannot long abide that highest joy of communion with the Father of our spirits, and all lesser joys cloy the taste and weary us with their vanity. The frequent condemnation of art is, I say, but a part of this general law by which, at some time or other, we malign our own joys, and almost always despise the joys of our neighbours. The discontent of the human heart and its egotism are two main characteristics that have an enormous but unacknowledged influence on our estimate of pleasure, indeed, on all our moral judgments. Pleasure is the most conceited thing on earth: nothing like our own choice morsel. Ozanam, the mathematician, said it was for the Sorbonne to discuss, for the Pope to decide, and for the mathematician to go to heaven in a perpendicular line. If Plato turned the poets out of his republic, he made the philosophers kings in it. This is the egotism of pleasure; as in Bacon's objection to poetry that it is the pleasure of a lie, we see chiefly the discontent of it. The prevalence of such facts leads us straight to the

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The asceticism of human nature.

And the egotism of pleasure.

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conclusion, that the mere statement of dislike to art, and the mere assertion of its moral wrong, must—aloof from intelligible reasoning—go for nought. It is but part of a widespread asceticism, which clings like a parasite to the sense of enjoyment, always irritates it, and sometimes sucks it dry. We may reject assertion, therefore, and insist on dealing only with facts and arguments.

What we
are to un-
derstand by
the moral
influence of
art.

Now, in pushing any inquiry into the moral influence of art, I suppose it is almost needless to begin by explaining that here there is no question as to the direct lesson which art *professes* to teach, if it make any profession at all. Its worth is not to be measured by the lower—that is, the more palpable order of utilities. Bartholin declared that ailments, chiefly the falling sickness, were curable by rhymes; Dr. Serenus Sammonicus offered to cure a quartan ague by laying the fourth book of the Iliad under the patient's head; Virgil was once believed to be an excellent fortune-teller. The moral usefulness which we expect from art bears no sort of resemblance to these physical utilities. Any one who will look for conscious moral aim in art, will find it nearly purposeless. The troubadour gave to his calling the name of *El Gai Saber*, the gay science. To conclude, however, that nobleness of tendency may not flourish under gaiety of mien, is to imitate the poor

satyr, puzzled to understand how a man could blow hot and cold with one and the same mouth. The avowed object of the poet is pleasure, and he seems to have his eye set only on present enjoyment, but it is like a rower, that looks one way and pulls another. Shenstone paints the village schoolmistress as disguised in looks profound. On the contrary, it was a reproach to the greatest of all teachers that he was a wine-bibber and a friend of sinners. The artist has still less the air of a teacher, and if he puts on the air of one, it sometimes happens that his influence is directly the reverse of his precepts.

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Take the novelist, Richardson, for example, as he appears in his earliest work, which Fielding could not refrain from satirising. No book has ever been written in which there is such a parade of morality as in *Pamela*: nevertheless, it is a mischievous work that makes one sympathise with the disgust which it excited in Fielding. There is no end to the morals which it professes to instil—morals for husbands, morals for wives, morals for parents, morals for children, morals for masters, morals for servants. Ostensibly we are taught to admire the strength of virtue, and to note the reward of victory; but to understand the virtue, we are introduced to all the arts of the deceiver. There is a continual handling of pitch, in order to see how

Sermonising
art often the
reverse of
what it pro-
fesses to be.

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well it can be washed off: there is a continual drinking of poison, in order to show the potency of the antidote. The girl resists the seducer; but the pleasure of the story consists in entering into all the details of the struggle, and seeing how the squire takes liberties with the maid. When our senses have been duly tickled by these glowing descriptions, our consciences are soothed by a thick varnish of moral reflections and warnings that are entirely out of place. Notwithstanding its great show of virtue, such an exhibition seems to have a much more immoral tendency than the frank sinfulness of Fielding's works. "Here is my hero," says Fielding, "full of wickedness and good heart: come and read of his doings." "Here is my heroine, full of virtue," says Richardson: "come and read of all her goodness." But the descriptions of both are equally indelicate. It may be safely taken for granted that the force of Richardson's preachings goes for very little in comparison with the force of his pictures.

The influence and position of Richardson.

In justice, however, to so great a writer as Richardson, I should take particular care to state that these strictures apply only to his earliest work. In all his novels there is a parade of moral laws, but that parade is not offensive and hollow in the later ones. Notwithstanding the tediousness of its commencement, it is not risking much to say that *Clarissa*

Harlowe is the finest novel in the English language. No one thinks of Richardson, with all his weak vanity, as a great genius; yet we have to recognise the existence of this curious phenomenon that, as a grig like Boswell produced our best piece of biography, so a squat, homely burgess, who fed his mind on "says he" and "says she," produced what is still our best novel. It is not Richardson, however, that we have now to do with. The point I wish to bring out is this, that it is not moral sermons which constitute the moral force of a novel: it is example. Much of this example is consciously followed. Thus Molière ridicules those Precious ones—Madelon, who chose the name of Polixene, and Cathos, who would be called Aminte, out of the novels of Madame de Scudery. Madelon will not have a lover who does not woo her in the style of the romances, as Cyrus wooed Mandane, and as Aronce wooed Clélie. This conscious following of examples is generally ridiculous, and it is less vital than the unconscious obedience to it which can be also traced. It would be easy in several instances to show the silent influence which Richardson has exerted through the example of his personages, and I may mention one. The influence of his mode of novel-writing may be traced in the journals of Madame D'Arblay, better known as Miss Burney. He makes Pamela tell her own story in a series of letters and diaries.

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That moral sermons do not constitute the moral force of art.

The silent influence of Richardson shown in M. D'Arblay.

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But to tell the story effectively in this way, it is necessary to introduce into the letters and journals a good deal of information which naturally ought not to appear in them. The heroine, for example, is to appear lovely, and to have her praises sung. She is therefore forced to recite her own praises, and we find her making entries like this: "Mr. Peters whispered Lady Jones, as my master told me afterwards, 'Did you ever see such excellence, such prudence and discretion?' 'Never in my life,' said the other good lady. 'She will adorn,' she was pleased to say, 'her distinction.' 'Ay,' says Mr. Peters, 'she would adorn any station in life.'" Again, Lady Danvers says to her waiting-maid, of Pamela, who is present, and who is her sister-in-law: "'Did you ever hear anything prettier, more unaffected, sincere, free, easy?' 'No, madam,' says the waiting-maid, 'never in my life.'" Pamela is represented as a person of good sense and modesty, yet she repeats all this fulsome praise with the utmost simplicity. It was to some extent necessitated by the form of narrative which the author adopted. Little Burney reads Richardson, has a general impression that Richardson is truthful, and fills her diary in imitation of his heroines with all the flattery of herself that she hears.

The con-
scious mo-
rality of art

In point of fact, all parleying about the conscious morality of art is to little purpose. The

morality of a nation's art always rises to the level of morality in a nation's manners. Morality takes care of itself, and always revenges any outrage which art may put upon its laws, by either lowering the art that so offends, or extinguishing it. The history of art in this, as in every country, is a standing illustration of the necessity that art should have its foundations in the moral sense of a people. For a striking example, take the history of pictorial art in England.

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of little mo-
ment.

How art
must be
rooted in
the moral
sense of a
nation.

It is characteristic of the low estate of art and artists among us in the middle of last century, that during the early years of the Academy a large proportion of its members were foreigners. There were no less than nine among the thirty-four original members of the Academy. This distribution of the honours of membership indicates an important fact in the history of our pictorial art—the lateness of its rise. It is curious to note how slow we were as a people in detecting the cause of this backwardness, and how ready we were to join in the severe judgments of such men as Du Bos and Winckelmann, who saw no possibility of Englishmen ever excelling in art. At last it began to be argued among us—Why should we not excel in art, when our nation has produced a Shakespeare and a Milton, the greatest poets of modern times? It was a fair question, and but that in

History of
pictorial art
in England.

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—How it
flourished.

those days the taste for Gothic architecture had died out, the argument might have been strengthened by a reference to our cathedrals, in some of which may be seen, both in the mass (as at Salisbury) and in details (as at Wells, in the sculptures of the west front), the working of a great artistic faculty. If other proof were needed, it might have been drawn from such specimens of our missal painting as Queen Mary's Prayer-book, now in the British Museum, proving to all eyes that Englishmen in the middle ages (the date of the work is 1310) could vie with the finest artists of the Continent. Furthermore, it is a well-ascertained fact that under the Tudors England was pre-eminent in Europe for its musical faculty. The cause of our backwardness in painting had nothing whatever to do with natural incapacity for art, and it is not far to seek. Amid the desolation of the

How it de-
clined.

country in the wars of the Roses, we lost the seed-time of art, which other European peoples enjoyed. Then, when the revival of letters and of arts burst forth in Europe, the Reformation came to our island, and held possession of it as of no other country in the world. But, just then, pictorial art was a part of religion; its subjects were religious; its places of exhibition were the walls of churches and holy houses; it was identified with an idolatrous faith, with image worship and prayers to saints. England aban-

done that faith, and turned her back upon the art which ministered to it. There was no place for the grand pictorial art in England so long as it was only sacred, and if not sacred, heathen.

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To understand rightly what followed, let us now for a moment turn to a parallel series of phenomena. For it came to pass that in the great gap of time during which the pictorial art was dead among us, the whole imitative genius of the country rushed into the drama, and there found the means of expression. So also it came to pass that what is loosely called the Elizabethan drama exhibited a wealth, a power, and a versatility such as we find in no other literature of that or of any period. The Arabians do not cultivate the imitative arts, but as a recompense they count more poets, chiefly of the lyrical order, than all the rest of the world has produced. So in England, the imitative faculty which in other lands had several outlets, in our own had but one, and rushed to it with immense energy. Painting had not yet turned itself to the representation of secular subjects, and the representation of sacred ones was abominable to the Protestant mind. Sacred drama was, on the same principle, hateful to the reformers, but a secular one was less offensive, and the idea of such a form of art was suggested by the ancient classics. The dramatist had secular models

Rise of the
drama, and
how it
flourished.

Treating of

CHAPTER
XIV.secular sub-
jects.And much
insisting on
its morality.How at
length it
offended the

which were denied to the painter. The author of the earliest comedy in the language, *Ralph Roister Doister*, professes to take his lessons in the art of making plays from Terence, but there was no Terence to hint to painters that they had a rich field to cultivate in the delineation of secular life. The drama therefore, much insisting on its morality, and beginning with plays called moralities, had it all its own way, and showed astonishing vigour. It is impossible to speak in exaggerated terms of the fertility and abounding force of the English drama as it sprung up during the reigns of Elizabeth and James. There was a vast throng of dramatists, beginning with Shakespeare, whose works were not only acted but also read. Poor old Prynne held up his hands with pious horror when the stationers told him that in two years they had sold no less than 40,000 play-books, "they being now more vendible than the choicest sermons."*

This however brings me to the very point I am driving at—that the English drama thus

* It is very amusing to see how the unhappy man rages over the success of play-houses and play-books. "Some play-books, since I first undertook this subject," he says, referring chiefly to Shakespeare and Jonson, "are grown from quarto into folio, which yet bear so good

a price and sale that I cannot but with grief relate it; they are now new printed on far better paper than most octavo or quarto Bibles, which hardly find such vent as they." He adds in a foot-note, "Shakespeare's plays are printed on the best crown paper, far better than most Bibles."

fertile, thus powerful, thus established in popular favour, soon forgot the moralities out of which it sprung, failed to satisfy the moral sense of the nation, and ere long gave it a fit of disgust from which it has never recovered. The greatest of all our dramatists should indeed be acquitted of having contributed to this result, although even in his pages one sometimes sees a line which it would have been wise to blot: but Shakespeare's contemporaries too often revelled in filth. The pleasantry of Ben Jonson, for instance, is not merely indecent: it is nasty. And as years rolled on, the coarseness of the drama became more and more repulsive, and the wit of it even less brilliant, till at last the Puritans, in their rage, determined to put it down altogether. If there had been a Shakespeare then connected with the English stage, he would have saved it from extinction; but it must be said for the Puritans that the grossness of the playhouse was not redeemed by any great display of talent. When the playhouses were restored with our kings, talent certainly reappeared in them, but it was linked with a licentiousness worse than ever. Then it fell, that men abounding in true wit chose to indulge in that false kind which plays upon things forbidden. A bad word became a *bon mot*; obscenity passed for humour; and profanity for epigram. A hard heart was the best flint for

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moral sense
of the nation,
and
fell into dis-
repute.

Something
to be said
for the
Puritans.

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wit to sparkle from, and a hardened conscience the best steel to make it sparkle. The chief writer of his time was perhaps the most outrageous of all in his indecency. Dryden, who could rise the highest, could also sink the lowest. The song of Alexis and Coelia, in *Marriage à la Mode*, is probably the most daring and the most clever piece of impudence in the whole literature of that period. No one who has the least acquaintance with that literature can wonder that it alienated the moral sense of our people from the stage, and that gradually thenceforward the theatre sank. Again, and yet again, it acquired new life through the genius of individual actors and actresses; but as a power in the country, and as a field for authorship, it became ever of less account.

Recapitulation
of the
argument.

Now then see the milestone at which we have arrived in this analysis. First of all, I have shown that painting could not flourish among us after the Reformation, because just then it was in its greater efforts a religious art, and was therefore opposed to the religious sense of the country. But while painting died out among us the drama came to life, and rose to greatness. A splendid future lay before it, and so much vigour did it display that one might have expected it to live for ever. In about half a century it was pollarded by the Puritans; in another half century it began to wither. It

had no root in the moral sense of the people; it studiously offended their consciences. But now comes the next great fact.

As the drama, in all its pride of place, decayed, painting began to revive. The pictorial art had no chance in England so long as it jarred upon the religious conscience. A few noblemen might patronize it, and might begin to furnish their galleries; but these were rare exceptions. It was not till Hogarth rose in the 18th century, and seized upon the common life of the people, that painting as an art made a very powerful impression on the English mind. Curiously enough, too, Hogarth, in entering on this field, insisted, like his contemporary Richardson, on making a somewhat ostentatious display of moral purpose, as if it were necessary to moralize in order to effect moral good. The offence may be forgiven. The art which he saw around him, chiefly the work of foreigners, had fallen into inanity, had no interest of subject, had little more than a certain technical skill to recommend it. He would follow a different course; he would speak to the heart; he would improve as well as please; and he would place in a strong light which would force conviction on the English mind his superiority to the painters of the day, by making his moral purpose very prominent. Whether he is to be praised or blamed, however, the point to be

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As the
drama
decayed in
immorality,
painting,
ostentatious
of its
morality,
began to
revive.

Hogarth,
and his
moralities.

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observed is, that whereas up to his time there was no school of painting in England, because the moral sense of our Protestant people could not abide religious representations, the first English painter won the hearts of his countrymen to the art which he practised, by making a direct appeal to their moral sense, such as they could frankly approve. Since then the art of painting has advanced more and more among us, and within the last thirty years its popularity has risen to full tide. In that time, we have seen even those ultra Puritans, who were suspicious of painters and painting, carried away by the stream, and giving their homage where it is due. No one has done half so much to bring about this result as Mr. Ruskin. He introduced a novelty into art-criticism: he made it ethical. In volume after volume, written with extraordinary eloquence, he examined, not so much the technical skill displayed in pictures, as the moral qualities and motives of the artist, with his pencil in hand, and the moral bearings of the work on us who look at it. The task was a most invidious one, from which a more timid man would have shrunk; but in following the course which he did Mr. Ruskin made art-criticism for the first time intelligible to the English mind. That he was sometimes wrong no one can deny; that he dogmatized with a vengeance is quite clear; but he popularized

How Mr. Ruskin demonstrated the moral purpose of art.

painting more than any man, by exhibiting with masterly skill its moral relations; he hit the popular taste; he represented the popular mind; and he did much to elevate art by awakening artists to a consciousness of their dignity. As a natural consequence, the painters receive such favour from the public as they have never before enjoyed.

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And the lesson to be derived from this history is clear. We have seen in our country a sort of Castor and Pollux movement in the twin arts of painting and the drama: as the one rose the other was lost to sight, as that other rose the first sank into disrepute. First painting failed us because it went against our consciences; then the drama, which had ostentatiously commenced in moralities, and which had flourished in the absence of painting, failed us because it ventured to defy all moral sensibility; lastly, painting rose into note, and made way among us as soon as it established itself in the moral feeling. All this shows that art is nothing save as it is rooted in the moral sense of a people; that it is popular only so long as it reflects the popular conscience, and is felt to elevate the popular taste.

The lesson
as to the
connection
between
taste and
conscience.

These illustrations may not go for much. They only go to show the intimacy of the connection between taste and conscience, art and ethics. We have still before us the task of examining

What are
the precise
moral bear-
ings of art?

CHAPTER XIV. what are the precise moral bearings of art; in what directions of our moral life its influence is most active; and whether that influence is always baneful or always beneficial, or sometimes the one and sometimes the other. In approaching such inquiries, the temper which it is most of all needful to eschew, is that of the advocate. Honour our Sidneys, Haringtons and Shelleys as we may, most men care little more for their eloquent but one-sided defences and apologies of poetry, than for the senseless diatribes of Philip Stubbes and Cornelius Agrippa. Ours is a chequered life, in which the moral forces cross and counteract each other, and in which no one of them can be regarded as by itself perfect. Justice without mercy becomes hateful, and the gentleness of doves may fail of respect if divorced from the wisdom of serpents. There may be too much of a good thing. The moral not less than the physical earth needs change of weather, and could not thrive either in eternal sunshine or in eternal showers. So it is absurd to speak of poetry and the fine arts as if they had not their weak side. Religion itself has its weak side, and Mary, who sits at the feet of Jesus, knows not how much she owes to Martha, who takes the burden of the household cares. The life poetical and the life practical may have each its virtues, but evidently they are virtues that, carried to lengths, encroach upon

The temper with which such an inquiry should be attempted.

Complexity of the moral forces.

each other. It is from this point of view that it becomes necessary to define the tendencies of art, and to note their bearing on the various forms of life—on the life of individuals and on that of nations, on the worldly life and on the spiritual.

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Now any examination of the moral influence of art is either general or special; that is to say, it touches either upon the general influence of art at all times and in all places, or upon its special influence at this or that particular period, and in this or that particular country. In so far as this influence is general, there are two chief points to be kept in view—the aim of art, and the means which it employs. Are the aims of art ennobling? are its means justifiable? But the aim of art is pleasure, and the method of art is fiction. The chief general questions, therefore, as to the ethical purpose of art, resolve themselves into questions as to the place of pleasure, and as to the right of fiction in this world of ours. On both of these subjects we have already had to bestow some attention; but we have by no means exhausted them, and it still remains that we should consider them from the ethical point of view. Again, in so far as the ethical influence of art is special—we are of course mainly interested in our own time and in our own country; and therefore for us, practically, the question resolves itself into this: What

Division of
the inquiry
into the
ethics of
art.

General
influence of
art.

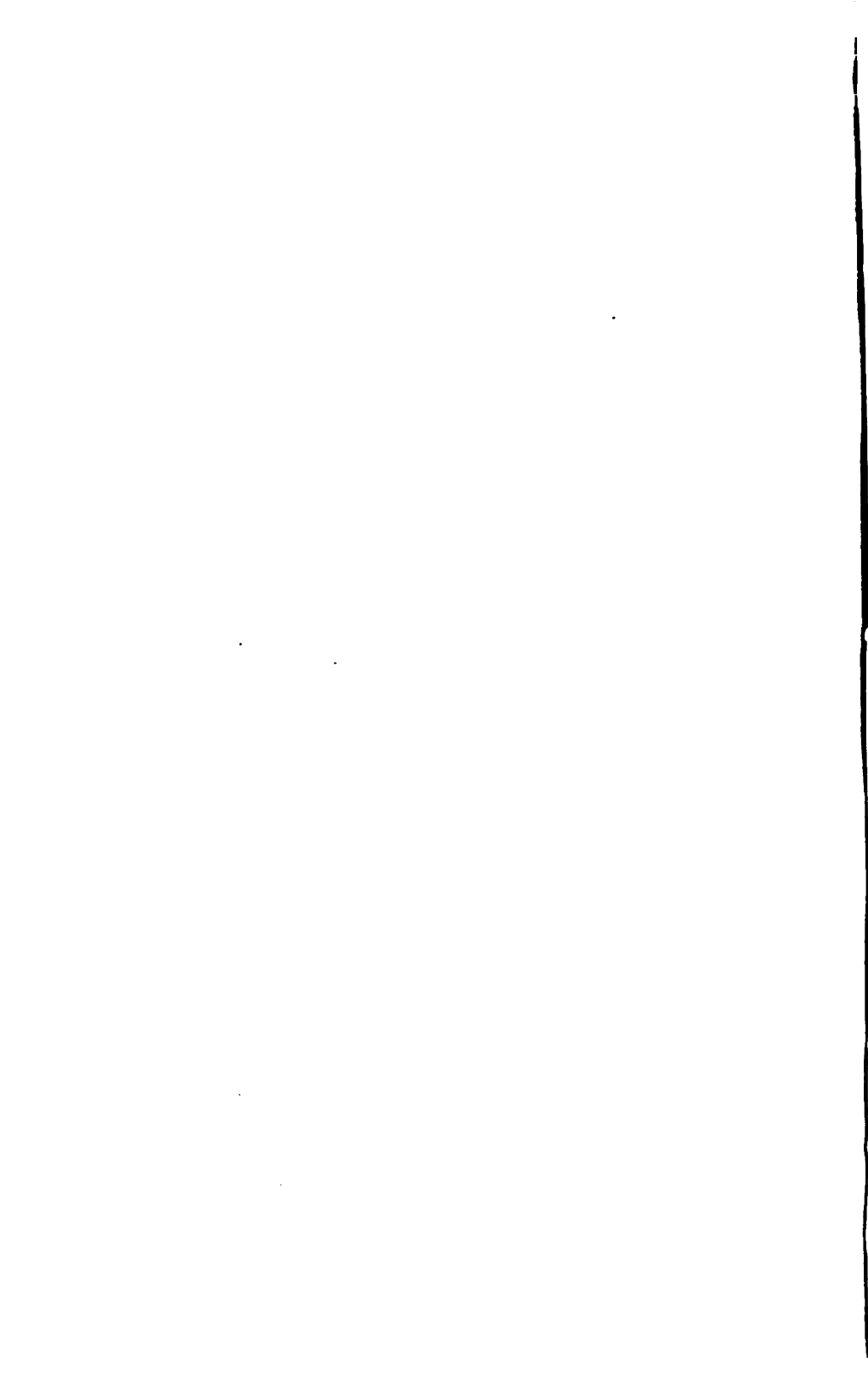
Special in-
fluence of it.

CHAPTER XIV. is the ethical drift of art in the present day? How does it bear upon the moral life of our people? And thus in effect a discussion as to the ethics of art ranges itself under three different heads or chapters. What is the ethical value of pleasure as an object of pursuit? That is the first question to be studied. What is the ethical influence of fiction in this world of realities? That is the second. What is the special characteristic of the ethical current in our time? That is the third. To each of these questions a chapter.

The inquiry
to be ranged
under three
heads.



THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.





CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.

FIRST, then, of pleasure. It is the pursuit of pleasure as pleasure, that here claims our attention. Can that pursuit, even in the case of pure and elevating joy, be morally right? This is the leading question of ethics, and must be unflinchingly met. But before we can enter upon so hard a discussion, we are entangled in the mazes of an easier one. Before we can see to the moral bearings of pleasure as such, we encounter the opinion of many worthy people that the kind of pleasure which art has a tendency to foster is very gross; that, for all its fair seeming, art is a forbidden fruit; that it is by no means the illuminated initial and the golden border of lives saintly in every page; that the lives of artists are anything but divine. All the wrong-doing

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XV.
Is it right
to pursue
pleasure?

On the
grossness of
the pleasure
fostered by
art.

CHAPTER of poets and artists is gathered together—all the
 XV. evil that may appear in their own lives, all the
 — sin which they have emblazoned with pen or
 pencil, or rendered enticing with the charm of
 sirens; and the vast assemblage of iniquity is
 fathered upon art as its only lawful offspring.
 What is good or dignified in art or artists is, by
 the same sort of people, set aside as nothing akin
 to art, as belonging to the prose of human life,
 as a redeeming grace which cleaves to the
 artist, not because he is an artist, but because he
 is a man.

The fre-
 quent lewd-
 ness of art
 is not to be
 denied.

The foulness of many an artist's life and
 many a work of art is undeniable. Great part
 of the famous Alexandrian library, which was
 turned into fuel for the public baths, was un-
 worthy, even thus remotely, of being applied to
 a cleanly purpose, and any one, bathing in waters
 warmed with its scrolls, had reason to deem him-
 self unclean for the remainder of his days. The
 mysteries of classical faith entered into a fright-
 ful alliance with the fury of the senses. Every
 important collection of antique gems contains
 proof of it. Behold corruption in gems: lo, sin
 immortalized in jewels. Chrysolite and jacinth
 and jasper—ruby, opal, and sard, that on the
 breast of the high priest or on the walls of
 heaven, told the purity of the joy and the bright-
 ness of glory which are the heritage of the
 saints, were darkened and defiled. Cupids wan-

Classical
 art espe-
 cially at
 fault.

toned in the beautiful transparency of rock crystal; satyrs and goats rioted in the cold green of emeralds; the splendour of the beryl was dimmed by the breath of coarse passion; the azure calm of sapphires was overcast with a storm of lust. Why does not the curse of the inwrought image reduce the amethyst to its elements, bring back the topaz to clay and the diamond to ashes? The gem alters only in its sparkling. Adultery tarries in tourmaline; rape and seduction infest the onyx; strange dances wilder in cornelian; and the orgies of Bacchus still fling in perdurable jade. All that is most vile in man is joined to all that is most precious in the inanimate creation. All that is most hideous in nature is married to all that is most lovely in art.

Nor are such descents as these characteristic only of the heathen. The grossness of Christian art is little behind the worst displays of paganism. We read in the Coventry Mysteries and the Chester Mysteries, that when the scenes of the garden of Eden were enacted before the multitude, Adam and Eve literally stood naked on the platform, and were not ashamed till they had eaten of the apple; and then having gone to the apple tree for food they went to the fig-tree for raiment. If the enactment of such a spectacle in the streets of a Christian city appears to be incredible and impossible, still let

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Christian
art little
behindhand
in its in-
decency.

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Examples
from the
comedy of
the Restora-
tion,
As
Wycherley.

And again
Sir John
Vanbrugh.

The sin in-
excusable.

it be remembered that the demoralization which it implied and engendered is as nothing to the demoralization implied and produced by scenes in still more modern plays, the performance of which we regard as very possible and quite credible. Take any comic dramatist of the reign of Charles II. Wycherley wrote a play, called *Love in a Wood*, which is avowedly to the glory of prostitution and the basest intrigue. Sir John Vanbrugh is generally deemed a shade or two better than Wycherley; but nothing can be more outrageous than some of the scenes which he ventured to provide for the amusement of playgoers. The obscenity of such writers appears to us credible and possible, as enacted in an English theatre, although it is far more degrading and demoralizing than the story of Adam and Eve as performed by the drapers at Chester, which to us now seems a performance scarcely to be credited, even if we take into account that the female characters were in those days played by men.

There is no doubt of it. Poetry and art have not always been content with angels' food. More especially in their moments of comic outburst they have drunk of the cup of devils, and they have eaten the mess of satyrs. And by its very nature the sin thus perpetrated is inexcusable—because it is shameless and tasteless, and therefore opposed, not only to high moral

feeling, but also to what is most essential in art —the sense of mystery, and the hold of refine-

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ment. High morality and high art follow here the same dictates, for the unpardonable sin in both is shamelessness. Art can be tolerant of sin so long as it blushes. If its blush and secret shame be gone; then for art, because it wants the sense of secrecy, its charm is gone.

Because, being shameless, it is opposed to the most prevailing quality of art—its sense of mystery.

And so in morals—to do wrong is error enough; but it is the most frightful of errors to lie to our own souls, to represent wrong as right, to paint the evil good and fair. It has been said with a withering sarcasm, that the greatest of the commandments is the eleventh—"Thou shalt not be found out." Alter but a little the terms of that commandment and it expresses a stern truth, inasmuch as the most grievous guilt is not to fall, but to make a boast of falling—not to err, but to glory in error—not to sin, but to exhibit sin. Sin, if you will, and take the consequences manfully; sin and be damned; kiss to-day and die to-morrow; drink to-night, and accept the headache in the morning. But need you insult reason by denying the headache that is in store? need you debauch your minds by casting off modesty? need you, like Porson, thirsting for strong drink, swallow the embrocation?

It is not uncommon for some of the worst offenders against the modesty of art, to plead

False pleas
in defence

CHAPTER XV. that, though their works have been immoral, their lives have been pure. The elder Disraeli gives a short list of writers who are worse upon paper than they were in reality—as Cowley, La Fontaine, and others. It is enough that I select two examples which he has overlooked, that of the heathen Catullus, who, in his sixteenth lyric, says boldly :

Very often
put forward.

Nam castum esse decet pium poetam
Ipsium, versaiculos nihil necesse est;*

that though a poet ought to be good, there is no reason why his song should not be wicked—in other words, that though his life must be fine his art may be coarse; and that of the Christian Herrick (a vicar too), who at the end of his book wrote :

To his book's end this last line he'd have placed—
Jocund his muse was, but his life was chaste.

This is a plea which, although it has some foundation in fact, shows immodesty in all its meanness. It is in effect to say: Although I did the wrong, I showed by my life that I knew and cared for the right. I myself avoided the gutter, but I rather liked to think of others wallowing there, and I was not unwilling to sing them into it.

* Doering refers to parallel passages in Ovid, *Trist.* ii. 354; and in Martial, i. 5, 8, adding with regard to this last reference “et plura ibi vide apud *Raderum.*”

After making all these admissions, however, it still seems hard that art alone of all things human, should be expected to be faultless, and, because it is not so, should be visited with a sweeping condemnation. Sir John Harington set up an odd defence for the naughtiness of art. It is, in effect, an expansion of Martial's epigram :

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Erubuit, posuitque meum Lucretia librum :
Sed coram Bruto. Brute, recede : leget.

But why should we expect art to be faultless, and what is to be said in palliation of its enormities?

It is that the very persons who object to artistic displays of naughtiness, will, when our backs are turned, go and enjoy these displays as much as any libertine. But this is entirely to mistake the argument. To take a license is one thing, to approve of it is another. We are not now inquiring into what men actually do ; we are inquiring into what they ought to do. And to those who are strongly impressed with the immoral tendency of art through its appeal to gross tastes and passions, I offer three considerations.

The first is very obvious. It is that all ages alike are not to be measured by the same standard of purity. Horrible as seems to us the worship of Priapus, and what we know or guess of the Eleusinian mysteries, it was, being a religion, and, therefore, instinct with symbolism, less destructive to its votaries than the dwelling on the same thoughts would be to us who are clear

Palliated by the customs and habits of particular times and places.

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of symbol and look only to the vulgar facts. Sir John Vanbrugh makes one of his characters laugh at the attitudes of a fashionable lady. "As for her motions, her mien, her airs, and all her tricks," says Heartfree, "I know they affect you mightily. If you should see her motions at a coronation, dragging her peacock's train with all her state and insolence about her, 'twould strike you with all awful thoughts; whereas I turn the whole matter into a jest, and suppose her strutting in the selfsame stately manner, with nothing on but her stays and her under scanty quilted petticoat." Yes, but the peacock strut and the Grecian bend are suggested by the dress, and are assumed in conformity with its requirements. Remove the dress and the strut goes with it. The strut and the stoop are made for the dress, are a part of it, and are not to be judged by themselves. So it is to some extent in morals. What in the abstract, what seen in all its nakedness, would be a most improper stoop, or an indefensible strut, may find some excuse in the circumstances of the time, may be carried off harmlessly by the accidents of place. In this view we may not lose sight of the fact, that much of the nakedness and free-speaking which now offends us in art is the nakedness and the plain speaking, not of vice but of nature, not of the beggar showing his sores, nor of the courtesan revealing her ankle, but of the boxer

stripping for the fight, or of the lady in blue who dances with the waves on Brighton beach. We are all inclined to smile at the old Spaniards who thought it immoral in their painters to expose the leg of an angel, and frightfully indecent to show the bare toes of the Virgin poised upon the moon. But many of the Puritanic objections to the freedom of art are not less ridiculous.

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A second point worthy of consideration is, that in most cases to call attention to the nudity of art is more offensive than the nudity itself. When the Crystal Palace was transferred to Sydenham it was proposed by some sensitive persons that none but draped statues, such as the Venus of Milo and the Diana of Gabii should appear in it; and about the same time there was a very lively debate in the Prussian chamber as to the decency of the nude statues on the palace bridge in Berlin. On that bridge, surmounting its square granite columns, there are certain allegorical figures of young warriors in various attitudes, but all in a state of nature, rendered the more striking as each is accompanied by a well-clad Minerva, Victory, or other gigantic goddess. It should be distinctly observed, however, that the objection made to these statues is for the most part self-made. The mere fact of the objection having been made creates a difficulty where there might have been none before. The

Sometimes
the objec-
tion makes
an offence
where in
reality
there is
none.

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The state-
ment of the
objection
makes the
objection,

nudity that was harmless and innocent so long as it was not forced upon our consciousness, becomes indefensible when urged upon our attention, and simply because it is thus urged. The statement of the objection makes the objection, and is the fiat of its own truth. There was no harm till the objection was made, for few pure-minded men and women think of the nudity of the sculpture before them. But here comes an individual not really bad, but morbidly sensitive. He is vividly awake to the circumstance that the sculpture is unveiled, and views it with the pious horror with which Mahomedan legends inform us that Moses gazed upon the ankles of Zipporah. His future wife was sent to invite, to her father's house, the destined lawgiver of the Hebrews, from the well, where he had been watering the cattle. She led the way, and as they advanced, the wind blowing upon the garments of the maiden, made exhibition of her ankles, and showed the contour of her limbs. The feelings of the shy and sensitive Hebrew were so shocked, that with an approach to unpoliteness, he requested the lady to do him the favour of walking behind him. With the same abashed and morbid consciousness of evil, some people find offence in every statue that is undraped. What defence can be set up? None whatever when once the objection has been made. We can only remind the accuser of another Arabic legend, about Mohammed and

his wife Ayesha. The prophet talked to his wife of the resurrection, and told her that at the end of the world men and women would rise from their graves naked as when they were born. Ayesha observed that it would be highly improper for men and women to see each other like that. And Mohammed replied, that on the great day they would have something else to do than to look at each other. Those who are offended with the nudity of statues ought to have something else to see. If you object to nude statues, I have no defence to offer; but do not object, and no defence is required. I admit that this line of argument would throw over some fine statues of Venus. The foam-born queen of beauty is the only one of the goddesses represented without drapery; but in some of her statues, as those of Medici, of the Capitol, of Menophantus, of Canova, and others, she displays a most alarming consciousness of her position. It does not matter whether the fact of her nudity is forced on the spectator by a Puritan iconoclast, or by the artist himself: the moral result is the same. The exquisite delicacy of the forms of the too conscious Venuses is not sufficient to redeem the sense of sin which shows in their attitudes. Even the ungraceful attitude of the Kallipygian Venus (with no such unhappy consciousness of nakedness) is preferable. When Dr. Johnson saw a cast of the Medicean Venus in a fine park

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But the
nude statues
that pro-
claim their
own nudity
have no
defence.

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he proposed to pitch the poor wench into the horse-pond.

All art is not to be condemned for the offences of some of its specimens.

Finally, let me ask how it comes to pass that all the treasures of art are to be condemned because some of them are vicious? Is it an argument against honey to say that the bees of Trebizonde feed on poisonous flowers and distil poisonous honey? are all flowers poisonous? and even in the poisonous ones may there not be some virtue? In point of fact, the crimes that have been committed in the name of art, are not worse than those which have been wrought in the name of liberty, of law, and of religion. Is freedom vile because to reach it a nation has to swim through blood? Is law bad because it is the instrument of tyrants? Is religion vain, because the cross has been sharpened into a dagger, and the dew of Hermon is sometimes changed for the dew of Ben Nevis? And is art a low, coarse thing, because sometimes it is seen stooping low and grovelling in the mire? Not so. Give us liberty with all its follies and its waste of life; law with all its tyrannies and its waste of time; religion notwithstanding its excesses; art, glorious despite its devilry. For in good sooth, who knows not, and why forget, that the essential feature of the fine arts is their refinement? that what weakness there may be in poetry lies in its ideal fancy? Notoriously, the tendency of romance is to nurture ethereal aspirations—to lift

Any more than law, freedom, and religion are to be condemned for the crimes which have been committed in their names.

its devotees too high above the earth—to make them overlook the actual and present in dreams of what may or ought to be. Whatever the faults of poetry—this is not one of them, to be a pleasure of mere sense. It is nothing if it is not pleasure above sense, and if its tendency is not to soar above animal joys to the delights of soul.

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Suppose this granted. Grant that the true joy of art is pure and lofty. At length comes, in its keenest form, the question as to the morality of art which loves and aims at pleasure. Can the pursuit of pleasure be of good effect? We are so trained in moral commonplaces that the answer is like to run away with us. But before we attempt an answer, let us see distinctly what is the point to be mooted. Here we have not to discuss the Epicurean doctrine as to the chief end of man. Let that doctrine be brushed aside, and let us assume that not to achieve happiness, but to do the will of God, ought to be the grand aim. Still even thus minded as to ultimate aim, we know that there are some actions, the immediate aim of which falls far short of the final one. George Herbert tells us that a housemaid should use her besom for the glory of God; but we know that her immediate purpose is to clean the room. When we eat mutton chops, divines tell us that

But is pleasure in the abstract a fit object of pursuit?

Distinction between ultimate and immediate aim.

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we must do so for the glory of God; but we know that our immediate aim is to satisfy hunger. In the same sense, the fact, that the immediate end of art falls short of the ultimate end of life, need not trouble our consciences. The sore point is that art not only gives but inculcates pleasure. It puts pleasure for duty, and liking for law. It is therefore argued that the influence of poetry and the fine arts on human conduct is not favourable to virtue.

That the
artist is no
friend to
virtue.

I am going to admit that the artist is no friend to virtue; but I am going to cap this paradox with another, that he is not therefore a foe to morality. By virtue, of course, moralists understand not merely righteousness of life, but righteousness produced in a special way. Virtue is distinct on the one hand from the innocence of a child, on the other from the holiness of a saint. A child neither sees nor feels temptation; a saint may see without being moved by it; the man of virtue both sees and has to struggle. The two former act according to nature, either inborn or ingrafted; the third acts according to conscience. It is in this view that I allow the artist to be no friend to virtue, and yet maintain that he is no foe to morality. All morality is not virtue. Art is so far like the religion of the gospel, that it is not satisfied with that righteousness which is of the law, and which is called virtue. It would fain put love

But on the
other hand
all morality
is not
virtue.

instead of law, and the sense of delight for that of duty. The influence of each is exerted less through a code of rules and a system of teaching, than through the force of example and sympathy. "Follow me." The poet is no preacher of the law; he brings a gospel of its kind—glad tidings of great joy, glad tidings of smaller joys, but always pleasure; it is his business to kindle the affections, to stir the heart, to reach those sympathies by which one imitates another, and Elisha when he puts on the mantle of the Tishbite, forthwith becomes another Elijah.

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At this point, however, it is needful to deviate for a moment into an explanation of terms, in order to prevent confusion. There is no word in the language which has so many meanings and which has been so used and abused as *nature*. Sometimes it is opposed to art, sometimes to grace, sometimes to man, sometimes to affectation; and in the foregoing paragraph I have opposed it to conscience. Now, the necessity for explanation here arises out of the fact, that the man of most authority as a moral philosopher in this country, Bishop Butler, runs all his arguments up to the point of proving that virtuous action is according to nature. The remark of Sir James Mackintosh, however, must be remembered, which was to the effect that no man so clear-headed has, perhaps, ever been so

The distinction between the life according to nature and the life according to conscience.

With especial reference to Bishop Butler's argument.

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Which identifies conscience with nature.

dark-worded as Butler. His obscurities of diction are more than enough to make one doubt the truth of the well-known maxim, that to write clearly, you have only to think clearly. It is not because the language of a sermon is unfit for philosophic accuracy that he thus fails. From the pen of Hobbes, of Berkeley, of Hume, has flowed language far more homely, but seldom or never wanting in precision. Now, Butler's argument is, that a life according to conscience is a life according to nature, because conscience is part of human nature. It is a question of words which in itself is not worth looking at; but which, nevertheless, cannot be disregarded by any one who knows how the metaphysicians, whenever they get near the subject of conscience, begin to wrangle about words, and to display all the craft of the casuist. To speak of action led by conscience as natural, in the same sense in which we speak of action led by impulse as natural, is to confound speech. In common parlance, we speak of a good-natured or an ill-natured man; we say it is the nature of cherubim to know, the nature of seraphim to love. Thus, a man may be so gentle, that not for his life could he do anything unkind; or so high-minded, that it would be impossible for him to descend to any meanness, and he is never once visited by that fear of vulgar minds lest peradventure they may do something shabby.

This is to act naturally ; it is to act instinctively. But to act by the law and rule of conscience is altogether different ; it is natural in a much lower sense. Innocence is nature, holiness is second nature ; but virtue is not nature as innocence and holiness are ; it is in contrast to these affected ; it is, if I may so speak, artificial. And I hope I have rendered it sufficiently clear that art, as a moral force, tends to create or to establish a nature. It is the part of art not only to hide its own art, but to be opposed to art. It is born of nature, it follows nature, and it creates nature.

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No sooner have we reached this idea of art—that in so far as it is pure and noble, it cherishes the inborn nature which we call innocence, and the engrafted or implanted nature which we call holiness, but has little to do with virtue, or the life according to conscience—than we are met in full front by the philosophers. They cannot indeed tell us that the cultivation of natural impulse, and the trusting to it, is immoral ; but they insist on the inferiority of impulse to conscience, of sensibility to the sense of duty. Dugald Stewart, in this country, and Victor Cousin, in France, for example, maintain that conscious endeavour after the right is something higher than instinct, that struggle and victory are something better than peaceful possession. But surely these are as shoemakers sounding the

Art cherishes instinctive goodness and makes no appeal to the conscience.

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But the philo-
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say that
natural im-
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inferior to
conscience as
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life.

praise of leather. Intense consciousness is the all-in-all of philosophy; therefore, philosophers think that it must be the all-in-all of life. By the same rule, it would be better to eat and drink, not guided by appetite, but by a kind of animal conscience, formed out of chemical calculations, and called the sense of food. There are poor wights to whom almost every thing eatable has become a forbidden fruit. Hunger and thirst can no longer be trusted, and a new faculty arises, built of the ruins of appetite, the purchases of experience, the findings of reason, and the advice of the doctor, in one word, and in the old use of that word—a conscience; not unlike to which in its higher sphere is that conscience known as the sense of duty. Banished from the paradise of our innocence, with dispositions to good either froward or weak, troubled with sorrow and trial, cursed with shortcomings and backslidings, full of longings that have risen and set in the heart day after day, of hopes to fulfil those longings that have waxed and waned moon by moon, and of vows that have sprung with the spring, but have too often fallen long ere the fall of each returning year; man, tossed about and torn asunder by the discordancies of his life, is guided by a faculty of conscience built out of and upon the ruins of natural inclination—a faculty that appoints, to every one who will submit, a regimen with which for strictness

the regimen, prescribed by the strictest physician to his dyspeptic patient, is no more to be compared, than the rule of King Log with the rule of King Stork.

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From this fierce struggle, from this life of conscious endeavour, it is the object of our religion to set us free, and if art is defective in not cultivating virtue, so is the gospel. To enable us to move in the world without sin, and without conscience of sin, like a fish in the salt sea, fresh by an inward necessity—that is its aim. Of John the Baptist, the last prophet of the law, and herald of him who was to make the eye itself full of light, it was said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” It is even so: great as are the deeds of the law, the least work of love is greater. The philosophers may go on telling us that the impulses of affection are not to be compared with the dictates of reason. We only look to the fact that it is the method of Christianity to cherish impulse. If impulse be a weaker influence than conscience, still it is an influence of the healthiest. Do you say that the first faint call of appetite, when the life of the dying man begins to return, is less or more to be desired than the largest demands of the hypochondriac? Or do we quarrel with Zephyr because not equal to Euroclydon? Nay, is not

From righteousness which is of the law, art, like the gospel, would set man free.

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Zephyr the very wind we pray for? the wind blowing right on our course? and how can we take advantage of Euroclydon without much and weary doubling?

Nor is this to disparage the sense of duty in its proper place.

In the hard encounters of life, no doubt, we have ever to be falling back upon the sterner power of duty; but that does not degrade nature and the sense of the agreeable into a less noble motive. Wordsworth, in his fine ode to duty, while giving due honour to the "stern daughter of the voice of God," has not failed to recognise the worthiness of action that springs from a freer and more pleasurable impulse. To Duty he says :

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who in love and truth
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad hearts! without reproach or blot,
Who do thy work and know it not:
Oh, if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast.

Serene will be our days, and bright
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now who not unwisely bold
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet find that other strength according to their need.

This is precisely what the poet aims at as a moral ruler. His, in aim at least, is a moral world, where glad hearts fulfil the law and know

it not, where love is an unerring light, and joy its own security.

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It is difficult, when dealing with moral forces and obligations in the abstract, either to think with perfect precision or to speak with perfect clearness. Moralists, more than any class of reasoners, must come down from their abstractions to biography, and have to illustrate their laws by examples. I shall therefore conclude what I have to say on this head, by referring to a case in point. I select that case because it has been supposed to tell more powerfully than any other against the argument of the foregoing pages. I have already referred to Milton, as the foremost man of his time, deliberately choosing art for his vocation, and thereby vindicating the intellectual importance of it. He is not less worthy of our regard as illustrating the nature of the poetical temperament in its relation to pleasure, and through pleasure to morality. Here, however, I find that I differ with one of the chief living critics, the latest biographer of Milton. In a masterly essay, Mr. Masson has especially pointed to Milton, as displaying in his youth the very opposite of those qualities which are supposed to characterise the poetical temperament. I have in a phrase endeavoured to indicate that temperament, by describing it as ruled by impulse and bent on pleasure, or the gratification of impulse. Mr. Masson, with an

The contrast between duty and pleasure, principle and impulse, illustrated by the example of Milton.

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Mr. Masson describes Milton as, unlike poets, ruled by a sense of duty.

eye to the idea which he has formed of Milton's character, expresses what is essentially the same doctrine in the following felicitous language: "Poets and artists generally, but particularly in youth, it is held, are and ought to be distinguished by a predominance of sensibility over principle, an excess of what Coleridge called the spiritual over what he called the moral part of man. A nature built on quicksands, an organisation of nerve languid or tempestuous with occasion, a soul falling and soaring, now subject to ecstasies and now to remorse—such, it is supposed, and on no small induction of actual instances, is the appropriate constitution of the poet. Mobility, absolute and entire destitution of principle properly so called, capacity for varying the mood indefinitely, rather than for retaining and keeping up one moral gesture or resolution through all moods,—this, say the theorists, is the essential thing in the structure of the artist." This in a lower degree, let it be added, is the temper which communion with the artist is believed to nurture. And Mr. Masson asserts that against this, as a maxim of universal application, the character of young Milton is a remarkable protest.

In point of fact, however, there was in Milton a predominance

Now, I think it can be shown that Mr. Masson is in error, and it behoves my argument to do so. For those who hold the aforesaid theory of the poetical nature, and who hear it denounced as

immoral, cannot afford to give up Milton as an exception to the rule. Observe that, by the very terms in which Coleridge, as cited by Mr. Masson, has defined the complexion of the artist, it is pronounced immoral. It is true that he means no blame, and that he gives credit to the artist for qualities which he regards as higher than moral; still in that very phrase he seems to grant all that the moralists who denounce art maintain. Many of these can see in the laxity of will which a poet in his moods displays but the first step to looseness of living, in the abeyance of principle mere infidelity, in the dominion of impulse the thralldom of passion, and in the mind's mobility that want of ballast which leads to shipwreck. In such an argument as this, I must repeat that we cannot afford to forego the great example of Milton. In the first place, any theory of the poetic mind which excludes Milton, one of the four greatest poets of the world, must be from the outset false and absurd. There is no use in any further discussion of it. But beyond this, Milton is the great exemplar among the poets of the perfect life. He is the chief of saints in the poetical calendar. His was a life of noble aim and pure deed, that, showing as a fine poem, has charmed the moralist, and won even the straitest Puritan. I cannot let such a life drop out of my argument.

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of sensi-
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principle.

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Proofs of it
in his
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The truth is, that Mr. Masson has overrated the want of sensibility and the amount of principle in Milton's youthful character. Perhaps, in this case, he interprets the tendencies of the poet's youth by the results of his manhood. What, after all, can we trace in Milton's youth except beautiful sensibility, enormous intellectual voracity, intense enjoyment of study and of all things good and fair? That he shunned the immoralities of youth is not necessarily referable to what, in strictly technical phrase, is understood by principle, virtue, sense of obligation to law. Why not to love rather than to law?—to that attraction which all things lovely, honourable, and of good report must ever exert upon a simple mind?—to that repulsion which gross vice excites in all refined natures? In short, what is there in all this inconsistent with the superabundant sensibility and deficiency of principle in the poetic nature?

Further
proofs in
his Oratori-
cal Exer-
cises.

Nay, if we examine further, it will be found that the proofs multiply in opposition to Mr. Masson. Just as in his Oratorical Exercises the poet was ready to argue—it might be for day against night, it might be for night against day; or again, it might be for ignorance, it might be for knowledge; so the great fact of his after-life, which is most pronounced in his youth, is his unbounded tolerance—a tolerance which in his maturity signified an unlimited confidence in the

power of truth over all error, and also a fear lest any good thought should be lost to mankind, because it happens to be contrary to the dominant opinion, and appears to wear the badge of heresy; but a tolerance also which, especially in this latter form, must have signified in the immaturity of his mind a certain irresolution, a certain latitude of principle, a certain indifference. For the toleration of a boy is very different from that of a man; the toleration which precedes is very different from that which succeeds a careful study; and it appears to me that the toleration which Milton afterwards developed into a dogmatic principle, and justified on grounds of right reason and state policy, must have wrought within him in the first instance, as a latent tendency, as a mode of poetry, as an unconscious symptom of that mobility and indiscriminating sympathy, which is the characteristic of the youthful poet.

Besides which—not to speak of the sixth oration, which exhibits an unexplained facility in obscene jesting, that not even the Clevelands and the Randolphins could outdo—there is in Milton's poetry of this early period a spirit quite in harmony with the theory of the poetical character combated by Mr. Masson, a spirit separated—I might say, by the whole diameter of feeling,—from the compositions which belong to the final epoch of his life. If we desire an example of

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—And in his
tolerance.Also in his
poetry.

CHAPTER XV. sensibility triumphing over principle, of varying moods assuming the alternate and absolute sway, of the most perfect mobility, where shall we find one more apt than in those two noble poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*; where it is to be remarked that the poet gives himself up without reserve to the instant feeling, stipulating in either case for the entire exclusion of the opposite? Throughout almost all of Milton's youthful poems, certainly throughout the most important of them, it will be found that the argument rests on a basis entirely hypothetical, and quite opposed to that categorical spirit which, in the perfection of his powers, led him to assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men. There is no dogmatic assertion whatever in his earlier poems: the poet is in that stage of pure sensibility, when he seems to be ready for all moods alike, provided they are beautiful; he is willing to assume any premises, and then on the strength of them to give his imagination free play for the mere pleasure of the emotion. It may be necessary to urge that in pronouncing this opinion I am not simply following my own knowledge of what these poems are,—what is far more important, we know from Milton's letters what he thought at this time regarding the function of poetry. Writing to his friend Charles Diodati, who had sent him some verses, and who had asked for some in return, as a proof

No dogmatism in his earlier poems, but pure sensibility.

of his affection, Milton protested that his love was too great to be conveyed in metre. So also in writing to Thomas Young, he observed that he had resolved to send his old preceptor an epistle in verse, but that he did not consider this enough without something added in prose; "for truly the boundless and singular gratitude of my mind was not to be expressed in that cramped mode of speech, straitened by fixed feet and syllables, but in a free oration, nay rather, were it possible, in an Asiatic exuberance of words."

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That is precisely the view which Milton's early poems suggest, namely, that verse is not the vehicle for categorical assertion and real sentiment, but for hypothetical reflections, imaginary situations, and potential feeling. It is from this point of view that we have a clue to those preposterous compliments which Milton paid to both Thomas Young and Alexander Gill—he was not flattering, but, with the most perfect good faith, writing prose-poetry to those who had been his instructors in the art. And so in his metrical poetry, all the men and women are shepherds and shepherdesses, he has got into the supposititious realm of song—into Arcadia, into the pastoral life which Mr. Masson truly says was but a device or form, adopted by the poet in order to secure that feeling of ideality, that sense of disconnection from definite time or place, and from all actual facts, which was then deemed

Milton's
view of
poetry.

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essential to the pure exercise of the poetic imagination. Milton, in one word, lived in his youthful poetry that hypothetical life, which is only explicable on the assumption that he had precisely such an overplus of sensibility and deficiency of principle as Mr. Masson denies in order to make him an exception among poets.

Recapitulation of the argument.

Placed side by side, then, Mr. Masson's argument and mine stand thus: The poet, the artist is supposed to be remarkable for an excess of impulse over principle. Mr. Masson says that this over-sensibility, be it good or evil, is not an essential of the poetic nature; for in Milton we see an example of a splendid poetical genius conjoined with firm moral principle. I say that the force of sensibility and the lack of dogmatism which belong to all poets, especially in youth, were palpable in Milton's youth; and that being thus palpable in a youth of perfect beauty, there is evidence that by itself the predominance of sensibility is not immoral. It is far more likely that the sublimity of Milton's youth is to be attributed to the perfection of his sensibilities than to the sternness of his character, to his good heart rather than to firmness of resolution, to fine feeling rather than to strength of principle. What is this but saying, as before, that love is more puissant than law; and that art favours no immorality in setting up love instead of law for its guide?

THE WORLD OF FICTION.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE WORLD OF FICTION.

NOW comes a new point of view. I CHAPTER XVI.
have explained that in examining —
the moral influence of art, we have The means which art employs.
to take into account in the first place the end of
art, in the second place its means. Having at
some length discussed the ethics of art in con-
nection with its object, which is the production
of pleasure, it is time now to discuss the same
theme in view of the means which art employs.
These may be loosely described in one word as
fiction, and unhappily fiction has come to be
regarded as the reverse of truth. Hence a
controversy, in which art, in more than one
sense, is denounced as the great engine of
falsehood.

In what is perhaps rightly entitled to the first The pleasure of falsehood
place among those wonderful Essays, all brim-

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ming with wit, wisdom, and winning eloquence, —in the *Essay on Truth*, Bacon avers that the mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure, and leaves us to infer, nay, pointedly declares that the pleasure of imagination and poetry comes of the same house and lineage.* Whatever the poet handles he is supposed to change into a lie. Macamut, Sultan of Cambaya, lived on poison, and thus became so deadly that flies alighting on his finger, and all who drew near him, were speedily killed. Even so, the poet has fed all his days on leasing, and—compact of imagination, which is supposed to be the most illusive of our faculties,—makes light of truth and deals death to fact. Perhaps the poets have to blame themselves most of all for the currency of this mistake. When King Charles II. reproached Edmund Waller with having written a poem in honour of the Restoration inferior to that which he had formerly composed in praise of Cromwell, he made answer: “Sir, the poet suc-

Asserted by
the poets
and others.

* So also Locke,—“If we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the figurative and artificial application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so, indeed, are perfect cheats.” . . . “It is evident how much men love to deceive and be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error, has always been had in great reputation.” . . . “It is in vain to find fault with these arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived.”—*Essay on Human Understanding*, Book III. Chap. x. Sect. 34.

ceeds better in fiction than in truth ;” and what a muster-roll of poets and poetasters might be called who, if possessed of Waller’s ready wit, would without scruple have vouchsafed the self-same reply !

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The least formidable, because the most ignorant, method of regarding the fictitious character of art is, to charge it boldly with a want of veracity. Here it is the proser that we have chiefly to deal with. I am reminded of the criticism of a terrible proser in the last century, who could not make out what Hotspur meant when, describing Mortimer’s fight with Glendower, he says :

Art is sometimes distinctly accused of mendacity.

On the gentle Severn’s sedgy bank
In single opposition, hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower :
Three times they breathed, and three times did they drink,
Upon agreement, of swift Severn’s flood ;
Who then affrighted with their bloody looks
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank.

The critic declares that if Shakespeare had not been perverted in his taste, he would never have penned such lines as these : “ Nature could never have pointed out to him that a river was capable of cowardice, or that it was consistent with the character of a gentleman such as Percy to say the thing that was not.” It is with a touch of the same fire that Mr. Collier records a

This, however, the view chiefly of prose.

CHAPTER
XVI.Sir Philip
Sidney's
defence.

boldly ; like a true knight he denies it: "Of all writers under the sun, the poet is least a liar." But see the evidence on the strength of which he makes the denial: "The poet never maketh any circles about your imagination to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth." If we are not to believe it true, we must believe it false; and if he who writes what we are to account false be least a liar of all writers under the sun, and simply because of his confession, the poet would seem to be little better than the confessed robbers of Egypt. As these, if they acknowledged their theft, were entitled to retain a fourth of the plunder; so the poet, making away with verity, is allowed to escape on condition of his giving up the one truth that he has been uttering a parcel of lies. And still the question is untouched; how far it may be right to engage in the perusal of acknowledged falsehoods.

But art is
nothing if
not true.

Johnson gave the true answer: "Poets profess fiction," he says; "but the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth." This at first sight may appear to be but a Johnsonese rendering of the Spanish proverb so often quoted by Lord Bacon, "Tell a lie to find a troth." But it is not so. Art is nothing if not true. It cannot be false without injury to itself; and to speak of fiction as a system of falsehood, is but to misunderstand the language of art, and to grow

bewildered over the varieties of truth. Neither in word nor in thought do we ever reach the perfect grasp and exact rendering of truth. All our efforts are but approximations; and it is a bitter thing for the human intellect to be ever noting the residue of error which cleaves to all knowledge, all expression, forgetful on the other side of the much truth which they embody. There is no more falsehood in the fictions of art and poetry than in those of philosophy, of religion, of history, of law, of grammar, of mathematics.

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And indeed the highest truths are capable of expression only in the form of fiction.

The mathematician tells us that a line is length without breadth, and that a point has position but no magnitude. He lies worse than any poet, for there is no such thing in nature, and his whole science is built on this impossible fiction. Go from mathematics to grammar. We refuse to argue seriously with the quaker, who tells us that we utter falsehoods in using the plural for the singular pronoun; but his objection to the grammatical fiction is neither better nor worse than the objection to artistic fiction. Let us turn to politics. The whole political life of England, the grandest political life that the world has seen, is founded on the prodigious fiction—that the crown can do no wrong. There is a sense of course in which it is absurd to speak of the sovereign as impeccable; and those who strain at gnats may insist on the literal falsehood of the legal fiction. It is but a part

Mathematical fictions.

Grammatical fictions.

Legal fictions.

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of the imperfection which clings to all human expressions ; and essentially the fiction is for us true and unmistakable.

Philosophi-
cal fictions
and abstract
ideas.

In philosophy, too, we have other fictions, and the battles of the realists, the nominalists and the conceptualists remind us that on the very threshold of reason we have to accept fictions more inveterate, more indefensible, than any which the fancy invents—abstract ideas. The abstract idea of a triangle, for example, is not a reality, nor is it the mental image of a reality, since all three-sided figures in nature must be scalene, isosceles or equilateral, and the ideal triangle is none of the three. Or, again, the general idea of man answers to no individual in existence ; it is neither tall as the Anakim, nor short as the Bosjesmen, nor yet middle-sized ; neither black nor white ; neither old as Parr nor young as the last infant prodigy ; it has eyes, but they are not the blue of the Saxon, nor the jet of the Gipsy, nor the hazel of the Celt, nor the pink of the Albino ; it is neither bearded like the Arab, nor beardless like the Mongol ; it applies to all in general, and to none in particular.

But are these abstract ideas false? It is in these fictions on the contrary that the philosopher expresses the highest truths which the mind of man can grasp. Yet the fictions of art have an advantage over those of philosophy. We can imagine to ourselves the possible existence of a

Fictions of
art have an
advantage
over those
of philo-
sophy.

Hamlet or a Faust. The existence of a man in the abstract is simply inconceivable. CHAPTER
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Do we fare better when we turn from the fictions of reason to those of sense? At the other end of the table at which I am writing, there lies a book. I know that it is in form, rectangular; but I see it as a rhomboid, and if I were a painter, I should paint it as a rhomboid. The rhomboid is a fiction of the eye—but is it false? The whole theory of foreshortening is based on the fictions of perspective; but it is only in these fictions that the truth of drawing can be rendered. The steel grate in my room blushes with the reflected colour of the hearth-rug. You who stickle for truth and talk of the falsehoods of fiction, decide whether it is better for an artist to paint that grate the colour of steel, or the colour of the crimson rug. Which would be the truer tint? And again, still speaking of the fictions of sense, decide which is truer to say that the sun is just now setting, or that the earth is wheeling from the sun? The fictions
of sense.

Nay, look to religion itself and see the fictions to which we are reduced. We speak of the Most High God as if he were like ourselves, with the same passions, and the same limbs, irascible, affectionate, jealous, with feet upon a footstool, with hand outstretched, with arm laid bare, with bowels that sound like a harp for Religious
fictions.

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 Isaiah xvi. 2. Moab, and inward parts for Kirharesh. Is all this false? and if we discard these fictions, can we find other terms in which to express with equal force and clearness the truths which the fictions convey?

The whole world of thought is a world more or less of fiction.

Behold, it is a world of fictions in which we live, and history itself, that prides itself above all else on its adherence to fact—history has not without a show of reason been pronounced to be false in everything but the names and the dates. Amid all these fictions of the senses, of the heart, of reason and of revelation; amid fictions of history, fictions of law, fictions of philosophy, fictions of mathematics, fictions of language, fictions that are all more or less short of the truth, but still are charged with truth and mean truth—shall we be told that in art alone fiction is not allowable, and can only mean falsehood? Art, let it be repeated, is nothing if not true, and what fictions it employs are but the poor faltering human expressions of truth which cannot be half so well conveyed in other forms. To every great artist is granted the gift which the elf queen bestowed on Thomas of Ercildoune—the tongue that cannot lie.

And these fictions are not falsehoods, but faltering expressions of truth.

A further sense, however, in which art is accused of being fictitious;

Nothing can be weaker and more stupid than the old accusation that art because fictitious in form is stricken with the leprosy of lies; but behind that accusation, in so far as we have yet considered it, there dwells a deeper meaning.

The untruthfulness of art is really supposed to consist, not in any want of veracity, but in a want of verity. There is no objection to the fictions of form. But is there in art no falsehood of substance? Does it not, on the one hand, play false with the ideals of religion? Does it not, on the other, play false with the realities of life?

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namely,
because it is
not reality.

It is a perplexing fact in the history of art, that many a time and oft it has flourished in an inverse ratio to the religious life. Again and again, when faith has been strongest, art has been weakest; and when faith has been weak, art has been strong. The contrast is usually interpreted to the discredit of poetry and art which are supposed to offer the substitute of unreal sentiment for the faith which can alone save. But the truth is that in those cases where the religious sentiment is displaced, or seems to be displaced by poetical sentiment, it will nearly always be found that the former is just then choked with superstition, and that the poetical spirit which overrides it is a real good—is an advance upon the current creed—is not so much infidel as Protestant and reforming. The Latin poets especially, have the reputation of being at variance with the orthodoxy of the popular religion. "I have always said, and will say," sings Ennius, "that there is a race of gods in heaven, but I do not think that they look after

Thus, for
example, it
sometimes
fails of
orthodoxy.

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the race of men; for if they did, good would come to good men, and bad men would go to the bad, which is not at all the case." In like manner Pacuvius and Lucilius ridiculed the superstitions of their time, the divination of the augurs, and the idolatry of the people. This sceptical tendency culminated in Lucretius, who is commonly supposed to have been an utter atheist. Afterwards, perhaps, we may not find scepticism dogmatically set forth, but in poet after poet under the Emperors, we can see that there was no real belief in the religious system of the time. To Tibullus, for example, it may be doubted whether the deities of Olympus meant more than to Pope or Addison.

If it fails of orthodoxy it is not therefore irreligious, but is sometimes reformatory.

But can we in the nineteenth century seriously blame these Roman poets because they rose to a higher strain of religious sentiment than was contained in the popular faith? The fact is, that all great poetry is Protestant in tone. The very essence of poetry is to idealize, and any great poet in rising to a higher conception of the Deity than prevails in his time, is sure to offend the orthodox, and to exhibit signs of revolt from the current creed. Euripides was called an atheist, the Troubadours were Albigenian, Milton was an advanced Puritan. But great poetry, if it shows some scepticism of current dogmas, is essentially religious in temper, and, in fact, often creates a religion. From

what is known of the history of poetry, we may be quite certain that Homer's theology was in advance of his time (though this is not Mr. Gladstone's view), and that it was so far sceptical; while on the other hand, Homer must have gone far to create the Greek religion, as it showed itself in the palmy days of Greece. The names of infidel poets in this very century may be cited on the other side. But if we do not accept their infidelity, neither need we condemn it utterly. There was a hard mechanical theory of the world and its relations to the Deity prevalent in the earlier half of this century. The poets, whom we condemn for their scepticism, saw before them but two types of theology—theology in the cold-blooded school of Paley, reduced to a system of clever contrivances, with springs and pulleys, and most ingenious machinery; theology in the more ardent school of the Wesleys and the Whitfields, reduced to a system in which there was less of love and mercy than of hell and damnation. If thus in the earlier half of the century there flourished among us a mis-shapen theology, a clockmaking theory of the universe, which represented the Almighty as a sempiternal Sam Slick, hard of heart, but of infinite acuteness and softness of sawder, those are not wholly to be blamed who revolted against the creed because in their zeal they carried the revolt too far.

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The broadest statement of the fact that art is fictitious.

What discordance there may be between art and religion, is, however, but part of a more general fact. It is that the art world is not the real world. Living in the art world, it is said, unfits us to sojourn in the actual world, and to fight the hard battles of life. There is no ground of objection, be it observed, in the fact of the two worlds being different. The objection is that living in the one unfits us for the other.

Curious contradiction of opinions on this subject.

This view has with some persons become a sort of common-place; but those who have urged it most forcibly are Rousseau, in his letter to D'Alembert on Public Shows, and Dugald Stewart, in treating of the Imagination. It deserves particular attention, because it is diametrically opposed to the views of nearly all the old thinkers. If we take Aristotle as representing ancient philosophy, and Milton as representing more modern thought, we find them, from the very same facts, arguing to a conclusion the right opposite of Rousseau's and Stewart's. The phenomenon is like that which puzzles a landsman when he sees two fleets sailing with the same wind contrary ways. There is a fine northerly breeze, and to our amazement it drives the good ship Stagyrite and all its convoy to the west, while it blows the Jean Jacques, with many another, eastward.

The modern

The one set of thinkers argue as follows: It

is a law of human nature (limited, however, in its range) that habits of action are strengthened, and mere emotions or passive habits are weakened, by repetition. Thus the frequent sight of suffering dulls the sense of pity, while, if we are in the habit of relieving the sufferers, that habit grows upon us. Hence one sometimes sees the curious paradox, that those who are most forward to rescue the lost and to soothe the miserable—as physicians—seem to look with a sort of callousness on the anguish which they are bent on removing. Much experience of suffering has deadened the painfulness of pity as an emotion, while it has quickened the tendency to act the good Samaritan. Now the argument is that fiction excites emotion which ends there, and is not followed by action. The result is sheer loss. Emotion is weakened, the tendency to appropriate action has at the same time gained no accession of force. On the contrary, the habit has been produced of enjoying emotion, without finding for it the natural outlet in action. This is to hamstring the power of movement, and to drain vital energy in dreams.

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theory that
living in
the art
world unfits
us for the
actual
world.

Such then is the modern theory ; and before I set against it the ancient, and what seems to be the truer theory, it may be right to point out that it is of itself too timid to stand its ground. Not only so well-balanced a thinker as Dugald Stewart, but nearly all who speak of fiction as

This theory, however, is usually stated so timidly as to be of small importance.

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enervating, take care to observe that they are thinking only of excessive indulgence in it. That, however, is in effect to yield the point at issue. All excess is baneful, and no one doubts that such an excess of fiction as will overbear the realities of life is not to be defended. Those who, like Rousseau, state the case more absolutely, are of the class who love extremes, and who may be supposed to have some sympathy with the doctrine advanced in Rousseau's earliest performance, that science as well as the arts has been unfavourable to morals.

The ancient
theory, as
set forth by
Aristotle

Turn for a contrast to the Greek doctrine as set forth by Aristotle and held forth by Milton. What Aristotle meant has been much disputed, but after having read nearly all that has been written on the subject, I cannot doubt the accuracy of Milton's interpretation. Without any shadow of hesitation Milton says, that "tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the greatest moralist and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure, with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated." He supports this view by an argument from the homœopathy of the time, which if it is unsound in fact, will at least help to make clear

the truth it illustrates. "Nor is nature wanting," says Milton, "in her efforts to make good his (Aristotle's) assertion; for so in physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours." Aristotle's doctrine is a protest against Plato's. It was the doctrine of Plato, part of his general teaching against all art, that tragedy had the ill effect of inflaming passion—of so rousing it before fictitious events, that in the presence of real ones it must be too strong for the occasion. If we weep for Niobe in marble, what shall we not feel for Niobe in the flesh? Here we have an accusation against art the very reverse of that which is brought against it in modern times. The modern accusation is that if we weep for a fictitious Niobe, we are likely to exhaust our benevolence and to show small pity for the Niobe of real life. To complete the turning of the tables, that which in modern times is the chief count of accusation against fictitious distress, was put forward by Aristotle as its chief count of praise. With a clear reference to Plato, he points out that acquaintance with fictitious sorrow is cathartic in its effect, and brings passion to a mean. He who has wept for Niobe in a tune, will unawares feel the restraint of tune in his grief for a real Niobe.

I may be asked for an illustration of the fact, that the fictitious foretaste of emotion has a regu-

CHAPTER
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protest
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Plato.Curious
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theories.On the fic-
titious fore-

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emotion.

lating influence on the emotion ever after. The French used to complain of the atrocities allowed upon the English stage. Othello smothers Desdemona before the audience; Macbeth's head is carried about on a pole; Hamlet dies amid universal butchery. By Shakespeare's contemporaries still worse horrors were brought upon the boards, as when Webster decreed that the Duchess of Malfi should be strangled with ropes before our eyes. The French critics were shocked at these things, and triumphantly declared that they would not be tolerated in France. The sight of a scaffold would horrify a French theatre, and scarcely would the audience allow even the stab of a poignard.* But see the difference between Paris and London. All Paris that would have been shocked to see a scaffold on the stage, and turned away its head from fictitious slaughter, crowded to the guillotine in the Grève and in the Place Louis XV. Londoners that fairly faced the feigned atrocities

* "Soit que l'esprit philosophique les (Anglais) refroidisse, soit que les combats des gladiateurs, que la politique autorise encore parmi eux, les rendent moins sensibles à la simple imitation des catastrophes tragiques; soit enfin que la populace qui compose, à Londres, la plus grande partie des spectateurs, ait fait prévaloir son goût barbare et grossier; leur théâtre a porté la

tragédie à un degré d'horreur inconnu aux anciens. Les Français, aussi délicats que s'ils étaient plus sensible, n'ont pu souffrir des spectacles si effrayants. La coupe d'Astrée a fait détourner les yeux à toutes nos femmes; la vue d'un échafaud les révolterait; à peine s'est-on accoutumé au coup de poignard."—MARMONTEL, *Œuvres*, tome viii. p. 235.

of their stage, have had no scenes in the history of their vast city that approach in horror such transactions as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the bloodshed of the Reign of Terror.

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The contrariety between art and life must be neither blinked nor magnified into a mountain. All art has the double tendency to give off the life of the artist and to catch at something which is not visibly in his life; and it is sometimes difficult to determine whether what we find in a work of art reflects the life or only the dreams of a period.

The contrariety between art and life not to be denied.

The double tendency of art.

Dean Swift complained of Thomson's *Seasons* that there was nothing doing in it; and the same might be said of much the larger portion of the art and poetry of last century. Now we happen to know that this was a characteristic not only of poetry but of the time in which it flourished. Last century, up to the French Revolution, was a period of comparative repose in the history of Europe. To speak roundly and roughly, there was little doing in it. On the other hand, as the eye which has been looking at something red projects its image green upon the opposite wall, there are cases in which art gives us not the true colour of the time, but its complementary colour. For an example of this opposite tendency, go to the minnesingers. They lived amid all the fighting of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and included in their number some of the foremost

Sometimes it reflects the life of a period.

Sometimes it fails to express what historians would regard as the dominant life of the time.

The minnesingers.

CHAPTER XVI. warriors of the time,—emperors, princes, barons, knights. They crowded round the court of the empire—the crusading courts of Conrad III. and Barbarossa. We can lay our fingers on the ascertained compositions of no less than one hundred and fifty of them, and we have the anonymous songs of many more. But they sang only of love. They have not one war-song. The war-cry of a warlike age and of warrior-poets is not to be heard in the strains of all this vast throng of minstrels. And if we are surprised that we have no note of the crusades from the singers who swarmed around the crusading courts of Germany, we are no less surprised at the counter fact which we find in Italy. In the records of the middle ages, the princes and nobles of Italy have reproaches heaped on them for their indifference to the fate of the Holy Sepulchre. The crusades enlisted all the enthusiasm, all the energies of Christendom, draining its best blood and untold treasures. In that great cause Italy was the most backward and made the least sacrifices. Yet oddly enough it is the Italian Tasso who is so kindled by the spirit of the crusades as to write the epic of *Jerusalem Delivered*,* and in it he gives

The epic of
the cru-
sades.

* May I take this opportunity of recommending the new translation of the great Italian epic by Sir John Kingston James? About half a dozen translations of the *Jerusalem* into English

have already appeared, and the latest seems to be the best. It is by no means perfect, but it comes nearer than any other to the spirit of the original.

the foremost place to the prowess of his country-
men.

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This apparent severance of the artist from his epoch and his country is sometimes displayed in comical terms, as in the story which Eckermann tells of Goethe. When the aged poet was near his end, news came to Weimar of the Revolution in Paris which raised Louis Philippe to the throne. It set every one in commotion. When Soret went in the afternoon to see Goethe, "Now," said the poet, "what do you think of the great event? The volcano has come to an eruption: all is in flames." "A frightful story," replied the writer, "but what else could be expected under such bad government? It was but natural that all the blundering of the ministry should end in the expulsion of the Bourbons." "We do not seem to understand each other," said Goethe. "I am not speaking of these people, but of something quite different. I am speaking of the contest, so important for science, between Cuvier and Geoffrey St. Hilaire, which has come to an open rupture in the Academy." That little conversation is entirely in the spirit of the famous saying of the Abbé Dangeau. When he heard of the disasters of Blenheim and Ramilies, and of the danger with which his country was threatened, he laid his hand on his desk and could say, with a smile of triumph: "Come what may,

A parallel
illustration
in an anecdote of
Goethe.

CHAPTER I have safe here three thousand verbs all rightly
 XVI. conjugated."

Yet another
 illustration
 in the influ-
 ence of town
 on town-
 bred poets.

Let me give one more example of this tendency, because it is a very common one. I refer to the tendency of town-bred poets to forget and deny the town, notwithstanding its vast abounding life. It may be doubted whether we ever firmly enough seize the fact that Milton was a Cockney. We not only overlook it, but our whole knowledge of his poetry leads us to protest against it strongly. We imagine Milton as a man of the country, secluding himself in his earlier days, like the nightingale of which he sings, amid the leafy shades of Buckinghamshire, far removed from "towered cities" and "the busy hum of men." On the contrary, he was town-born-and-bred. He was born within the sound of Bow-bells, and within the shadow of Bowsteeple. He first saw the light in Bread Street, one of the cross streets running into that great thoroughfare to which Johnson referred when he said, "When you have seen one green field, sir, you have seen all green fields. Sir, I like to look upon men. Let us walk down Cheapside." He lived under his father's roof in the city of London; he went to St. Paul's school, in St. Paul's Churchyard; and when he left the capital it was in order to proceed to Cambridge. Up to his twenty-fourth year, his life was thus spent between the great metropolis

As Milton.

on the Thames and the great university on the CHAPTER
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Cam.

London then, it is true, was nothing like On London
in the days
of Milton.
what it is now, when a dweller in the City is walled round and defended from the country by ramparts of brick some four or five miles in thickness, and is covered from sun and moon and stars by that tremendous canopy of smoke which must have entered into Shakespeare's imagination when he spoke of "the blanket of the dark." Its population was under half a million, and for extent we may liken it to Liverpool or Glasgow of the present day. Such as it was, however, it was even then the greatest city in Europe. Whatever were the town-influences of those days, Milton felt them and grew under them; and as we picture to ourselves what these influences were, we cannot but wonder that a great all-embracing mind like Milton's should not feel them in such wise that they should appear with a positive not a negative force in his poetry. Only imagine this London for a moment, and see how the details of its multitudinous life bear upon the great poet's temperament, with the force rather of repulsion than of attraction.

Born in the year 1608, John Milton was London in-
fluences and
Milton's
poetry anti-
pathetic.
launched upon London life when there were congregated in the metropolis the most splendid intellects that have ever been seen in similar

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Milton's
proximity
to the
Mermaid
Tavern,

And the
wits that
flourished
there.

constellation. While the child is still crying in his nursery, or enjoying the sweet sleep of infancy, we can hear from a house hard by—none other than the Mermaid in the selfsame street—the crashing laughter of the wits who, over the brimming sack and the foaming tankard, re-echo the rattling wit of Shakespeare, and the heavy cannonade of Ben Jonson—the English frigate and the Spanish galleon that held the incessant war of words. They call each other, as the whole town calls them, by their Christian names, Will and Ben, and Jack and Tom, and they are assembled after the play is finished to eat the fat capon, to fill the goblet and to pass the jest. They are dreadful in puns; they are by no means select in their phrases; there is a good deal of dirty talk splashed about; sometimes one may detect a touch of jealousy, though the prevalent feeling is that of perfect confidence and genuine friendship. Francis Beaumont has his private signals to John Fletcher, and both have a design to outwit Ben; George Chapman thinks the youngsters rather forward, and waits anxiously for Ben to rush out upon them like Achilles, shaking his horrid crest and brandishing his mighty spear; Tom—Tom Heywood, the prose Shakespeare—thinking of his one hundred and seventy-first new play, sees a likely situation and chuckles; Will lets off one of his squibs that completely turns the

conversation, and sets the table in a roar, and Ben himself, with his canary in one hand and his clay in the other, rolls about on his chair, the prince of good fellows, well soaked with the liquor that he loves, and trying to drink, smoke, and talk everybody down all in the same instant of time. While all this clatter of tongues and drinking-cups, the crackling of the wood-fire, and the grating of the chairs upon the sanded floor, are heard—but a few yards off a beautiful babe with golden hair sleeps in his cradle, and amid the sullen din of the City dreams of that heaven where the guests are angels and the mirth is music. Meantime the babe's father, who is a composer as well as a scrivener, has tied up his parchments, and, seated at the organ, fills the house with strains to which it is not less accustomed than to the sound of law Latin and the smell of skins and pounce. As the foot-passenger goes by the house, which bears the sign of the Spread Eagle, taken from the Milton arms, he perhaps stops to listen, as he listened to the uproarious crew of the Mermaid, and if he is at all musical he recognises the air as sung last Sunday in the parish church—the tune called York, of which Master Milton was the composer, which half the nurses of England used afterwards to chant by way of lullaby, and which the country churches rung in their chimes full many times a day. Gradually the stillness

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—Milton's
father.

CHAPTER
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—

A passing
glance at
other men
of thought
who then
lived in the
metropolis.

of the night deepens, the Bacchanals disperse, and the footfall of the passer-by is unheard. Only a few restless spirits are awake, who from the night snatch hours of study which the day is too poor to give. Bacon throws off the cares of a solicitor-general in order to polish his *Essays* which he is preparing for a new edition, or to perfect that New Instrument of science in which the world's future lies as in the wand of a magician. Selden in his little chamber in the Temple pores over piles of black-letter, adds another and another to his host of precedents, and mutters a sneer against ecclesiastics and their tithes, while the faggot on his hearth has burnt itself out, and the white ashes are blown by the night wind about his cell, settle on his papers and fill the dim air with motes. On his pallet in the Tower a noble prisoner tosses and sighs for the day, half dreaming of voyages across distant seas, the discovery of Eldorades and the glories of Virginian tobacco, half pondering on that history of the world which, if he cannot roam over it free from shore to shore, he can still in imagination share and interpret with all that chivalrous spirit which once led him to doff his rich cloak and to spread it on the ground that England's queen might foot it like a queen. If George Herbert, with his long nose, is still at Westminster school, it may be that he too is now awake, thinking of the

coming pleasures of the university, happy at the idea of soon meeting his "sweetest mother," and bent on anything rather than the service of the temple and what in more than one of his poems he has called the passage of the Jordan.

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It was upon the London that contained such men as these—the London that was not only astir with all the energy of a trade which, unsurpassed by that of any other city in the world, even then made conquests in regions the most remote, and began to familiarize itself with the jewelled lions and the ivory thrones of moguls and rajahs in the fabulous Orient, but was also strong in the enjoyment of a civic life, such as few existing municipalities could boast; strong in the anticipation of political development and popular rising; strong in the excitement of the release from Rome, the final triumph of Protestantism, and the confusion of Guy Fawkes; strong in the literary stars that clustered together in the great city, and whether engaged in the founding of a new philosophy, the translating of the imperishable Book, or the creating fiat of poetic imagination, shone forth with a glorious ascendancy, to which only Athens in her prime can dare a comparison, and which even Athens cannot approach; strong especially in that dramatic art which, as displayed at the Globe and many a theatre besides, seemed like the discovery of a new world, endowed the town

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of the most
important
influences
which then
stirred the
town.

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with a new sense, took all London by storm, and made citizens, who of all others in the world were the most devoted to business and hard cash, at the same time the most devoted to pleasure's lure and the airy nothings of fancy;—it was upon the metropolis peopled by such men and moved by such forces, that young Milton was thrown; it was in this metropolis that Milton rose to manhood.

Turn from
the life of
the town to
the life of
Milton's
poetry.

Yet formed in the town—and such a town—there is very little of the town in his poetry. We have in our time seen this as the characteristic of other Cockneys—Leigh Hunt and Keats, for example, the latter of whom, if his life had been spared, might have written something not unworthy even of Milton's fame, and seems to be the nearest approach to a second Milton that we have produced. All these babble of green fields, as if only too happy to forget the smoke of cities. Imagine a town-bred poet lamenting the death of a dear friend—his Lycidas—in this fashion, which is the very revelry of flowers :

Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flowrets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparsely looks;
Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
That on the green turf suck'd the honey'd showers

And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
 Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
 The tufted crowtoe, and pale jessamine,
 The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
 The glowing violet,
 The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
 With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears;
 Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
 And daffodillies fill their cups with tears,
 To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.

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The point of all this? The point is that both critics and moralists when they see a contrast between fact and fiction, life and art, fly to their conclusions much too hastily. Art would not be art if it were the perfect double of life, and often, as in love, we have to read the signs of it backwards.* It is a saying of Rochefoucauld's

The gist of
 the argu-
 ment.

* M. St. Marc Girardin has described, very forcibly, the two aspects of literature between which we have to judge:

“Il y a, dans la littérature, deux sortes de sentiments, et ces deux sortes de sentiments répondent à deux phases différentes de l'histoire littéraire des nations: il y a les sentiments que l'homme trouve dans son cœur, et qui sont le fond de toutes les sociétés; il y a les sentiments que l'homme trouve dans son imagination, et que ne sont que l'ombre et le reflet altéré des premiers. La littérature commence par les uns et finit par les autres.

“Quand la littérature arrive à ces derniers sentiments, quand

l'imagination, qui se contentait autrefois de peindre les affections naturelles, essaye de les remplacer par d'autres affections, alors les livres ne représentent plus la société: ils représentent l'état de l'imagination. Or, l'imagination aime et cherche surtout ce qui n'est pas. Quand la guerre civile agite et ensanglante la société, l'imagination fait volontiers des idylles et prêche la paix et la vertu. Quand, au contraire, la société s'apaise et se repose, l'imagination se reprend de goût pour les crimes. Elle est comme le marchand d'Horace: elle vante le repos du rivage quand gronde la tempête; elle aime les flots et les orages, quand le vaisseau est

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that the more a man loves his mistress the nearer he is to hate her. Whereupon Lord Lytton remarks with equal force, "But in return, the more he declares he hates her, the nearer he is to loving her again." And art is not less mysterious and contradictory in its utterances than love. Who could have imagined that the minnesinger was a warrior? Who could have dreamt that Milton was a Cockney? Whether the poet sing true to his time or not, and whether we who listen to his song learn to live more with the time or not, are questions which are not to be settled by pointing out

dans le port. Ajoutez, chez nous, à cette contradiction naturelle de l'esprit humain, les souvenirs encore ardents de la guerre et de la Révolution, le goût des aventures, le regret du repos, l'espérance de la gloire et de la fortune, le dédain de vivre petitement dédain plus vif au cœur des fils de ceux qui ont fait de grandes choses. Ce sont ces désirs inquiets et ces émotions confuses que recueille l'imagination et qu'elle met en œuvre dans la littérature. De là l'énergie des romans, la terreur des drames; de là enfin cette littérature qui plait d'autant mieux à la société qu'elle lui ressemble moins. La société autrefois aimait à trouver, dans la littérature, l'image embellie de ses sentiments, et cette image lui servait de leçon et

d'encouragement; elle n'y cherche plus aujourd'hui qu'une distraction. Elle disait naguère à la littérature: Étudiez-moi afin de m'instruire et de m'élever;— elle lui dit aujourd'hui: Amusez-moi. Alors l'imagination se met à l'œuvre, et elle fait seule tous les frais de la littérature. Elle ne réussit pas toujours à amuser le public; mais elle consomme le divorce de la littérature d'avec la société, chacune allant de plus en plus où la poussent ses besoins et ses penchants: la société, à ses affaires et à ses labeurs chaque jour plus tristes, parce que, chaque jour, l'art y trouve moins sa place; la littérature, à ses œuvres chaque jour plus frivoles et plus vaines, parce que, chaque jour, l'étude et l'observation du monde y ont moins de part."

here and there such discordances between fact and fiction as I have been noting. These discordancies are perplexing only when we look at them singly. They are nothing when we see them in the mass, for then we trace a method in them—a law like that of colours, which engender in our sight their opposite. I am indebted for this illustration which I have already used, to that great Irishman, Cornelius O'Dowd, who raises the question, "Is it in ethics as in optics? and does the eye, gorged and inflamed by red, turn to seek repose—to rest—upon green?" Both the eye and the mind do more than this. The eye not merely looks out for a green object to rest upon; it creates the complementary colour, and projects it. If we look through a pane of yellow glass, and then look away on a sheet of white paper, we shall see there the exact image of the pane—but the colour is thrown purple upon the paper. Is the eye therefore false? to be plucked out? and to be cast away?

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—
Illustrated
in the law
of colours,
and the
eye's crea-
tion of
colour.

Ever as we pursue our inquiries into the nature of art, we come back to the great fact which lies at the root of it, that man leads a double life, and that the laws and the needs of the one which flourishes in imagination, or as I have ventured to name it, the Hidden Soul, are not less imperative and importunate than those which rule in our work-a-day consciousness. But the laws and

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needs of each differ as the climates of the frigid and the torrid zones ; and when the man of fact insists upon the falsehood of fiction, he merely repeats the fallacy of the African king, who amid the heats of the equator, declared ice to be impossible ; or of the Spitzbergen fisher, who amid the nights—half a year long—of his native north, screamed at the notion of days and nights that lasted only twelve hours. We are much too prone to set up our standards. Mine shall be the standard height ; mine the standard of vision. This instant feeling shall be the measure of all feeling ; the present knowledge shall be the limit of knowledge. And so, because the world of imagination and of art is not the exact double of reality, we must regard it as a mock and a lie !



THE ETHICAL CURRENT.

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE ETHICAL CURRENT.

WHEN a painter draws his own portrait, CHAPTER XVII. he has the advantage of a mirror in which he can see himself at a proper distance. But when we attempt to understand or to delineate the age we live in, The difficulty of understanding one's own time. we are apt to forget that we have no chance of viewing it from a sufficient distance—that we are too much in it to be able to see how it looks on the broad plain of history. Perhaps no collection of opinions would be more curious than those which even great thinkers have pronounced upon their own times. Thus we find Bacon expressing a “doubt that this age of the world is somewhat upon the descent of the wheel.” Hooker complained that the same age was deficient in learning. Bishop King described it as “this prodigal and intemperate age of the

CHAPTER XVII. world." Michael Drayton summed it up as "this lunatic age." The period so decried is the grand Elizabethan epoch, which we now extol as the proudest in our annals. And yet of Drayton, who could speak of the time in which he flourished as lunatic, Ben Jonson says, "I find in him, which is in most of my compatriots, too great an admiration of their country."

The opinions of Elizabethans on the Elizabethan age.

The opinions of contemporaries on the present age.

One naturally recurs to these opinions concerning the Elizabethan age, when we hear what even men of ability can now assert regarding our Victorian era. Archdeacon Hare says it is an age of superficial character, feeble-minded, earth-worshipping and self-idolizing. Mr. John George Phillimore assures us that all strength has gone from our literature, and that we are little better than the beasts. Mr. Matthew Arnold tells us that we have no ideas, and that England is hindmost in the intellectual race which Europe is now running. When amid this discontent of the present, which is the natural condition of the human mind, we venture to descry what good there may be in things as they are, then comes from Mr. Hare, and Mr. Phillimore, and Mr. Arnold, the echo of Jonson's chiding of Drayton, that we are too much given to love our own country and our own times.

There is but one settled opinion as

All this conflict of opinion is a warning to us not to be too certain that we ever quite under-

stand our age or our country. I know of but one settled opinion as to the character of the English race. From the dawn of modern literature there has been a constant confession of its physical beauty. Upon other points it may be possible to raise a doubt. We pride ourselves on English honour; but the Spaniards of old accused us of falsehood, and the French to this day have a strong opinion as to the perfidy of Albion. We think that never was a nation more industrious than ours; but in the days of the last three Tudors our countrymen were denounced for their sloth and their idleness, and at a still later period George Herbert could cry out, "Oh, England! full of sin, but most of sloth." We talk of merry England; and there was a time when the joyful character of English singing was famous throughout Europe in a proverb of French origin (*Galli cantant, Angli jubilant, Hispani plangunt, Germani ululant, Itali caprizant*); but on the other hand we are also famous among foreigners for our melancholy. We boast of our philanthropy, our large-heartedness and our tolerance; but the nations upbraid us for lack of sympathy and for insular prejudice, while one of the most sober of French critics, M. St. Marc Girardin, speaks of "*la misanthropie chagrine du génie Anglais.*" The one excellence allowed to us is the gift of personal beauty, which indeed is nothing except it be the symbol of a higher

CHAPTER
XVII.to the
English
character.The beauty
of the Eng-
lish race
is alone
undisputed.

CHAPTER XVII. excellence. Sang the Emperor Frederic as a troubadour :

Me the Catalan ladies please ;
 Me the cavaliers of France ;
 Honour of the Genoese ;
 Minstrel music of Provence ;
 High Castilian courtesies ;
 And Treviso for the dance ;
 Sinews of the Arragonese ;
 English hands and countenance ;
 Me the Tuscan younkens please ;
 Me the Julian pearl enchants.*

* The original of this little poem is very curious ; and in the above translation I have utterly failed to reproduce the peculiar effect which comes of the rhyme always falling upon the name of the nation or the place indicated by the poet.

Plas mi cavalier Francez,
 E la donna Catalana,
 E l'onrar del Ginoes,
 E la court de Castellana,
 Lou cantar Provençalez,
 E la danza Trevisana,
 E lou corps Aragonés,
 E la perla Juliana,
 La mans e kara d'Angles,
 E lou donzel de Toscana.

It is not possible in English to make the rhymes all rest on the proper names. If any English poet could succeed in the attempt, it would be Sydney Dobell ; and the following translation, which he has been good enough to make for me, is remarkable as a *tour de force*. Yet even Mr. Dobell, with all his skill, has been able to work out only half the rhymes.

Cavalier of France for me ;
 And the Doña Catalanian ;
 High Castilian courtesie ;
 And the stature Arragonian ;
 The Provençal minstrelsy ;
 And the dances Trevisonian ;
 Genoese fidelity ;
 Pearls from Julium the Ausonian ;
 Damselry of Tuscany ;
 Hands and countenance Saxonian.

And so also the Spanish poet, Juan Lorenzo Segura, as translated by Bowring : CHAPTER
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Impetuous and light
Are the citizens of Spain,
The French of valiant knights
The character maintain ;
And always in the van
Are the young men of Champagne,
And the Suabians in their gifts
No costs nor cares restrain ;
The Bretons are renowned
For their zealous love of art ;
The Lombards ever act
An ostentatious part ;
The English are most fair—
But withal most false of heart.

There is but one voice upon this subject ever since the Pope Gregory expressed his opinion in the quibble that the Angles might be taken for angels.

It is with a diffidence inspired by these examples of failure that we must now attempt to ascertain the direction of the ethical current in our time—the master current which determines the movement of art, as of life and of all literature. And in setting about this inquiry we have first of all to come to terms with Mr. Matthew Arnold, who has pronounced a very decided opinion upon the subject. Mr. Arnold holds that the main movement of European thought just now is, what it has been for years past, a critical movement. The age is nothing if not critical ; criticism is what Europe

Mr. Matthew Arnold's opinion as to the master current of our times, that it is critical.

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most desires; and criticism is the very last thing for which we should at present care to consult English literature. Is the patriotism unjustifiable which suggests the reply that a theory of the European movement in which England has no share, or in which England acts only as a drag, must be wrong? One is rather surprised to find in Mr. Arnold the glibness which professes to bottle in one little word the spirit of an age. But he has some excuse for supposing that he has bottled the present age in the three syllables of criticism.

How far the thinking of the present time may fairly be described as critical.

The thinking of an epoch is said to be fairly represented in its philosophy, and the dominant philosophy of our epoch is what is called critical. Let us understand, however, what is meant by a critical philosophy, and see if there is anything in it peculiar to our time. Kant it was who gave the phrase authority. He called his first great work a *Critique*; it was a critique of pure reason. That is to say, Emmanuel Kant, when he began to think, found himself in the midst of problems which seemed to be insoluble; at least, they suggested the previous question, Is human reason in any way capable of dealing with them? Therefore, before entering on any argument in metaphysics, he undertook to criticise reason. This critical inquiry into the competence of reason is called a critical philosophy; and hence one may run

away with the notion that a critical philosophy is peculiar to our times. The name is new, but the thing is old. All the great thinking movements since the revival of letters are critical—they criticise either the powers or the methods of reason. Des Cartes gave us no system of thought that survives; his great work is a criticism on the method of thought. Bacon gave us no philosophy; he gave us a criticism on the methods which reason pursued and which it ought to pursue. The next great name in philosophy is that of Locke, and what is his *Essay on the Human Understanding*? He tells us how a company of gentlemen got together to discuss philosophy; how the question was thereby suggested, Is the human understanding equal to the task of philosophy? and how he undertook to answer that question by a critical estimate of the powers of the mind and the sources of knowledge. Hume pursued the criticism of Locke to its consequences, and arrived at a desolating scepticism as to the capacity of human reason. Kant's *Critique* was but a continuation of the same line of inquiry; and Sir William Hamilton's the same. The conclusion is manifest that if the thinking of our time be critical, it is not so in any sense which distinguishes it from the other great thinking movements of the last few centuries.

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All the
great think-
ing move-
ments of
modern
times are
critical.

What then is the characteristic movement of

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What then
is the cha-
racteristic
movement
of our time?

our time? He must be a bold man who will undertake to answer that question for certain. Often we know nothing of the leading movement until it is complete. It is like the tide at Dover which runs up the channel for four hours after to the eye of the landsman it has been ebbing fast, and which runs down again long after on the shore it begins to rise. There are about four hours in every tide in which a landsman will say it is flowing, when the seaman says it is ebbing. Nevertheless if the landsman at Dover declares the tide to be rising, when the seaman in mid-channel declares that it is running westward, no one can challenge the fact. And so we all from our special points of view can state what we see, and our witness so far as it goes may be trustworthy. In this temper, let us attempt to ascertain what is the precise movement in the art, the thought, the life of our times, of which we are most conscious. Each man of us in this inquiry can utter but his own methinks, and so long as we recognise it as a mere methinks we are certain to be within the truth.

The answer
to be given
diffidently.

The saying
of Tenny-
son, and
how the
saying may
be varied.

If then I may venture on a methinks, I should say that what strikes me most in the movement of our time is expressed by Tennyson in the saying that "the individual withers, and the world is more and more." But I am not sure whether the essence of this thought might not

be expressed in the very opposite terms: the individual prospers, and the world is less and less. The great point to be seized is that there is gradually being wrought a change in the relation of the individual to the mass. Whether we regard that change as a growth or as a withering will depend very much on what we think of the individual. If the individual in whom we are most interested is what is generally understood by a hero, then certainly it must be confessed that he withers. There is a cry gone forth that we are in lack of heroes. Great deeds are achieved as of yore; but they are not accredited to one man so much as they used to be; his comrades come in for their share of the glory; and the world at large, recognising his ability, adopting his ideas, seconding his efforts, is more and more in our esteem. Yet if the hero as an individual is of less account than he used to be, and so may be said to wither, the individual in a much wider sense may be said to prosper. The little men and the private men and all the incidents of privacy are coming into repute. We dwell far more than we used to do on the private side of human life. We have learned to feel that there is as much greatness in the family as in the state, in love as in strife, in the shedding of ink as in the shedding of blood, in finessing the pips at whist as in counting the chances of endless division lists.

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The relation
of the indi-
vidual to
the mass of
men.

CHAPTER XVII. — There was a time when we could draw a pretty clear line of demarcation between the private life and the public life—between private virtues and public virtues. Now the private virtues are becoming public, and the private life is rising into public importance. Publicity is the order of the day. The home life is proclaimed on the housetops; and the secrets of the heart are made an open show.

The glorification of private life.

The assertion that the decay of heroism and individuality of character is due to commerce.

Met by reference to the history of Venice.

They who take a desponding view of this fact, as Archdeacon Hare and Mr. Phillimore, say that the present is an age of superficial character because we have given ourselves up to the grovelling pursuit of money-making. What can we expect from a trading age? What from any nation of shopkeepers? The golden age has come back upon the earth; but it is not the golden prime of the poets; it has turned to dross. It is difficult to answer a charge like this, because it concerns our own times, and we cannot well see them in due perspective. The age is given to merchandize, and we of the Anglo-Saxon race in both hemispheres take the lead in the pursuit of gain. But if we would know whether there is any connection of cause and effect between the predominance of the trading spirit and the withering of individual character, then look at the history of Venice. Of all foreign histories which it behoves Englishmen to study, that is by far the most important.

But it is studied very little ; and Mr. Disraeli, CHAPTER XVII. himself of Venetian extraction, is the only one of our statesmen who seems to have mastered it. In the Venice of the middle ages we see before us a picture of modern England which we can hold at arm's length and study.

In her day, Venice was at the head of Christian In Venice of the middle ages we can see a picture of England, civilization ; her empire was the grandest in Europe ; her navies were the most powerful on the earth. She rejoiced in freedom when other nations bowed their necks to the cruel yoke of the feudal system, and even before the English barons had a Magna Charta to boast of. Her mariners knew all the coasts of Europe, and had found their way to Iceland, to Labrador, and to Newfoundland, before Columbus was born. Marco Polo had prayed to St. Mark in Tartary, India, and Cathay, while as yet Europe dreamt not of journeyings beyond the established route of palmers and pilgrims. It was about the same time, the end of the 13th century, that the golden ducats of Dandolo came into note and obtained a currency similar to that enjoyed afterwards by the Spanish dollar and now by the English sovereign. They were carried far beyond the confines of Europe, so that when Clive, after the battle of Plassy, came upon the hoarded treasures of the East, his eyes were astonished by the sight of ducats and sequins carried of old to these distant regions by Venetian traders.

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The trade of Venice was so large that in the beginning of the 15th century the Doge Mocenigo calculated the commerce with Lombardy alone as worth nearly 29,000,000 ducats a year. The Venetian galleys carried wine to the English, honey to the Scythians, wood to the Greeks and Egyptians, saffron, oil, and linen to Syria, Persia, and Arabia. They were the great carriers of the world. It was by means of Venetian galleys that the postal service between Germany and Constantinople was accomplished. As we read of the doings of Venetian merchants and the windings of Venetian polity, we are in the heart of the middle ages, but we hear all the modern cries and feel the modern pulse. The hands are the rough, hairy hands of the mediæval Esau, but the voice is the voice of the modern Jacob in all his various degrees from Jacobin to Jacobite.

And hear all
the modern
cries.

The consti-
tutional and
commercial
polity of
Venice.

In no other history of the middle ages can we find such a phenomenon. At times we imagine that the scenes enacted in the Great Council of Venice must bear a striking resemblance to what is reported of the American Congress. The debate becomes tumultuous; words pass into blows; and the proud nobles in the most august assembly of the world take to fisticuffs, for they have been deprived of their side arms. The whole system of routine is modern in its aspect. The Venetian

Government was the earliest in Europe that organized a bureaucratic machinery, that developed largely the use of red tape, that elaborated the diplomatic etiquette and official routine which, in its decrepitude, we know as the peculiar glory of the circumlocution office. Commerce is indebted to the Italians for that singularly ingenious system of book-keeping by double entry without which it would nowadays be impossible to conduct safely a large business. What double entry is to commerce, etiquette, routine, division of labour, and standing orders are to political administration; and to the Italians we are indebted for both systems. In the commercial polity of Venice Englishmen are especially interested. In many of the discussions in the Great Council one fancies that one hears the first notes of an infant Manchester school. Venice was constantly at war, but, being a nation of traders, its instincts were always on the side of peace, and an orator in the Great Council often looks curiously like Mr. John Bright in garments of mediæval cut, or Mr. Cobden clothed in purple.

Most curious of all, however, is it to think of the Funds in these middle ages. We who are apt to regard a national debt as quite a modern invention, seeing it is not two centuries old in this country, are amazed to hear of loans contracted in Venice for the State so early

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The Venetian Funds,

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And their
points of
resemblance
to the Eng-
lish Funds.

as the 12th century, to hear of the rise and fall of the funds in the 13th century, and to think of the Four per Cents. and the Five per Cents. as in those middle ages a good investment. The Venetian Funds were an invention of the revolution of 1173, just as the English Funds were a creation of the revolution of 1688. Mr. Disraeli is never tired of repeating that from 1688 to 1831 England was governed by a Venetian oligarchy, and the oligarchy had certainly learned the Venetian art of creating a public debt. Our Dutch William learned the secret in Holland. Money was required for certain purposes which were, no doubt, as commendable as they were imperative. But a Government, newly established and by no means secure, could not afford to tax the people heavily. It was a great thing for William's Government to afford our people the diversion of war and the glory of victory; but it was impossible to incur the odium of laying the burdens of the contest and the cost of the whistle on a nation accustomed to rebellion and but half satisfied with the revolution.

How the
loans were
raised.

So it was at Venice towards the close of the 12th century. Under the new constitution the people were deprived of their open assemblies. Their Arrengi, as they had previously been conducted, were robbed, indeed, of almost all their power. But under the new constitution it be-

came necessary to adjust the finances of the State, which recent wars had brought to the verge of bankruptcy, and it was a matter of importance that the taxes of the new Council should not be felt after those of the old, as the chastisement of scorpions after the chastisement of whips. The expedient of a loan, and a chamber of loans, was proposed. The Four per Cents. were raised. Gradually the system was carried out so completely, loan after loan being raised, that in process of time the Venetian Funds came to be regarded as a first-rate investment. Foreign princes, trembling for their power, and not knowing what should afterwards become of them, prudently sought permission to place their money—hundreds of thousands of ducats—in the secure keeping of the Chamber of Loans, and this, too, although in those troublous times the prices fluctuated prodigiously, being sometimes as low as $18\frac{1}{2}$, and never higher than 60. Where such an institution flourishes we at once feel that we are on modern ground. The Bank of Venice was the oldest institution of the kind in Europe, and, though banks and public funds are very gross material things, yet they very nearly express the essential facts of modern civilization. They mean money—they mean security—they mean debt—they mean heavy taxes to meet the interest of that debt—and more or less involve all the great problems of political economy.

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And how
they were
regarded in
Europe.

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In the Venice of the middle ages we are in the centre of commercial polity.

And the assertion that commerce is destructive of character may be supported by the fact that Venice soon decayed.

The true cause of the decline of Venice.

In the Venice of the middle ages we thus find ourselves in the very centre of commercial ideas, and of a commercial polity directed, as in England, by a mixed Government. Furthermore those who, with Archdeacon Hare and Mr. Phillimore, denounce the destructive effects of the commercial spirit can point with triumph to the speedy fall of the Bride of the Adriatic. We read of Venice in the height of power and refinement, when the other kingdoms of Western Europe were sunk in barbarism and struggling for existence, and we are astonished to hear of this mighty empire declining as the others, rising into notice, shook off the bonds of the mediæval darkness. But the cause of that decline must be traced not to the fact that Venice was a commercial empire, but to the fact that she had no agriculture—that she was a city without a country. It was upon this very ground that Venice maintained her right of dominion over the seas. In answer to a message from the Pope as to the free navigation of the Gulf, the Ducal Government stated that Venice having no lands depended on the sea, that her home and her path was on the deep, and that it was of vital importance to her that the Lion of St. Mark should rule the waters. Driven out upon the seas, she asserted her supremacy there, and, cooped up amid the lagoons, developed a municipal system to the highest point,

when all around was only feudalism. Queen of the sea, and enjoying all the strength that could be derived from municipal institutions and an elaborate constitutional government, Venice became very great; but in her greatness there were the seeds of death, for she had no broad footing upon the land.

A signal and most curious illustration of her weakness in this respect occurred in 1222, shortly after the conquest of Constantinople by the Venetian arms. In that year the Doge Ziani proposed to transfer the seat of the republic from Venice to Constantinople. He stood up in the Great Council, pointed out the unpleasantness of living amid the vapours of the lagoons, and behind dykes which the waters continually threatened to submerge. He described the colonies of the republic spread far and wide, and not sufficiently under control. He painted the glories of the Golden Horn—the finest and most enchanting site in the world—where his fellow-citizens might bid defiance to the Pisans and the Genoese; where they might lord it over the Archipelago, over the whole of Greece, and over the coasts of Asia; and where they might command the commerce of all mankind. He therefore moved that the Venetian Empire should be transferred bodily from Venice to Constantinople. The project was opposed by Angelo Faliero, and when it was put to the

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An illustration of the weakness of Venice in being a lackland government.

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ballot was lost by only one vote, which, as thus deciding the fate of Venice, was termed the *vote of Providence*. We can easily calculate the stability of an empire which was thus, in the estimation of half its Legislature, capable of being transplanted bodily. Nor was Venice only without a country, its wide-spread colonies were not colonies as we understand them, but branch establishments of trade. The Venetian colonist was still a Venetian citizen, paying his dues to the treasury of St. Mark, and never really naturalized in the country of his adoption. An empire, based upon the fickleness of commerce, and upon that alone, rests evidently upon a foundation as precarious as those shifting sands of the lagoons from which the Doge Ziani tried to lure away his fellow-islanders.

The lesson
to us which
is implied in
this history.

But in all this there is a lesson which tells directly on the argument of the present chapter. If we who glory in the originality of our constitution, and in the singularity of our commercial position, may find somewhat to lessen our pride and to teach us caution, in the history of Venice; once comparatively great as we are, free as we are, proud as we are; now sunk into decay, her navies reduced to a few gondolas, her palaces until but yesterday the spoil of the spoiler, and her paths the paths of the conqueror; we may also take comfort against the reproaches of those who attribute the withering of individual character

to the incubus of commerce, from the extraordinary force of individual character among the Venetians, which all the levelling influence of their trade could not crush. From being a collection of fishing villages and islands, Venice became an immense emporium, the leading men of which were at once merchants and princes. From being lord of a few morasses and shifting sands the Doge of Venice rose to be Doge of Venice, Dalmatia, and Croatia; he became the mate of Kings and Emperors; and the dynasties of the Badoeri, the Sanudi, and the Orseoli met on equal terms the House of Hohenstaufen in Germany, and the descendants of Capet in France. The trading aristocracy of Venice is the shrewdest that history makes any mention of, and, traders all, they felt and asserted their equality. Their differences were differences of wealth, and, above a certain level, differences of wealth do not constitute a social distinction. The difference between the man who has £5,000 a year and him who has £50,000 is by no means proportionate to the difference between men who have respectively £50 and £500. Above a certain level all differences of this kind go for nothing, and an aristocracy of wealthy traders insisted upon their equality. In the course of time they so asserted their rights that the Great Council of Venice became the most august assembly in the world. Proud and

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For Venice, absorbed in commerce, was famous for the force of character of its citizens.

Their social and worldly standing.

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exclusive as it was, however, the Venetian oligarchy had the natural sympathy of merchants with the people. We trace the whole spirit of the Venetian aristocracy in one great though exceptional fact. On the fall of Chioggia, when the very existence of the Republic was in danger, the Senate published a decree that of those families of plebeian rank who should most powerfully assist the State, either in purse or person in this its hour of need, thirty should be summoned after the peace to the Great Council; and in fulfilment of this pledge we find masons and other artisans, vintners, dealers in peltry, apothecaries, and the like, introduced into the same chamber with the Sanudi and the Badoeri, the Contarini and the Dandoli, who could trace back their honours to the first rise of the Republic.

In the Doges we have a series of remarkable characters, such as no other monarchy or presidency can show.

But the point for us which is worthy of especial notice is that in the long line of Doges selected from this aristocracy we have a series of remarkable characters, such as no other monarchy or presidency, elective or hereditary, can boast of. They were men of native force and of modern type—heroes who derived their authority from strength of character and not from feudal observance, and who, being the elect of municipal institutions, were above all others pre-eminent in that administrative ability which in these latter days has come to be regarded as the prime quality of statesmanship. There is

an originality about these Doges which is ever pleasant. The tragedies of Marino Faliero and the Two Foscari are well known. There is scarcely one of the Doges who would not make a first-rate character in a drama. In almost all the leading incidents we are charmed with a certain simplicity. A Doge is elected, and when he appears in public his father, insisting on his paternal superiority, refuses to unbonnet before him. It is only by the trick of exhibiting in the ducal berretta the image of a saint that the father is at last induced to give the appearance of homage to his son. Again, a Doge's son is in prison, is in great suffering, begs to be released, finds his father unrelenting, though not as a father, but as chief magistrate, and dies in his dungeon that the laws of Venice may be observed. It is out of nature so pure and strength so great as this that true nobility proceeds. Read of Giovanni and Andrea Dandolo, read of Pietro Contarini, who was literally forced to leave his privacy to assume the berretta. These were great, peculiar men. Imagine for a moment Pietro Ziani, with his kind heart and hot temper, his fine face and prodigious memory, receiving the ambassadors at St. Mark's. On one occasion he receives two-and-twenty envoys, bids each of them speak in succession, while he throws himself back in his seat, shuts his eyes, and appears to be dozing. After each has said his say the

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And in presence of such men it must be denied that commerce enfeebles character.

Doge comes to himself again, takes each of the envoys in order, and gives each his reply from memory. The Doges are all men of marked individuality, sometimes, as in the case of Ziani, tending to eccentricity. And in presence of such men we are driven to the denial of Hare's and Phillimore's assertion that commerce enfeebles character, or that whatever feebleness of character we may find in modern life is due to the predominance of the trading spirit.

That the position and character of the individual is altered in modern society is due to a variety of causes, as, for example, to the prevalence of law.

That the position of the individual has come to be altered in modern society is certainly one of the incidents of commercial enterprise; but it is not the result of a sordid propensity. Increase of commerce, for example, implies the increased prevalence of law; and law makes short work of heroics. In reading history, one constantly comes upon characters that are nowadays almost unknown in public life—hot, angry men, who cannot be controlled, and whom it is death to offend. They might flourish in an age when might was right; they wither in an age of law. At the Council of Constance, the Archbishops of Milan and Pisa sprang from their seats in the midst of debate, closed like wild beasts, and nearly throttled each other. No such passion dare show itself in a modern convocation. The persons who are described as yielding to their passions in former times are chiefly men in authority—kings or barons. These have less liberty

now than they formerly had. The liberty of their subjects and lieges has been raised on the circumscription of their power—therefore on the limitation of their excesses. If a baron now were ever so passionate, his anger would not be so terrible, and therefore not so noticeable, as it was in days when he could hang and imprison at pleasure, and when he thought no more of running a retainer through the body in a sudden fit of rage than he would now do of dismissing him with a month's wages. So to limit the energy of the passions is to shear Samson of his locks, and to reduce the hero to the level of an ordinary individual. It is not commerce which thus acts; although the trading spirit is one of the most potent influences in the modern civilization which represses the so-called hero and encourages the private individual.

Again, it is one of the incidents of commerce that the intercourse of man with man should be increased; and before such intercourse the sense of the marvellous pales. The hero is a moral giant, and we become soon incredulous of moral as of other giants. I have several times in the course of this volume referred to M. de Montalembert and his reverence for the monks. He would not recall the Middle Ages, but he thinks that society was—thanks to the monks—better then than now; more moral, more spiritually enlightened. He gives up the priests. He does

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And again
to the dif-
fusion of
knowledge.

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Montalembert thinks the monks among the greatest of men.

They are certainly not to be depreciated.

not think that the secular clergy were then so good as now, but "there were more saints, more monks, and, above all, more believers than in our days." It is not worth while to argue the point, but I cannot help recalling another of his statements, which has a resemblance to those of Hare and Phillimore,—that the Middle Ages were not only more fertile in saints and monks, but also in *men*, than these modern days. I do not wish to speak disrespectfully of the monks. For several centuries past Europe has known the monastic institution only in its degeneracy, and we have quite forgotten what it was in its prime. In the day of its glory, the cloister was the favoured home of piety and learning, all the arts of peace, and all the blessings of religion. We have come to know it as a sink of corruption, as a den of laziness, as the living grave in which human decrepitude is content to hide itself. Our contempt for the monks of later days has been so strong, that we have been unjust to the simple-minded men who in a former age, in an age of brute force and brutal appetites, kept alive in their hallowed retreats the flickering flame of religion and the tender seeds of knowledge. Roughly speaking, the monks came into Western Europe with the barbarians. This is the great fact which explains the good and the evil which belonged to them. They were a barbarous remedy for a barbarous disease. When Huns and

Vandals poured upon the pleasant South, and spread themselves over Europe, the evils of their inroad were much more manifest than the good which followed from it. We know well how much modern Europe owes to these Goths, who were our progenitors, and who easily overbore the effete civilization of pagan Rome with that youthful energy and animal perfection which is the best of all soils, that sentiment of honour which ever points upward, and that respect for womanhood which is the preserving salt of society. But we know also their original ignorance, their coarseness, their brutality. In one word, they were barbarians, full of impulses which they never questioned and passions which they never controlled. The monks converted the heathens and trained them in the arts of peace. M. de Montalembert indeed complains that the defence of the monks is put on the wrong ground when we dwell on the services which they have rendered to the sciences, to letters, to the fine and to the useful arts. This, he says, is to praise what is merely incidental at the expense of what is essential. Prayer was the great function of the monks, and we are favoured with the opinion of the Bishop of Orleans, that "prayer equals and surpasses sometimes the power of God. It triumphs over His will, His wrath, and even over His justice." If the bishop's view be correct, of course St.

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—They did a
great work.

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Augustine had ample reason for saying that "the less a monk labours in anything else but prayer, the more serviceable is he to men." I hope it is not impious to suggest that if the monks had done nothing but pray, they would never have risen into importance. Their charity to the sick and the poor was abundant and beneficent. The lesson of poverty which they taught by their example was of immense value in an age of rapacity and plunder. The son of the nobleman clothed himself in the same coarse habit as the son of the serf, and lay on the same straw. Kings and queens washed the plates of the poor, oiled the shoes of the last novice, dressed and kissed the sores of lepers. It was a grand lesson both to the secular priesthood who were inclined to grasp at wealth, and indulge in too much luxury, and to society at large who saw the partitions of rank borne down, to be made to feel that neither was wealth anything nor birth in the sight of Heaven—but only purity of heart and the love which never faileth. Nor are we to forget the influence on society at large of the monkish vows of chastity. An age of luxury and ease, of great towns and much excitement, is apt to discredit the chastity of the monks; but it does not appear that we have any right to regard their celibacy save as a real and beneficial protest against a prevailing vice.

Still need we, thus giving the monks their due, go further and worship them as greater than men now, and as the only true heroes? If M. de Montalembert sees in the monks a race of giants beside whom the men of the present day are but pigmies, it is because he sees the Middle Ages through a mist of miracles. He has a most lively faith in the supernatural, and implicitly accepts all the stories about Benedict enabling St. Maur to walk upon the lake, breaking a poison cup by the sign of the cross, and raising a child from the dead. An age that was able to work miracles must have been more fertile of extraordinary men—heroes and saints—than an age which can work none. This is the fallacy of the perfect tense. Men who lived in the pluperfect past must have had a pluperfect character. Alas! if Achilles were alive to-day should we take him for a hero? If St. Bernard, whom M. de Montalembert deems the greatest of the monks, the hero of heroes, were risen from the dead, he would have no chance now beside the lover of Eloise, if he too were risen—that Abelard whose intellect is in profane eyes one of the redeeming glories of monachism, and to this day affronts the triumph of St. Bernard. It is not commerce that has produced this change in men's estimate of what is and is not heroic; but it must be repeated that the trading spirit is one of the most potent

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should we
set them up
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of heroes.?

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Lastly to
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And various
 other or-
 ganizations,

Once more, it is one of the results of commerce that we herd together in larger and larger towns, and in great towns we herd together in clubs and other forms of association. When men thus become gregarious, they grow like each other, and one is the double of another. The development of the principle of joint-stock or associated enterprise has at one and the same time given weight to every member of a community, and has proved the weakness of any who would set himself above or against it. Then immense importance has been given to the wants of society through the extraordinary organization of the press, which chronicles every little thing done by every little mite, giving him a voice that rings across the world. Moreover, the prodigious power of machinery at once endows man with a superhuman strength, and dwarfs him in his own eyes. The individual withers and cowers before a great machine that has a hundred hands; but the individual also waxes great in view of the fact that this mighty engine which does the work of giants, changes the face of nature and turns the current of civilization, is an invention of no towering genius—is an invention of the most ordinary flesh and blood. We are astonished at the grandeur of the results that have been achieved by the engineering and

the mechanical contrivances of our time. They seem the work of Titans. To our surprise, we find that the engineers and mechanics who do such wonders are not at all of the race of Titans ; or that if they are, then we must all be Titans together. There is rarely a new mechanical contrivance but there are scores of persons claiming its authorship ; it does not appear that there is needed any vast reach of mind to succeed in such authorship ; hundreds of middle-sized men with a little mother wit succeed in it ; sometimes a small man with his contrivance will do more extraordinary work than a great man with his ; and the Patent Office is encumbered with the title-deeds of useless inventions which have called into exercise far more brain than the useful ones that move the world and set the elements at naught.

Whether the individual may be said to flourish or to wither, still the change which has come over his position is an important one for the world, and a very important one for art. The heart, the common heart, has ever been the stronghold of art. We know that art rejoices in a hero, and if we find the hero withering—if marvels are abolished and the gigantesque passes out of sight—so much the worse, it would appear, for art. But on the other hand, what art most prizes in the hero is the human side of his character, the little touches of nature by

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But whatever be the causes of it, the modern change in the standing and character of individuals is very important for the world and for art.

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If the individual withers as a hero, he flourishes more than ever as a man.

which he is more particularly felt to be kin to the whole world, the very points about him which are not exceptional, and which, therefore, are not heroic, but common. If individuals fail as heroes, still they flourish and are of more account than ever as men. Horny-hand is now a hero as much as any knight of old that placed his lance in rest for the golden lilies, or for the roses, white and red. The result is that no one man now reaps such a harvest of fame as fell to the lot of great men in the bygone time; but crowds of men and women win fame who would have had no chance of winning it in the past. Not that fame can ever be regarded as the measure of a man's greatness. The definite exploit, the crowning victory, which the tongue of fame seizes upon, rarely belongs of right to the man who gets the credit of it. *Sic vos non vobis*. One sows and another reaps. Columbus sails through the weedy seas, and rasps his prow upon a western isle. The mariner who follows in his wake lights on the mainland, and calls it after himself—America. The philosophers at first refuse to believe in the telescope of Galileo, and then when they do believe, discover that he took it from Aristotle. Philosophers at first refuse to believe in the circulation of the blood, and then when they do believe, discover that Harvey learnt it from Plato and from Solomon. If, however, fame cannot be accepted as the standard

of real greatness, it is at least a sure index of the world's thinking. And the great fame which now belongs to little men that formerly would be esteemed as emmets unworthy of notice is a very curious fact, and full of meaning. Some of the aspects of this peculiar phenomenon are worth attending to.

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And some of the aspects of this peculiar phenomenon are worth attending to.

I. And first of all, observe the prominence of biography in the current literature. It cannot have escaped the notice of the most cursory observer that of late years history has been growing more and more biographical in its tendency, while biography has been growing more and more historical in its tone. In the picturesque pages of Macaulay, as in that darker scroll on which Carlyle writes his terrible Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin—two extremely opposite types of history—it is impossible not to remark how frequently the interest of the narrative is centred in cabinet pictures of personal traits, illustrative manners, and accidental customs. On the other hand, we have learned to magnify so much the importance of individuals that there is scarcely a memoir published now-a-days in which the subject is not regarded as of national interest. If he voted at a county election, he is supposed to have powerfully assisted in carrying the Reform Bill;—hence a chapter on rotten boroughs and corruption generally. If he doffed his hat in the

First note the prominence of biography in the current literature.

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History con-
descends to
biography,
and biogra-
phy rises to
the eleva-
tion of
history.

streets to George IV., he is supposed to have had a powerful influence in checking rebellion—hence an edifying dissertation on the balance of the three estates. We need not now stay to inquire whether by this process history has been bettered, or biography has been worsened. The fact stands out clear that we give enormous importance to the lives of individuals which heretofore would have been overlooked in the general account. Just as philosophers tell us that every word we utter, every breath we inhale, has, through a million of intermediate links in the chain of cause and effect, a definite influence on the dancing of the leaves in an American forest or on the course of a hurricane in the Indian seas, so we recognise the fact that the action of every unit of a nation or a party tells upon the total result of human achievement, and we insist on tracing that action, no matter how infinitesimal, throughout all its ramifications. We have nothing to do with the question whether this be right or wrong—whether to trace the influence of every little emmet on society may not be as worthless a task as would be an attempt to calculate the effect of the blast of a trumpet on the weather of to-morrow. Right or wrong, there is the fact that we do seek to estimate the influence on society of every petty individual whom we happen to like. A Dissenting grocer, who makes money and extends his

operations till he is regarded as a marvel by the country-side, has his life written by a very able man in a very ornate style as the pattern of a British and Christian merchant; a sickly undergraduate who never does anything, but makes up for his nothingness by writing in his diary all his good intentions, is paraded before the world as a favourable specimen of the earnest and evangelical student; and so we may go through the whole list—the good physician, and the benign attorney, down to the lives of those poor men and women which half a century ago would have been published as warnings under the names of Penitent Polly or Dutiful Dick by the Religious Tract Society, in small volumes of a dozen pages, but which are now held up to our admiration as the salt that preserves us from the decay of nature—the few righteous souls that preserve us from the judgment of Heaven.

We are not only deluged with biographies of all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children, from the pet parson to the pet pugilist, and from Mr. Brown's three wives to the sweet infant who was perfect in lollypops and Dr. Watts; we have biographies of murderers, biographies of horses, biographies of dogs, and everything is more or less regarded from the personal point of view. The best history of philosophy that has been written in this country is a biographical history. If science is to be

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Some description of the deluge of biographies.

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And of the enormous importance now given to personal traits and personal arguments.

made interesting, it is thrown into the form of dialogues between characters with whose private hopes and fears we are to pick up an acquaintance; if a new creed is to be divulged, it is in a novel, in which the personages are so amiable that for the sake of their goodness we are to swallow their doctrines; if travels are to be written and statistics concocted, they are dished up in the form of a diary, in which the figures of the tea trade and the effect of missions are insidiously conveyed as incidents of a fierce flirtation, or as the rattling musketry of a conversation in the intervals of a dinner which is to make the diner-out ill; if the news of the day is to be provided, it is crammed into a letter, which is lighted up with the information that Snooks is worth 30,000*l.* a year, that the writer of the letter has a partiality for fair hair, that he is not impervious to Burgundy, and that he shaves regularly twice a day. Even our discussions are becoming personal, and our arguments are *ad hominem*. It is curious that at the very moment when we are proclaiming that party is dead, and that henceforth we must no more consider men, but measures, the biographical element predominates in our literature, and in public life the personal overrides almost every other consideration. Principles have little hold on us unless, more than principles, they are men and women, as the white block of Carrara has little

interest for us until it is hewed into a living form. CHAPTER
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Now this state of things is regarded by not a few as a tremendous proof of degeneracy. It was in the decay of Greek literature that Plutarch flourished, as his crabbed style abundantly proves; and among ourselves we regard with profound contempt the author of our most remarkable biography. What is akin to biography, portrait painting is held in like esteem when compared with the other branches of the pictorial art. And people may jump to the conclusion that the biographical tendencies which are so marked in these days are signs of failing power and may be accepted as the premonitory crack of doom.

The flourishing of the Cheronæan sage in the decadence of Greek literature is a fact certainly that seems to tell in favour of the argument that the rise of biography betokens the fall of literature. Plutarch's biographies are the most complete and the most entertaining picture of classical antiquity—its wit and its wisdom, its faith and its practice, what it loved most, what it feared most, what a man was in private as well as in public. In the pages of other historians we see a stately pageant of shields and swords, chariots and horses, short tunics and long robes, sculptures of gold and ivory and marble, laurel leaves and myrtle branches. Plutarch not only

This state of things regarded by many as a proof of degeneracy.

The appearance of Plutarch in the decadence of Greek literature supposed to indicate a warning.

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shows us these in great variety—he introduces us to the individual as well as to the citizen; we make acquaintance with the man even more than with the soldier. We see how the Greek is elevated over his wine, and how the Roman disports when he throws aside his toga; if we see Anthony in war, we see him also in love; and if we see Alcibiades throwing money to the rabble, we know that the young fellow has at the same moment a quail under his robe. We may behold what Dryden delighted to point out, Scipio and Lelius gathering shells on the shore, Augustus playing at bounding stones with boys, and Agesilaus riding on a hobbyhorse among his children. We have the inner life as well as the outer; we have, in a word, all that is implied in the story of Themistocles, who said that Athens ruled Greece, that he ruled Athens, that his wife ruled him, and that his little son ruled his wife, where we see the domestic impinging on the political life, and the cares of State mingled with the pleasures of society.

On the true
position of
Plutarch.

But is this indeed a proof of degeneracy? On the contrary, may we not regard the surpassing excellence of Plutarch in biography rather as the splendid dawn of a day that was struggling into light than as the fading glory of a day that was past? For let it be observed that although Plutarch was not a Christian in his religious faith, his standard of morality in relation to his

fellow-men was more truly Christian than that of most believers, and in himself he united, in a singular manner, the literary cultivation of the classical period, which had passed away, with the human sympathies that in the new era found their fullest expression in Christianity. It may be asked, what has Christianity to do with the matter?

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It has this to do with it—that the human sympathies which it inculcated, the rejoicing with them that rejoice, and the weeping with them that weep, the loving our neighbours as ourselves, and, above all, the peculiar force with which it insisted on the true nature of conduct, good or bad, that it is to be judged even more by motives than by results, must have produced precisely that temper in which personal considerations and biographical elements are all in all. Compare for one moment the Greek with the Christian idea of sin. We see the former in the common story of Œdipus, who killed his father in self-defence, not knowing who it was that he slew. There was the fact—he had killed his father. No matter what were his motives—they might be good, bad, or indifferent. Irrespective of motive, he had committed a crime which was irremediable, and which could only be expiated in the utter destruction of himself and of all that should belong to him. In perfect innocence he marries the wife of the dead king, his own

He appeared
in the dawn
of a new
era.

Contrast
between the
Greek and
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mother, neither of them being aware of the relationship. Guilt added to guilt, he only heaps up wrath upon wrath. His external acts are regarded in the most impersonal light; no account is taken of the motives by which his acts were directed; and he suffers the most cruel punishment. We have in this wonderful story, which was the constant theme of the poets, a capital illustration of the Greek view of life. The Greeks were men, and in practice were continually breaking loose from their theory; but in their view motives were never of so much account, personal traits were never of so much importance, individual life was never so sacred, the foibles of human will and the infirmities of human affection were never so tenderly treated, as to foster that temper out of which biographical excellence proceeds. A Greek cared little for the individual in comparison with the race to which he belonged, and which his imagination magnified so gloriously that in his view it was immortality enough for any man to live in the memory of his race—to live as a mere fame, while his real existence had utterly perished.

The stoical
philosophy.

The stoical philosophy was in fact the most genuine expression of the Greek wisdom, and, if this fact be fully appreciated, we shall easily understand that out of a stoical indifference to personal traits biography could never emerge, and could never obtain a satisfactory development.

When, therefore, we pass on to the age of Plutarch in the degeneracy of Greek literature, we at once see that the spirit of the biographer is not the old stoical spirit of disregard for motives and individual peculiarities. That, indeed, had utterly decayed, and in this sense we may accept the production of Plutarch's Lives as one more proof of the Greek decadence. The true source, however, of these biographies was the rise of a new spirit upon the ruins of the old. Plutarch wrote his great work, as nearly as we can determine, about a hundred years after the birth of our Saviour. It is unnecessary to suppose that, although not a Christian, he had indirectly derived some impulse from Christianity—a supposition, however, which is by no means improbable. It is enough to say that our Saviour came "in the fulness of time," and that the world was ripe for his advent. The moral code of Christianity, all that it urged as to the importance of individuals, even if they were the least in the kingdom, as to the value of motives, as to the duty of sympathy, and as to the pre-eminence of unfailing charity the civilized world was prepared to echo. The ground was ready for the good seed, and, though we cannot describe the process, we find the seed bearing its fruit in the work of Plutarch, who had so far also wandered from the Pagan faith of his fathers that he believed in one God.

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The spirit of
Christianity
was utterly
opposed to
stoicism.

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And so gave expression to a new idea of life which was in course of development.

Plutarch's nature was in consonance with the new spirit which was thus evolved.

There are persons who seek to magnify Christianity by endeavouring to show that almost every detail of doctrine which we include under that name was a novelty to the world, and flashed in the faces of the Gentiles as a marvel and a mystery. Not so. Christianity had its marvels and its mysteries, which astonished and repulsed the Gentiles; but it also absorbed and it gave authority to much of what was passing in men's minds through the natural development of human thought—the purest feeling of the time, the ripened wisdom of the age.

And it was out of this new element of a new epoch that Plutarch's faculty for biography arose. It was because he had, unknown to himself, been baptized with the Christian spirit that he drew towards biography, and came to write it, as he himself describes in the life of Alexander. "It must be borne in mind," he said, "that my design is to write not histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits are not always the most characteristic. Sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, gives a truer insight into a man's mind than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, and the bloodiest battles." This in very truth is the Christian spirit in view of which the first is last, and the last first; and he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city. The individual as a public hero pales before

the light of the individual as a private man beloved. CHAPTER XVII.

If these views be correct, it will be seen that the extension of biographical literature in our day is not necessarily to be regarded as a bad sign. The biographers may be bad and their subjects uninteresting, but in itself an increased regard for biographical details is not blameworthy. That we have a contempt for Boswell, who has written our best biography, is quite intelligible on a principle which does not involve contempt for biography. It is not for appreciating Johnson and writing an admirable biography of him that Boswell is despised, but for appreciating and studying him in a way that showed him to be incapable of appreciating and studying anybody else in like manner. He wrote one biography; he could not have written two. He had a soul large enough to understand one man, but it was not large enough to embrace more than one. He was essentially a parasitical plant that clung to one tree. Human nature takes revenge upon him by laughing at his littleness. He erred by defect. If he had the capacity to form a friendship with others besides Johnson, he would have had just that balance which would have preserved him from ridicule. What he has actually done is by no means despicable; what is pitiable about him is that he is palpably one-sided, that he sees but

In this light the predominance of biography was, in his day, to be regarded as a sign, not of decadence, but of regeneration.

CHAPTER XVII. — with one eye, that he boasts but one arm, and that if he has a couple of lower extremities, they are like those of Jacob Tonson, so mercilessly ridiculed by Dryden—two left legs.

The prevalence of prose fiction in our day.

II. In speaking of the prominence of biography in current literature, I had some occasion to refer to a kindred fact, the similar prominence of prose fiction. That, however, is an incident of modern times which is important enough to demand separate notice.

The quantity of it produced.

It is said that within the space of thirty-five days, not long ago, no less than forty-six novels were offered for subscription in Paternoster Row—that is, nine every week for five successive weeks. The number seems to be prodigious, but in truth it gives no adequate idea of the quantity of fiction which is written and printed, published and read, year by year in this country. Not only are there heaps of stories, great and small, produced in single, in double, and in treble volumes, each one by itself, but let it be remembered that there are an infinity of periodicals, weekly and monthly, varying in price from a halfpenny to half-a-crown, which have, with scarcely an exception, each a story on foot, and some of them two. Now, making every allowance for the fact that nearly all the important novels are first published in the periodical form, and then separately, so that

they figure twice in any calculation which we may make of the number of novels, it will still appear to any one who will sit down and think calmly of our fictitious literature that its bulk is enormous. There has never been anything like it before. To the literary historian it is an unparalleled phænomenon, and brings to mind the remark of Lord Lytton, that the literature of Greece began to exist in poetical fiction and expired in prose fiction. That, however, is a gloomy view of the subject which may suggest in reply an argument parallel to that which accounts for the production of a Plutarch in the decadence of Greek authorship.

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A novel is but a fictitious biography, and in the popularity of the novel we have to deal with precisely the same movement and sign of the times as we find in biography. Our interest in the private life of our fellow-men has been developed into a system, and there is nothing in the way of study which people seem now to desire so much as to peep into the house of a neighbour, to watch his ways, and to calculate the ups and downs of fortune. All the efforts of all the moralists cannot restrain the love of gossip or quench the enjoyment of scandal. There is nothing half so interesting to the great mass of mankind as a mysterious murder in a street cab, or a full-blown adultery made patent in court. Many men who care only for

And the
great inter-
est which
the public
takes in it.

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Notwithstanding the monotony of passion, men are more interested in its display than in the working out of intellectual ideas which are remarkable for their variety.

ideas and their practical development are apt to scorn these things, and to speak of them as Johnson spoke of green fields. Crimes are wonderfully like, and when you have seen one you have seen all. The passions are monotonous in their action, and are not to be compared for variety with our more intellectual activities.

About these matters we may argue as we please; we cannot argue away the fact that it is in passions and the work of passions, not in ideas and the results of ideas, that the majority of men are interested. From year to year, and from month to month, eternally, we are interested in knowing that John is going to marry Jane, that Smith has quarrelled with Smythe, and that Bluebeard has left all the keys with his wife. Here is a gossiping propensity in human nature which any man of sense can keep within bounds, but which none of us can eradicate. To this gossiping sense the novelist appeals. A novel may be described as gossip etherealized, family talk generalized. In the pages of a novel we can pry without shame into the secrets of our neighbour's soul, we can rifle his desk, we can read his love letters, we are present when he first kisses the maiden of his heart, we see that little maiden at her toilet preparing for the interview, we go with her to buy her simple ribands and to choose her bonnet. To transport us into new villages which we have never known, to

lodge us in strange houses which we have never dreamt of, to make us at home among new circles of our fellow-creatures, to teach us to sympathize in all their little pursuits, to love their trifling gauds, to partake of their filmy hopes and fears, to be one of them and to join in the petty fluctuations of contracted lives—this may not be a lofty occupation, nor need great genius for its perfect exercise ; nevertheless, it is good healthy work, and I know not who in this generation is better employed than he who—even if he cannot boast of genius, yet with tact and clearness—widens through fiction the range of our sympathies, and teaches us not less to care for the narrow aims of small people than for the vast schemes of the great and mighty. We read the village gossip with as much concern as if the fate of the nation depended on it, and we take as much interest in a lawyer’s poor daughter as if she were a peeress in her own right. Oh, happy art of fiction which can thus adjust the balance of fortune, raising the humble and weak to an equality in our hearts with the proud and the great!

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While thus through all fiction the position of the private individual is in the public regard invested with a new importance, there are two especial forms of fiction in which we may note more closely the withering of the individual as an exceptional hero, and his growth as a multiplicant unit.

And in
prose fiction
the hero
wither
and the
private man
flourishes.

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This may be seen in the form of fiction cultivated by Thackeray.

Thackeray's doctrine that all men are alike, and that there are no exceptional heroes.

The story by which Mr. Thackeray first became famous was entitled *A Novel Without a Hero*; and throughout all his works, the idea which is most constantly urged upon the reader is that we are all alike, that the differences between the extremes of humankind are very trifling, and are due rather to the force of circumstances than to force of character. He was always insisting that black is not so very black and that white is not so very white. He thus imposed upon himself as an artist Herculean toil.

When a novelist takes two characters that seem to be very nearly alike, and by the skilful laying on of touch after touch proves them to be essentially dissimilar, his method naturally tends to variety of result; each individual is different from every other; within the limits of a village he finds all the elements of a kingdom, and in the end he might realize the scholastic dream and show us legions of existences dancing on the point of a needle. But when a novelist goes upon the opposite tack, surveys each new comer, and passes him on, saying, You are like the rest of us; there is nothing new about you; how are you better than I am? I don't think that you are worse; you are very like the man I painted last—nose, eyes, and mouth; we are all medals, in fact, struck from the same die, and if on some of the medals time makes a few marks, it does not affect the resemblance—he is evidently

working after a method which tends to monotonY of result. And so it happened that of Thackeray, who, apart from all question as to his truth or as to his power, most certainly possessed one of the richest minds with which a novelist has ever been gifted, it was said more frequently than of men who can boast not one tithe of his genius, that he lacked variety. So it happened, also, that compelled in the last resort to reduce his characters to something like unity — compelled to return always upon one central idea, he was obliged, for the sake of variety, to go further afield in search of his materials than he otherwise would. If he had to prove the identity of personages apparently dissimilar, then to give strength to his argument not less than variety to his narrative, he ought to select these personages from as wide a range as possible, and, every man's range of personal observation being limited, he was forced back upon history. When he set out with the statement: Let any two characters be as dissimilar as possible; let the circumstances in which they are placed be as opposite as the poles, I will prove that their natures are the same, and I do not doubt that, spite of our censures, we in their places would have acted precisely as they did—he was bound to choose a goodly number of his examples from situations in life which are very different from ours, and he found that difference

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And the difficulties which this doctrine imposed upon him as an artist.

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Summary
of his views
in *Esmond*.

He summarised his views of life in the first chapter of *Esmond*, and two passages in it bear so closely on the argument which I am now working out that I will venture to quote them: "The Muse of History hath encumbered herself with ceremony as well as her Sister of the Theatre. She too wears the mask and the cothurnus, and speaks to measure. She too, in our age, busies herself with the affairs only of kings; waiting on them obsequiously and stately, as if she were but a mistress of Court ceremonies, and had nothing to do with the registering of the affairs of the common people. I have seen in his very old age and decrepitude the old French King Lewis the Fourteenth, the type and model of kinghood—who never moved but to measure, who lived and died according to the laws of his Court-marshal, persisting in enacting through life the part of Hero; and, divested of poetry, this was but a little wrinkled old man, pock-marked, and with a great periwig and red heels to make him look tall—a hero for a book if you like, or for a brass statue or a painted ceiling, a god in a Roman shape, but what more than a man for Madame Maintenon, or the barber who

shaved him, or Monsieur Fagon, his surgeon? I wonder shall History ever pull off her periwig and cease to be Court-ridden? Shall we see something of France and England besides Versailles and Windsor? I saw Queen Anne at the latter place tearing down the Park slopes after her stag-hounds, and driving her one-horse chaise—a hot, red-faced woman, not in the least resembling that statue of her which turns its stone back upon Saint Paul’s, and faces the coaches struggling up Ludgate Hill. She was neither better bred nor wiser than you and me, though we knelt to hand her a letter or a wash-hand-basin. Why shall History go on kneeling to the end of time? I am for having her rise up off her knees, and take a natural posture: not to be for ever performing cringes and congees like a Court-chamberlain, and shuffling backwards out of doors in the presence of the sovereign. In a word, I would have History familiar rather than heroic.”

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Another passage in the same vein runs as follows: “I have seen too much of success in life to take off my hat and huzza to it as it passes in its gilt coach; and would do my little part with my neighbours on foot, that they should not gape with too much wonder, nor applaud too loudly. Is it the Lord Mayor going in state to mince-pies and the Mansion House? Is it poor Jack of Newgate’s procession, with the sheriff and javelin-men, con-

Further illustrations of his views.

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ducting him on his last journey to Tyburn? I look into my heart and think that I am as good as my Lord Mayor, and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack. Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of Alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner. Starve me, keep me from books and honest people, educate me to love dice, gin, and pleasure, and put me on Hounslow Heath, with a purse before me and I will take it. 'And I shall be deservedly hanged,' say you, wishing to put an end to this prosing. I don't say no. I can't but accept the world as I find it, including a rope's end, as long as it is in fashion."

But the individual withers and flourishes in the same sense among the sensational school of writers.

Not only does Thackeray thus insist upon a theory of character which implies in the sense of the poet the withering of the individual; we see precisely the same tendency in the school of fiction, which is the right opposite of his—what is called the sensation school. In that school the first consideration is given to the plot; and the characters must succumb to the exigencies of the plot. This is so clearly necessary that at length it has become a matter of course to find in a sensation novel a fine display of idiocy. There is always, in a sensation novel, one, or it may be two, half-witted creatures. The utility of these crazy beings is beyond belief. The things they see which nobody thought they would see, and remember which nobody thought

they would remember, are even more remarkable than the things which, do what their friends will, they cannot be made to comprehend, and cannot be counted upon to repeat. Now, this species of novel is very much sneered at by persons of supposed enlightenment, and certainly it is more satisfactory to the pride of human nature to write and to read a novel of character. But I am not sure that, viewed in the abstract, such a work is either more true or more philosophical than the species of fiction in which the plot is of most importance. Suppose we attempt to state in abstract terms the difference between the two kinds of fiction.

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It is usual to decry the thinking of this school; but perhaps their views contain as much truth as those of the opposite school.

Both profess to give us pictures of life, and both have to do with certain characters going through certain actions. The difference between the two lies solely in the relation of the characters portrayed to the actions described. In the novel of character man appears moulding circumstances to his will, directing the action for himself, supreme over incident and plot. In the opposite class of novel man is represented as made and ruled by circumstance; he is the victim of change and the puppet of intrigue. Is either of these views of life wholly true or wholly false? We may like the one better than the other. We may like to see men generally represented as possessed of decided character, masters of their destiny, and superior

Abstract statement of the difference between the novel of plot and the novel of character.

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to circumstance ; but is this view of life a whit more true than that which pictures the mass of men as endowed with faint characters, and as tossed hither and thither by the accidents of life, which we sometimes call fate and sometimes fortune? The art of fiction, which makes character succumb to the exigencies of plot, is just as defensible as that which breaks down incident before the weight of character. In point of fact, however, most novelists attempt to mix up the two extreme views of life, though they cannot help leaning to the one side or to the other ; and the chief weakness of the plotting novels, as they are now written, is, that while they represent circumstances and incident as all-important, and characters amid the current of events as corks upon the waves, they generally introduce one character who, in violent contrast to all the others, is superior to the plot, plans the events, guides the storm, and holds the winds in the hollow of his hand. It is quite wonderful to see what one picked character can do in these stories in comparison with the others, who can do nothing. He predominates over the plot, and the plot predominates over all else. The violence of this contrast is an artistic error ; but the views themselves which are thus contrasted are not necessarily false. To show man as the sport of circumstance may be a depressing view of human nature ; but it is not fair to regard it

as immoral nor to denounce it as utterly untrue. And whether it be true or false, still, as a popular view of life, it is one of the facts which we have to regard, when we consider either the Laureate's view, that the individual withers, or Archdeacon Hare's view, that this is an age of superficial character.

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III. We continue to travel on the same line of rails, if now we give a few moments' attention to another characteristic of current literature—the feminine influence that pervades it. Women are of much account in it, and women produce a large share of it. Of late, indeed, the women have been having it all their own way in the realm of fiction. There was a time when the chief characters in fiction were men, and when to find a female portrait well drawn, especially if she was intended to rank as a heroine, was a rare exception. How colourless, for example, are most of Sir Walter Scott's heroines, when compared with the men in whom he delights. Now all the more important characters seem to be women. Our novelists have suddenly discovered that feminine character is an unworked mine of wealth, and they give us jewels of women in many a casket. This is all the more natural, seeing that most of our novelists just now seem to belong to the fair sex. But their masculine rivals follow in the same track. Nor is

The feminine influence which pervades the current literature tells in the same direction.

Not only are more works written by women, but also in the works

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of men the
characters
of women
figure
more pro-
minently.

this tendency evident only in prose fiction. Look at Mr. Tennyson. A great poet is supposed to be the most perfect representative of his age, and the greater part of the Laureate's poetry may be described as a "dream of fair women." For one man he paints half a dozen women, and we remember the women better than the men. We remember the Princess and all her train; we remember Enid, Elaine, Vivien, Guinevere, Dora, Lilian, Isabel, the Gardener's Daughter, Maud, Godiva, the May Queen, Mariana, Lady Clara, and many more. How many men of the Laureate's drawing can we set against such a splendid array of women?

Nor is this
feminine
tendency in
our litera-
ture all for
good.

It must be allowed that this feminine tendency in our literature is not all for good. But the evil which belongs to it is not what one would expect. Woman embodies our highest ideas of purity and refinement. Cornelius Agrippa argues for the superiority of women over men, because Adam signifies earth, but Eve life. And in the thinking of the mediæval times we are often reminded that Adam was formed out of the dust of the earth, but Eve out of the living flesh; that Adam was created no one knows where, but that Eve was born in the garden of Eden. And now, when the influence of women is being poured into our literature, we expect to feel within it an evident access of refinement. We find the very opposite. The first object of

the novelist is to get personages in whom we can be interested ; the next is to put them in action. CHAPTER XVII.

But when women are the chief characters, how are you to set them in motion? The life of women cannot well be described as a life of action. When women are thus put forward to lead the action of a plot, they must be urged into a false position. To get vigorous action they are described as rushing into crime, and doing masculine deeds. Thus they come forward in the worst light, and the novelist finds that to make an effect he has to give up his heroine to bigamy, to murder, to child-bearing by stealth in the Tyrol, and to all sorts of adventures which can only signify her fall. The very prominence of the position which women occupy in recent fiction leads by a natural process to their appearing in a light which is not good. This is what is called sensation. It is not wrong to make a sensation ; but if the novelist depends for his sensation upon the action of a woman, the chances are that he will attain his end by unnatural means. How the evil effect shows itself.

There seem to be scattered over the world in the most opposite regions—in South America, for example, not less than in Russia—certain legends as to the existence of Amazons ; but always in the neighbourhood of these Amazons are to be found “the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders ;” Ancient legends that seem to indicate such a result.

CHAPTER XVII. — and, after the fashion of Lord Bacon, we may give this interpretation to the legend—that where the women are as men, there the men will be monsters; that when the women do violence to their nature in rivalry of men, then the men will have no hearts at all, but heads where the hearts should be. It is certainly curious that one of the earliest results of an increased feminine influence in our literature should be a display of what in women is most unfeminine. One is reminded of the famous fact that the first record of feminine conduct in the world's history is unfeminine. Eve is said to have eaten the apple in a masculine lust of power—to be as the gods; Adam in a feminine weakness of affection for the mate who offered it.

The influence of women in literature must tend to increase the importance of the private life in the public view.

We might multiply these parallels; but it may be doubted whether they explain anything. The great fact with which we are more immediately concerned needs no elucidation. Some of the consequences which have attended the increase of feminine influence in literature may not be easy to explain; but the one great consequence with which we have now to do stands out clear, and easy of understanding. Woman peculiarly represents the private life of the race. Her ascendancy in literature must mean the ascendancy of domestic ideas, and the assertion of the individual, not as a hero, but as

a family man—not as a heroine, but as an angel in the house. The individual as a great public character withers. The individual as a member of society and in all his private relations grows in importance. In a charming volume of poetry recently published under the title of *Ephemera*, I find a characteristic poem which entirely represents the lady's view. First of all, there is drawn a picture of Lord Exmouth as a warrior, and we are shown the heroic side of his character. Then we are told the story of his saving an infant from drowning. "The happiest hour of my life," said Lord Exmouth, "was that on which I replaced the infant in the arms of its mother;" and the poetess, Lady Wood, insists upon this private act as the crowning glory of the hero.

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IV. Once more, it is an age of books and papers—of much reading and writing. The chief movement of the age rattles upon a cause-way paved with reading-desks and writing-desks. This implies that it is an age of thought. But of late years critics have been so impressed with the craving which exists among us for sensation, that they cannot bring themselves to believe in the thoughtfulness of a people demanding much excitement. Here we see in the moral world the incidents of the tide at Dover. It seems to be ebbing while indeed it is flowing. The de-

The very
thoughtful-
ness of the
age has an
influence in
the same
direction.

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 mand for sensation is but the reaction from overwrought thinking. Sensation is more striking in its effects, and we cannot help noticing it. But it is shallow to pick out the frivolities of the day as its regnant characteristic. Its regnant characteristic is not a love of frivolous excitement. It shows itself in the individual in excess of study; it shows itself in the nation in excess of discussion.

Mingled strength and weakness of the thoughtful habit.

In this characteristic there is so much of strength, and so much of weakness, that we need not wonder to find the most opposite expressions of opinion regarding it. The opinion of the age about itself is not unlike that of Earl Yniol in the *Idyls of the King*:

And I myself sometimes despise myself;
 For I have let men be and have their way;
 Am much too gentle, have not used my power;
 Nor know I whether I be very base
 Or very manful, whether very wise
 Or very foolish; only this I know,
 That whatsoever evil happens to me,
 I seem to suffer nothing heart or limb.

Thought widens but lames; action narrows but quickens.

On the whole, perhaps, we are most inclined to dwell on the weakening effects of too much thought. There is a pregnant saying of Goethe's, which I have already quoted, that thought widens but lames; that action narrows but quickens. The individual feels how thought cripples him; the nation feels how discussion cripples it; and we are keenly sensitive to the lameness thus produced. The laming

effect of thought is a painful fact which every thinker has to encounter. Well does he know how the restless spirit of thought unfits him for action; how the very excess of intellectual activity enfeebles his motive power; how that glorious faculty which gives him superiority over others in farness of vision, teaches him to sit still because he can see so far without moving. And accustomed as we are to regard life as action, the question, which we had to discuss in the Thirteenth Chapter, again suggests itself—Is it life to think? can the mere knowledge of life be life?

“To be, or not to be: that is the question.”^{CHAPTER XVII.}
It is the question of Hamlet; it is the question of many thinking minds in the present day. How shall a man be—be a man, not a puppet; a reality, not a seeming? What is it truly and humanly to live? How constantly, for instance, does this question waylay us in the writings of Mr. Carlyle, who seems to suggest that true life lies only in tangible work, so that the smith who makes a nail, or the draper who sells a pin, is a man of action, and therefore lives; whereas the thinker is no more than a lichen or a zoophyte that merely clings to the rock and spreads. But most persons in the present day, if they were asked to explain what is life, would certainly describe it in phrases that mean little else than seeing life. Seeing life is a grand phrase amongst the young;

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for the most part it is applied especially to seeing the naughtinesses of life ; but whether restricted in that sense or not, to see life is the young man's notion of living. The sage will tell us that true living is an action of some sort—work, as Mr. Carlyle calls it. That is not the feeling of youth. The feeling of youth is expressed in a verse which Coleridge contributed to one of Wordsworth's poems :

A little child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death ?

The life of thought and sensation as opposed to the life of action—is it to be admired ?

Without any conscious exertion the young man feels life pulsing in every vein, and sees no necessity for action as the law of life. He feels that he is possessed of certain faculties and capacities, intellectual, spiritual, sensuous—and to gratify these in every phase, to know and feel all that man is capable of knowing and feeling, is his ideal of life. Above all things, he pants for experience ; to gain experience is to taste of life ; to pass through all human experience is to drain life to the last drop. It is knowledge he craves, and when he has seen and known all, he thinks he may say that he has lived : *veni, vidi, vixi*.

The life of sensation.

More or less consciously every man on his first start in life entertains this feeling ; but there are two classes in whom it is most consciously developed. By one of these it is pro-

nounced chiefly in a thirst for pleasure and excitement, and, generally speaking, a life of sensation; and when an individual of this class has run through all the changes of such a life, he stagnates and sickens, ennuyé and blasé. Such were the heroes of the Byron type. But there is a very different class in a similar case—a class more self-consciously accentuated, and more largely endowed with the spirit of speculation. The men of this class, too, more subtle and refined of nature, indulge intense curiosity with regard to life and all the modes of living; and they in like manner fancy that the way truly to live is to know life—to be fully alive to it, as we say, to be keenly self-conscious of it, to be an agent certainly, but much more to be an observer. And there lies the mistake; as if life were the knowledge of life, and as if a man could truly live by mere force of thought. It is impossible. Knowledge is not life, thought is not life; now, as ever, there is a curse on the tree of knowledge; in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. No man in this world is permitted to say *veni, vidi, vixi*, unless he can first say *veni, vidi, vici*.

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The life of
speculation.

In however insisting upon action and conquest as the law of life, there is some danger that our idea of action may be too restricted. There are some confused notions current with regard to what constitutes a life of action as

In praising the life of action, we are too apt to limit our notion of what action is.

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opposed to the life of thought. It will be remembered how Sir Walter Scott regarded the Duke of Wellington as a man of action, himself as a man of words; and how Mr. Carlyle has directed his batteries against authors, as if they were not, properly speaking, doers, but wind-bags, and deserved only the epithet of Tydides—the good-at-shouting Diomed. It is rather puzzling, however, to understand how the action of the tongue is not as truly action as that of the hand—the action of the pen as that of the sword. By thought as opposed to action, we are to understand thought as distinguished from the interchange of thought. Whatever be the instrument of thought, if we but give our thought expression, whether in words or in blows, we effectually cross swords with man, with circumstance, with destiny, and fight our battle foot to foot and point to point. The vice of the mere thinker is that he never does cross swords with his fellow-man, never does stand front to front with occasion; that he leads a life of thought without adequate interchange of thought.

The life of thought and the life of sensation as characteristic of the present time, may be summed up under

Perhaps this life of thought may be more clearly recognised as characteristic of the present age, if I call it by another name—the life of culture. The example of Goethe has had a prodigious effect on the more highly educated minds among us—teaching them to value self-

culture above all things, and to indulge a selfish appetite for more and more experience. This is the selfishness of knowledge, and the vanity of scholarship. Fine names are given to such culture. The man who thoroughly indulges in it can say, "My mind to me a kingdom is," and that is a royal boast. It seems a grand thing to be able to live apart like a solitary sun that revolves on its own axis, and has no other movement. But this enjoyment of self-culture may be described not less truly in much less flattering terms. We all know how to despise the vices of solitary indulgence—say, solitary drinking; and it is something more than a jest to say that solitary thinking is akin to solitary drinking. Then again, we smile at the vanity of the girl who is always at her mirror, who watches there the play of her pretty features, and whom, perhaps, we catch kissing herself in the glass. But what is her vanity to the self-love of the man who is always looking at his own mind, studying it in all its phases and attitudes, pampering it here with the memory of an old experience, touching it there with the rouge of a new sensation, and treating it ever as a picture which is to have another and another charm added to it? The vice of such a character is that it enters into no pursuit for the sake of the pursuit, but chiefly for the pleasure of watching and gloating over the new mental condition which this or that new

CHAPTER
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name of self-
culture.The vices of
self-culture.

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pursuit may awaken. The man lives in the enjoyment of his own thoughts, and all life is to him but a means of feeding thought. He says to himself:

The world's mine oyster
Which I with sword will open.

He opens it, peppers it, lemon-juices it, and eats it. As Byron said of Madame de Staël, that the death of her son would give her the pleasure of writing an essay on it, so we may say of the man of culture, that he has the advantage of indulging his curiosity even in death. From a seduction he may gain experience; in misery he may learn wisdom; prosperity is to him additionally prosperous in the suggestion of a moral.

But be the habit of self-culture good or bad, we have to consider it chiefly in its bearing on art.

It is not, however, with the good or bad which belongs to this tendency that we have now to do. What is most interesting in it is its effect on character, its effect through character on art, and through art its reaction upon life. In an age of self-culture, the individual is at once pampered and withers. He is pampered with knowledge and many attentions; but in the sense of the poet he withers, and is of less account than ever. Here, if anywhere, is the saying good that the first shall be last and the last first. The individual rises into greater importance than ever, but the individual who thus rises is the very last person that, according to the traditions of art, we should expect to see treated with so much

honour. Any one who will just now look through the realm of art will begin to think of the kingdom of heaven, into which we are told that not many great or not many mighty are called. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in." What is this, after all, but the lesson we learn from the story books that amused us in childhood. The most frequent lesson of the fairy tales is, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and that he who is worth most is not he who seems most. It is little Jack that kills the giant; it is poor Cinderella that weds the prince. Mixed up with much weakness, and a tendency to maudlin, this is the view of life which makes itself now felt in literature as never before, and which, through the enormous organization of literature, tells upon the world's history as at no time previous.

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How the
individual
at once
withers and
flourishes.

But when we have the halt, and the maimed, and the blind for the magnates of our kingdom, when we make heroes of the sick, and pets of the stupid, when we chant the poor man's epic, and make a merit of the weak man's nothingness, we are like to find ourselves in an inverted world, and amid many confusions. In the fairy world of our ancestors, when little Jack overcame the giants, or when some feeble girl performed im-

And how at
length in
art we find
ourselves in
an inverted
world.

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possible tasks, the sense of order and reality was preserved by the appearance in the background of some greater force—a wizard or a sprite, through whose timely aid the weakest came to be endowed with a power beyond all expectation. Or, if in more sacred pages, we find how David, with a pebble from the brook, killed Goliath, there is no disproportion in the picture of life, seeing it is ever kept before us that the Lord of Hosts is on the side of the stripling. But in modern literature we have the same phenomenon—the weak and the foolish made much of, and treated as of equal account with heroes and demigods, while, at the same time, we hear no word of a supernatural grace—gift of a fairy, or favour of God—by which the weakness of man can be rendered of so much importance, and out of the mouth of a fool so much wisdom may proceed. And so throughout all the art of the day, and much of its thinking, we are troubled with a sense of disorder. Whether the disorder be real or not is another question. It may or not be a sign of disorder in our minds that the first should be last and the last first—that we should exalt the small private man in our regards, and lower the great public hero. But at least we are so accustomed, in those masterpieces of classical art which are held up to our admiration as models, to make a lion of the hero, and to make an ass of the private individual, that the change

which in this respect has come over art in its passage from the ancient to the modern ideal strikes one as strange, and at the first glance even as unjustifiable.

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It would be easy to find phrases laudatory of this movement—easy to find phrases condemning it. But it is idle to praise or to blame such a movement while it is yet unfinished. All that we can do with any profit is to watch it—to deepen our consciousness of it—to feel the force of the current on all sides—and to see as clearly as possible whither we are drifting. Nor let it be supposed that when we speak of the withering or of the flourishing of the individual this description fully characterizes the movement. It characterizes only that incident of its progress in which the artist and the critic of art is most interested. The grand movement, in which the withering of the individual is but an incident, is of vast extent, and makes itself felt in many ways. I venture to point out a few.

The movement thus described is neither to be praised nor blamed, but only watched.

Nor in so far as it has been described is it to be accepted as constituting the entire movement.

It is curious to note how as in successive ages literature receives a fresh impulse, although that impulse is merely mechanical, yet the effects both on literature and society have all the potency of a revolution. Take for example the first invention of an alphabet—the results were tremendous. Literature, which before had been entirely metrical, since it is only metrical com-

On the mighty effects produced from small mechanical causes, as from the invention of the alphabet.

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positions that could be preserved in the memory, then admitted of prose and all the simplicity and truthfulness which prose implies. On the other hand, society, accepting the gift of letters, found ere long that it had unconsciously accepted the creation of a learned class, that a priesthood in the worst sense rose where there was no priesthood before, and that its power was enormously increased and abused where previously it had been limited and just. The invention of letters thus unfettered literature while it fettered society; it furnished a lamp to knowledge and a dark lantern to religion; it was a secret which, like the Open Sesame of the fable, gave riches to them that knew it, and, it might be, death to them that knew it not. Slowly but surely the secret became more and more known, until at length the art of printing gave it a diffusion which was before impossible. Immediately we observe a remarkable effect both on literature and on society. In literature the paucity of readers and the habits of a learned class had encouraged throughout Europe the neglect of native dialects, and had created a sort of universal language. Authors, anxious to address the largest number of readers possible, very naturally wrote in Latin, which thus became the hero of speech. But, as the invention of printing increased the number of readers, it very soon became evident that even in his

And as
from the
invention of
printing.

mother-tongue an author could find an audience worthy of his ambition. Hence the gradual neglect of Latin in each country, and the increased cultivation of the vernacular, until at length the European literature settled into the form which it now bears. The individual withered: there was no more a great herolanguage. But the individual also prospered: for languages hitherto neglected sprung into note. And the effect on society was not less striking than the effect on literature. The deliberate culture of a national literature is of itself a social revolution; but a revolution not less important was produced by depriving the European priesthood of what had for ages been their almost exclusive possession. Letters were no longer a scholastic cabala; the mediæval distinction between clerk and lay was nullified; the priesthood of Western Europe, ceasing to be the exclusive owners of an art that was to the multitude like a wondrous charm, lost a mysterious power, which was an outward and palpable sign of a Divine but imperceptible influence.

Now literature has in our day received an impulse and a development which may be described as not less extraordinary nor less revolutionary than the impulse and the development which it derived successively from the creation of an alphabet and from the invention of printing. We cannot indeed fix upon any one dis-

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There are some mechanical inventions of our own time that are not less revolutionary in their combined effects.

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covery in the present century which may be compared for importance with either of these grand events; but we can point to the concurrence of a vast number of new applications and new arrangements that have tended to diffuse education, and not only to cheapen but also to improve and enrich books in a manner previously unexampled. The stereotype, the photograph, wood-engraving, the art of printing in colour, and many other useful inventions have been perfected—making the printed page within the last thirty years what it never was before. At the same time the railway and the steamship, the telegraph and the penny postage, by daily and hourly bringing near to us a vast world beyond our own limited circles, and giving us a present interest in the transactions of the most distant regions, have enormously increased the number of readers, have of themselves created a literature, and through that literature have had a mighty influence upon the movement of the time.

The artistic movement which we have been describing, part of this more general movement.

Out of that movement I have selected for illustration the incident that seems to be of greatest importance to art, whether we view it critically or ethically; and I hope that in the foregoing remarks I shall not be supposed to dwell on this incident as representing the entire movement, or even the entirety of its relations to art. The great intellectual change, which the new era of litera-

ture, science and art is bringing about, shows itself not only in the formation and in the estimate of individual character, but in many other ways. It is felt in every public meeting throughout the kingdom—in parliament, in the Church, in the theatre; and that we may not take too narrow a view of the movement, or dwell too much on one of its incidents, I close this chapter with a few short words on the evidence of its action in our public assemblies—in the senate, in the pulpit, and on the stage.

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This more general movement shows itself in many ways.

It is not sufficiently observed, for example, that within the last thirty years the character of parliament has been much altered; or if it is observed, the change is too readily attributed to the Reform Bill. But any one who notes in how many other directions the change operates, as well as in parliament, will soon come to the conclusion that the Reform Bill can have little to do with it. In the present generation it would seem that influences, chiefly literary, have begun to bear on parliament altering the tone of its oratory and its character as a deliberative assembly. The most obvious fact we have in this connection to grasp is the impatience with which the public regard House of Commons oratory. It is not unusual to speak of parliamentary eloquence in the most contemptuous terms. It is a favourite simile that the speeches of our legislators make the welfare of the nation as

As in Parliament,

Where it has completely changed the character of political oratory.

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Rome was saved by the cackling of the geese in the capitol. For years past people have been indulging in such criticism at the very time when there is reason to believe that the oratorical talent of the two houses has been on the whole greater than ever it was. It is true that the style of speaking is different from what it used to be; but it is not worse. It is indeed infinitely better, as anybody who will take the trouble of reading the senatorial effusions of last century must know.* It is forgotten that, in

* In proof of this, let it be remembered that Sheridan's great Begum speech in Westminster Hall was pronounced the most wonderful oration ever delivered, or second only to his previous speech in the House of Commons. Of the House of Commons speech we have unfortunately no report. Of the second Begum Speech, however, which Burke honoured with even higher laudations than he bestowed on the other, asserting it to be quite unparalleled in oratory, and an example of every possible excellence in the highest perfection, we can form a very fair opinion. Now, of this wonderful speech confessedly the most wonderful part was the peroration, after the delivery of which Sheridan accomplished the grand stage effect of throwing himself exhausted into the arms of Burke. The peroration had reference to an unfortunate

phrase of Warren Hastings, that "the majesty of justice ought not to be approached without solicitation." Sheridan overwhelmed his audience with a description of justice, and it may help to place on its proper footing the much-vaunted eloquence of the past if we quote this astonishing description. "But justice," said the great orator, "is not this halt and miserable object! It is not the ineffective bauble of an India pagod! It is not the portentous phantom of despair! It is not like any fabled monster formed in the eclipse of reason, and found in some unhallowed grove of superstitious darkness and political dismay! No, my lords! In the happy reverse of all these I turn from this disgusting caricature to the real image! Justice I have now before me august and pure; the abstract idea of

forming a comparative opinion of past and present eloquence, the action of the press has revolutionized every public audience; that it has rendered us more fastidious in our admiration of first-rate oratory; that it has rendered us utterly intolerant of mediocre speaking; and that more especially it has this particular effect on parliamentary debate—it takes the wind out of the sails of most members, anticipating all they intended to say.

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The contrast
of more
recent
oratory.

In the Church we may note a condition of things very similar to that which we find in parliament. We must combine the two facts that never has the British pastorate been so

Similar in-
fluences at
work in the
church.

all that would be perfect in the spirits and aspirings of men—where the mind rises!—where the heart expands!—where the countenance is ever placid and benign!—where her favourite attitude is to stoop to the unfortunate; to hear their cry, and to help them; to rescue and relieve; to succour and save; majestic from its utility, venerable from its utility, uplifted without pride, firm without obduracy, beneficent in each preference, lovely though in her frown! Such is the tawdry magnificence which was said to surpass all the oratory of which there is any record or tradition. Such is the dazzling claptrap which pales the ineffectual fires of modern eloquence. It is true

that Moore's version of the same peroration is somewhat better; but much of this improvement is due to the fact of its being more condensed; and we must not forget Moore's own opinion that many passages of the speech, when in print, appeared so little worthy of Sheridan's reputation as to require suppression—"I thought it would be, on the whole, more prudent to omit them"—a decision which he supports with the authority of Fox, who had propounded the most fallacious maxim that a good speech must read badly, and that a speech which reads well must have been a failure in delivery. Taking all the facts together, it is impossible to believe in the decadence of oratory.

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efficient, and that, on the other hand, preaching has never been held in such contempt as at the present day. Compare the Church now with what it was at the commencement of the century, in the age of beer-drinking and fox-hunting parsons; or compare it with its condition a full century back, when it was frost-bound in Socinian error, and the great majority of clergymen preached Socrates and Seneca instead of Christ—the Stoical philosophy for the glad tidings; or go still further back to what we have been in the habit of regarding as the golden age of the English pulpit—the days of Barrow, and Taylor, and South, and Fuller, when the great mass of the clergy were mean in their manners as well as weak in their letters; or once more recede to that strange period in the history of the Scottish Church, when some of the members were so poor that they had to make a living by keeping public-houses, and in 1576 the General Assembly was asked “Whether a minister or reader may tap ale and keep an open tavern?” the answer being, “A minister that taps ale and keeps an open tavern should keep decorum.” The comparison is in favour of the Church as we see it now. The clergy are better as a whole; and far better educated.

Contemporary ecclesiastics as a whole are not inferior to those of any bygone generation.

Yet in spite of this progress, it is also a fact that the pulpit, as an institution, has visibly sunk in our time. Not that there is any diminution in

the attendance at churches; on the contrary, CHAPTER
innumerable new churches have been built; they XVII.
are well filled; they are better filled than ever; Nevertheless, the
and the cry is still for more and more accommod- pulpit as an
ation; all this being due to the spread of institution
religious feeling in the community. The fact to has visibly
which I refer is the sort of respect in which sunk in our
the ordinary run of sermons is held, the stern time.
patience rather than interest with which good
people listen to the dull drone of their parson,
the contempt which men of the world express for
the pulpit, the repugnance which many highly
cultivated men feel against spending a couple of
hours in the sanctuary. To a very large class
of persons—and these of no mean mark—the
church is as much an object of aversion—as, on
other grounds, the theatre is to another very
large class of persons whose opinion is entitled
to not a little consideration.

What is the secret of all this? The secret
lies in the fact that, contemporaneously with
the renewed life which has visited the Church,
a new life has also visited the press, and through
the press has so told upon the country that
the progress of the Church has been as
nothing in comparison with the progress of
the people. There has been a sort of race be-
tween the press and the pulpit, in which the
latter has lost so much ground that certain
literary men have not scrupled to describe

The cause
lies in the
fact that the
pulpit now
has a great
rival in the
press.

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authors and journalists as the true working clergy of the British Isles. The comparison between press and pulpit, however, is run too close. The ministers of religion might with some justice complain that the full extent of their mission is not recognised in this statement of the case. But in the point where the comparison holds, the point of instruction, there is no doubt that the press must very much supersede the pulpit, that reading must have the advantage of listening.

A parallel process visible also in the theatre.

On the decline of the drama.

The process which is thus evident in senate-hall and church is somewhat different in our theatres; but the result is still the same, and especially calls for notice, because on the surface it seems to be opposed to that excessive thoughtfulness which is characteristic of art in our time. The decline of the drama is a by-word, but the most erroneous ideas prevail as to the manner and the cause of this decline. What is it that has declined in the drama? The number of theatres is on the increase, and the profits of managers have by no means been diminished. The decline is not an affair of quantity, but of quality. There is a demand for what is called sensation, and dramatic authors are compelled to gratify this craving for sensation. Authors blame the actors, and actors blame the managers, and managers blame the public, and the public blame the authors; and theatrical critics, too,

get a good share of blame for not being able to bolster the classical drama into health. There is a round of fault-finding, and the stage declines lower and lower. The decline which is to be deplored is the inevitable result of civilization.

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For observe the process. I have heard some of the best authorities attribute the decline of the drama to the abolition of the monopoly enjoyed by the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres; and in favour of this idea there is the fact, that since the removal of the patents the decline of the drama has become more apparent than ever. In urging this explanation, however, it is forgotten that the drama was in a state of decline long before the abolition of theatrical monopoly; and that, in truth, the abolition was proposed as a cure for the mischief which was already at work. The real explanation is the same here as in the case of the Church. Just about the time when the theatrical monopoly was abolished, educational efforts began to take effect, and more than neutralized whatever benefit might have accrued from the stoppage of the patents. At first sight this explanation looks very like a paradox. It seems very strange that the march of intellect and the diffusion of literature should tend to lower the character of the drama. But whatever be the philosophy of it, there is the fact, and it concerns not only the theatres, but all our

Various explanations of the cause of this decline.

The most important cause to be found in the spread of education.

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public amusements. In our enlightened age the really successful amusements are not of the intellectual sort. On the stage it is the pantomime and extravaganza, the farce and the ballet, that succeed. In the same manner, music succeeds, picture-galleries succeed, Cremorne succeeds, jugglery and rope-dancing succeed, the riot of a Derby day is the most successful of all amusements. This may be all very delightful, but it is not intellectual. Your lecturers don't succeed, even if they are men of mark, unless they have heaps of pictures and queer beasts to show or brilliant chemical experiments to let off—at least, they do not keep up their success. There are a couple of facts, explain them how men will, that concurrently with the spread of education the character of public amusements has been lowered; and when we come to examine them it will seem not in the least unnatural that the two facts should stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect.

People expect too much from education. It was expected to diminish crime; it is found, on the contrary, that it creates as much crime as it prevents; that it mars as much as it makes. In the same way it is imagined that education must so etherealize our minds as to render us independent of sublunary joys. How exalted we are to become! How sublime in our tastes! How angelic in our desires! Alas for poor

On the influence of education and the strain of thought.

human nature, we are mortal still; we cannot shake off the animal. The animal asserts itself; and we find that as civilization increases the tension of the mind in business, so it requires, to redress the balance, an increased relaxation in pleasure. In bygone days our minds were not so highly strung; we were not so reflective; we were not so horridly in earnest; we were not so wonderfully enlightened; and when we sought our pleasure we could afford to indulge in amusement requiring some intellectual effort. But now, when even novels are full of reflection, we are in our moments of leisure compelled to seek refuge from thought in sensation, to pass from one extreme to the other. One cannot help also feeling that on the same principle the relation of Sunday to life has been in some respects altered in this age of study and calculation. Precious as the day of rest must always be, the regular church-goers must learn to think charitably of those who do not find a perfect Sabbath in doctrinal meditations, who feel that a long service requires a mental effort which they can ill afford, and who pant for the calm and pure, even if it be sensuous, enjoyment of fields and flowers, bands of music and palaces of art. But whether the principle applies to the Church or not, it certainly applies to the theatre. Let us have no more reflection, is the cry of the

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Exhausted with too much thinking we seek relief in the pleasures of sense.

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weary brain ; let us gratify sense. Give us, for the eye, the race, the regatta, and the review—flower-shows and fountain displays—fireworks and illuminations—the fantasies of pantomime and the pageantry of a Shakesperian revival. Give us, for the ear, the music of thousands of choristers, the roar of innumerable batteries, the huzzas of congregated myriads. Give us the pleasure of the banquet and the excitement of the dance ; let us smoke the pipe of peace, and let us lie on beds of fragrant roses. We have had enough of reading, writing, and thinking. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we calculate again ; to-morrow comes black care ; to-morrow comes inky thought ; to-morrow we are the slaves of awful wisdom. Thus it is that the drama declines. At Shoreditch and Sadler's Wells the legitimate drama succeeds, because the audience are not so habituated to intellectual pursuits as to consider intellectual amusement a weariness. Just as in the old time our countrymen could stand the interminable prosiness of the old mysteries and moralities, few plays are more popular at the suburban and transpontine theatres than the *Ion* of Talfourd, which so abounds in long speeches and fine sentiment that no West-End audience could sit it out. At the West-End theatres we want farce and frivolity, bubble and ballet, not because we are less intellectual, but because it

is a necessity of our existence that, in the hour of play, we should fly thought, and cultivate sensation.

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Thus, then, it will be evident that the intellectual movement of our time is of vast extent and manifold in its operation. It goes to the root of our national life and of our daily habits. It affects us politically, socially, domestically, individually—in the senate hall as well as by the fireside, in the church as well as in the theatre.

Summary of the foregoing arguments,

But in closing this chapter, I recur to the point above all others which is most noteworthy in its ethical bearing on the imaginative art of our time. The development of literature in our day—the new power which we possess of acting on the masses and of being acted on—has led and is leading to many changes, but to none more important than the withering of the individual as a hero, the elevation and reinforcement of the individual as a private man. This elevation of the private life and the private man to the place of honour in art and literature, over the public life and the historical man that have hitherto held the chief rank in our regards, amounts to a revolution. The fact of such a revolution having taken place may perhaps be seen most distinctly in the pictorial art, where it is impossible not to be struck with the almost entire subsidence of historical painting. Instead

Which are intended mainly to show in what sense the individual may be said to wither, and in what sense to prosper in art.

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of craving for historical pictures, we glory in genre and landscape; and even a simple bird's-nest by William Hunt has more attractions for us than any pictorial attempt which could now be made at a battle or a martyrdom, the crowning of kings or the conference of heroes. And the greatness of the revolution implied in this fact may be signified by one word—idiot. Our highest idea of heroic art comes from the Greeks, and the Greek name for any private individual was—idiot. Not that the word meant among the Greeks what we now mean by it; but there was a slur attached to it, there was a contempt implied in it, which has gradually in the course of ages worked to this end—that the Greek name for any private person has come to be the synonym for a hopeless fool. The idiot of the Greeks is the hero of art in its latest development.

The difference between ancient and modern art may be defined by reference to the position which the individual holds in each.

There was a fierce discussion in the end of last century as to the comparative merits of ancient and modern art; but the combatants had not a little difficulty in agreeing as to the main point of difference between old and new—the classical and the romantic schools. The chief point of difference between the two schools might be condensed by one who, in admiration of the antique, was willing to disparage the modern, into this contemptuous phrase—that classical art was heroic, and that Christian art

is idiotic. The word is vile, but the meaning is harmless. Private life, private character, all the whisperings of privacy, are the peculiar property of modern art. The Greek poet rarely withdrew his gaze from the public side of a man's character, from acts which affected the public interest, and from the public feeling which these acts evoked; or, if he strayed in the byeways of human nature, and touched on purely private affairs, it was only for a minute, and because these private affairs have points of contact with the public life. See how love, for example, shows itself in ancient and in modern art. It is the all-in-all of modern poetry and romance, the very heart of modern art. In classical poetry it holds at best but a secondary position; in the greater works of classical genius it is veiled, repressed, almost unknown. The Greek dramatist might have a good deal to say of marriage. Marriage is a public ceremony, and the breach or observance of its obligations is a matter of public moment. But the agitations of love are of little importance to any but the lovers themselves; and a Greek artist would be astonished to see how, in the modern drama—even in its masterpieces—all the billing and cooing, and doubting and pouting, not only of heroes and heroines, but of every Jack and Jill in the land, are exposed to view. Thus it appears that the withering of the hero and the

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Classical art turns on the public life, Christian art on the private life.

And the withering of the individual which we

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see in
recent times
is but the
last result
of a process
which
belongs to
all modern,
in contrast
to all
ancient art.

flourishing of the private individual, which I have ventured to describe as being (for art at least) the most salient characteristic of our time, is but the last and most complete development of a tendency which belongs to modern art and literature more or less from their first dawn, and separates them, as by a great gulf, from the art, the literature, and the life antique.





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