

The Young Lady's Mentor eBook

The Young Lady's Mentor

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| The Young Lady's Mentor eBook..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Page 1..... | 8 |
| Page 2..... | 9 |
| Page 3..... | 10 |
| Page 4..... | 11 |
| Page 5..... | 12 |
| Page 6..... | 14 |
| Page 7..... | 15 |
| Page 8..... | 16 |
| Page 9..... | 17 |
| Page 10..... | 18 |
| Page 11..... | 19 |
| Page 12..... | 20 |
| Page 13..... | 21 |
| Page 14..... | 23 |
| Page 15..... | 24 |
| Page 16..... | 25 |
| Page 17..... | 26 |
| Page 18..... | 27 |
| Page 19..... | 28 |
| Page 20..... | 29 |
| Page 21..... | 30 |
| Page 22..... | 31 |
| Page 23..... | 32 |



[Page 24..... 33](#)

[Page 25..... 35](#)

[Page 26..... 37](#)

[Page 27..... 38](#)

[Page 28..... 39](#)

[Page 29..... 40](#)

[Page 30..... 42](#)

[Page 31..... 43](#)

[Page 32..... 44](#)

[Page 33..... 45](#)

[Page 34..... 46](#)

[Page 35..... 47](#)

[Page 36..... 48](#)

[Page 37..... 50](#)

[Page 38..... 51](#)

[Page 39..... 52](#)

[Page 40..... 53](#)

[Page 41..... 54](#)

[Page 42..... 55](#)

[Page 43..... 56](#)

[Page 44..... 57](#)

[Page 45..... 58](#)

[Page 46..... 59](#)

[Page 47..... 61](#)

[Page 48..... 62](#)

[Page 49..... 63](#)



[Page 50..... 64](#)

[Page 51..... 65](#)

[Page 52..... 66](#)

[Page 53..... 67](#)

[Page 54..... 68](#)

[Page 55..... 69](#)

[Page 56..... 70](#)

[Page 57..... 72](#)

[Page 58..... 73](#)

[Page 59..... 74](#)

[Page 60..... 76](#)

[Page 61..... 77](#)

[Page 62..... 78](#)

[Page 63..... 79](#)

[Page 64..... 80](#)

[Page 65..... 81](#)

[Page 66..... 82](#)

[Page 67..... 83](#)

[Page 68..... 84](#)

[Page 69..... 86](#)

[Page 70..... 87](#)

[Page 71..... 89](#)

[Page 72..... 90](#)

[Page 73..... 91](#)

[Page 74..... 92](#)

[Page 75..... 93](#)



[Page 76..... 94](#)

[Page 77..... 95](#)

[Page 78..... 96](#)

[Page 79..... 97](#)

[Page 80..... 99](#)

[Page 81..... 100](#)

[Page 82..... 101](#)

[Page 83..... 102](#)

[Page 84..... 103](#)

[Page 85..... 105](#)

[Page 86..... 106](#)

[Page 87..... 107](#)

[Page 88..... 108](#)

[Page 89..... 109](#)

[Page 90..... 111](#)

[Page 91..... 112](#)

[Page 92..... 113](#)

[Page 93..... 115](#)

[Page 94..... 116](#)

[Page 95..... 117](#)

[Page 96..... 118](#)

[Page 97..... 119](#)

[Page 98..... 120](#)

[Page 99..... 121](#)

[Page 100..... 122](#)

[Page 101..... 124](#)



[Page 102..... 125](#)

[Page 103..... 126](#)

[Page 104..... 127](#)

[Page 105..... 129](#)

[Page 106..... 131](#)

[Page 107..... 132](#)

[Page 108..... 133](#)

[Page 109..... 134](#)

[Page 110..... 135](#)

[Page 111..... 136](#)

[Page 112..... 137](#)

[Page 113..... 138](#)

[Page 114..... 139](#)

[Page 115..... 141](#)

[Page 116..... 142](#)

[Page 117..... 143](#)

[Page 118..... 144](#)

[Page 119..... 146](#)

[Page 120..... 147](#)

[Page 121..... 148](#)

[Page 122..... 149](#)

[Page 123..... 151](#)

[Page 124..... 152](#)

[Page 125..... 153](#)

[Page 126..... 154](#)

[Page 127..... 155](#)



[Page 128..... 157](#)
[Page 129..... 158](#)
[Page 130..... 159](#)
[Page 131..... 160](#)
[Page 132..... 161](#)
[Page 133..... 162](#)
[Page 134..... 163](#)
[Page 135..... 164](#)
[Page 136..... 165](#)
[Page 137..... 167](#)
[Page 138..... 168](#)
[Page 139..... 170](#)
[Page 140..... 172](#)
[Page 141..... 173](#)
[Page 142..... 175](#)
[Page 143..... 176](#)
[Page 144..... 177](#)
[Page 145..... 179](#)
[Page 146..... 180](#)
[Page 147..... 182](#)
[Page 148..... 183](#)



Page 1

LETTER I.

Contentment.

It is, perhaps, only the young who can be very hopefully addressed on the present subject. A few years hence, and your habits of mind will be unalterably formed; a few years hence, and your struggle against a discontented spirit, even should you be given grace to attempt it, would be a perpetually wearisome and discouraging one. The penalty of past sin will pursue you until the end, not only in the pain caused by a discontented habit of mind, but also in the consciousness of its exceeding sinfulness.

Every thought that rebels against the law of God involves its own punishment in itself, by contributing to the establishment of habits that increase tenfold the difficulties to which a sinful nature exposes us.

Discontent is in this, perhaps, more dangerous than many other sins, being far less tangible: unless we are in the constant habit of exercising strict watchfulness over our thoughts, it is almost insensibly that they acquire an habitual tendency to murmuring and repining.

This is particularly to be feared in a person of your disposition. Many of your volatile, thoughtless, worldly-minded companions, destitute of all your holier feelings, living without object or purpose in life, and never referring to the law of God as a guide for thought or action, may nevertheless manifest a much more contented disposition than your own, and be apparently more submissive to the decision of your Creator as to the station of life in which you have each been placed.

To account for their apparent superiority over you on this point, it must be remembered that it is one of the dangerous responsibilities attendant on the best gifts of God,—that if not employed according to his will, they turn to the disadvantage of the possessor.

Your powers of reflection, your memory, your imagination, all calculated to provide you with rich sources of gratification if exercised in proper directions, will turn into curses instead of blessings if you do not watchfully restrain that exercise within the sphere of duty. The natural tendency of these faculties is, to employ themselves on forbidden ground, for “every imagination of man’s heart is evil continually.” It is thus that your powers of reflection may only serve to give you a deeper and keener insight into the disadvantages of your position in life; and trivial circumstances, unpleasant probabilities, never dwelt on for a moment by the gay and thoughtless, will with you acquire a serious and fatal importance, if you direct towards them those powers of reasoning and concentrated thought which were given to you for far different purposes.



Page 2

And while, on the one hand, your memory, if you allow it to acquire the bad habits against which I am now warning you, will be perpetually refreshing in your mind vivid pictures of past sorrows, wrongs, and annoyances: your imagination, at the same time, will continually present to you, under the most exaggerated forms, and in the most striking colours, every possible unpleasantness that is likely to occur in the future. You may thus create for yourself a life apart, quite distinct from the real one, depriving yourself by wilful self-injury of the power of enjoying whatever advantages, successes, and pleasures, your heavenly Father may think it safe for you to possess.

Happiness, as far as it can be obtained in the path of duty, is a duty in itself, and an important one: without that degree of happiness which most people may secure for themselves, independent of external circumstances, neither health, nor energy, nor cheerfulness can be forthcoming to help us through the task of our daily duties.

It is indeed true, that, under the most favourable circumstances, the thoughtful will never enjoy so much as others of that which is now generally understood by the word happiness. Anxieties must intrude upon them which others know nothing of: the necessary business of life, to be as well executed as they ought to execute it, must at times force down their thoughts to much that is painful for the present and anxious for the future. They cannot forget the past, as the light-hearted do, or life would bring them no improvement; but the same difficulties and dangers would be rushed into heedlessly to-morrow, that were experienced yesterday, and forgotten to-day; and not only past difficulties and dangers are remembered, but sorrows too: these they cannot, for they would not, forget.

In the contemplation of the future also, they must exercise their imagination as well as their reason, for the discovery of those evils and dangers which such foresight may enable them to guard against: all this kind of thoughtfulness is their wisdom as well as their instinct; which makes it more difficult for them than it is for others to fulfil the reverse side of the duty, and to "be careful for nothing."^[1]

To your strong mind, however, a difficulty will be a thing to be overcome, and you may, if you only will it, be prudent and sagacious, far-sighted and provident, without dwelling for a moment longer than such duties require on the unpleasantnesses, past, present, and future, of your lot in life.

Having thus seen in what respects your superiority of mind is likely to detract from your happiness, in the point of the colouring given by your thoughts to your life, let us, on the other hand, consider how this same superiority may be so directed as to make your thoughts contribute to your happiness, instead of detracting from it.



Page 3

I spoke first of your reasoning powers. Let them not be exercised only in discovering the dangers and disadvantages likely to attend your peculiar position in life; let them rather be directed to discover the advantages of those very features of your lot which are most opposed to your natural inclinations. Consider, in the first place, what there may be to reconcile you to the secluded life you so unwillingly lead. Withdrawn, indeed, you are from society,—from the delightful intercourse of refined and intellectual minds: you hear of such enjoyments at a distance; you hear of their being freely granted to those who cannot appreciate them as you could, (safely granted to them for perhaps this very reason.) You have no opportunity of forming those friendships, so earnestly desired by a young and enthusiastic mind; of admiring, even at a reverential distance, “emperors of thought and hand.” But then, as a compensation, you ought to consider that you are, at the same time, freed from those intrusions which wear away the time, and the spirits, and the very powers of enjoyment, of those who are placed in a more public position than your own. When you do, at rare intervals, enjoy any intercourse with congenial minds, it has for you a pleasurable excitement, a freshness of delight, which those who mix much and habitually in literary and intellectual society have long ceased to enjoy: while the powers of your own mind are preserving all that originality and energy for which no intellectual experience can compensate, you are saved the otherwise perhaps inevitable danger of adopting, parrot-like, the tastes and opinions of others who may indeed be your superiors, but who, in a copy, become wretchedly inferior to your real self. Time you have, too, to cultivate your mind in such a manner, and to such a degree, as may fit you to grace any society of the kind I have described; while those who are early and constantly engaged in this society are often obliged, from mere want of this precious possession, to copy others, and resign all identity and individuality. To you, nobly free as you are from the vice of envy, I may venture to suggest another consideration, *viz.* the far greater influence you possess in your present small sphere of intellectual intercourse, than if you were mixed up with a crowd of others, most of them your equals, many your superiors.

If you have few opportunities of forming friendships, those few are tenfold more valuable than many acquaintance, among a crowd of whom, whatever merits you or they might possess, little time could be spared to discover, or experimentally appreciate them. The one or two friends whom you now love, and know yourself beloved by, might, in more exciting and busy scenes, have gone on meeting you for years without discovering the many bonds of sympathy which now unite you. In the seclusion you so much deplore, they and you have been given time to “deliberate, choose, and fix:” the conclusion of the poet will probably be equally applicable,—you will “then abide till death.”[2] Such friends are possessions rare and valuable enough to make amends to you for any sacrifices by which they have been acquired.

Page 4

Another of your grievances, one which presses the more heavily on those of graceful tastes, refined habits, and generous impulses, is the very small proportion of this world's goods which has fallen to your lot. You are perpetually obliged to deny yourself in matters of taste, of self-improvement, of charity. You cannot procure the books, the paintings, you wish for—the instruction which you so earnestly desire, and would so probably profit by. Above all, your eyes are pained by the sight of distress you cannot relieve; and you are thus constantly compelled to control and subdue the kindest and warmest impulses of your generous nature. The moral benefits of this peculiar species of trial belong to another part of my subject: the present object is to find out the most favourable point of view in which to contemplate the unpleasantness of your lot, merely with relation to your temporal happiness. Look, then, around you; and, even in your own limited sphere of observation, it cannot but strike you, that those who derive most enjoyment from objects of taste, from books, paintings, &c., are exactly those who are situated as you are, who cannot procure them at will. It is certain that there is something in the difficulty of attainment which adds much to the preciousness of the objects we desire; much, too, in the rareness of their bestowal. When, after long waiting, and by means of prudent management, it is at last within your power to make some long-desired object your own, does it not bestow much greater pleasure than it does on those who have only to wish and to have?

In matters of charity this is still more strikingly true—the pleasure of bestowing ease and comfort on the poor and distressed is enhanced tenfold by the consciousness of having made some personal sacrifice for its attainment. The rich, those who give of their superfluities, can never fully appreciate what the pleasures of almsgiving really are.

Experience teaches that the necessity of scrupulous economy is the very best school in which those who are afterwards to be rich can be educated. Riches always bring their own peculiar claims along with them; and unless a correct estimate is early formed of the value of money and the manner in which it can be laid out to the best advantage, you will never enjoy the comforts and tranquillity which well-managed riches can bestow. It is much to be doubted whether any one can skilfully manage large possessions, unless, at some period or other of life, they have forced themselves, or been forced, to exercise self-denial, and resolutely given up all those expenses the indulgence of which would have been imprudent. Those who indiscriminately gratify every taste for expense the moment it is excited, can never experience the comforts of competency, though they may have the name of wealth and the reality of its accompanying cares.



Page 5

Still further, let your memory and imagination be here exercised to assist in reconciling you to your present lot. Can you not remember a time when you wanted money still more than you do now?—when you had a still greater difficulty in obtaining the things you reasonably desire? To those who have acquired the art of contentment, the present will always seem to have some compensating advantage over the past, however brighter that past may appear to others. This valuable art will bring every hidden object gradually into light, as the dawning day seems to waken into existence those objects which had before been unnoticed in the darkness.

Lastly, your imagination, well employed, will make use of your partial knowledge of other people's affairs to picture to you how much worse off many of those are,—how much worse off you might yourself be. You, for instance, can still accomplish much by the aid of self-denial; while many, with hearts as warm in charities, as overflowing as your own, have not more to give than the "cup of cold water," that word of mercy and consolation.

You may still further, perhaps, complain that you have no object of exciting interest to engage your attention, and develop your powers of labour, and endurance, and cleverness. Never has this trial been more vividly described than in the well-remembered lines of a modern poet:—

"She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she had given life!
—For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
Never in all the world such a one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all." [3]

This wish for occupation, for influence, for power even, is not only right in itself, but the unvarying accompaniment of the consciousness of high capabilities. It may, however, be intended that these cravings should be satisfied in a different way, and at a different time, from that which your earthly thoughts are now desiring. It may be that the very excellence of the office for which you are finally destined requires a greater length of preparation than that needful for ordinary duties and ordinary trials. At present, you are resting in peace, without any anxious cares or difficult responsibilities, but you know not how soon the time may come that will call forth and strain to the utmost your energies of both mind and body. You should anxiously make use of the present interval of repose for preparation, by maturing your prudence, strengthening your decision, acquiring control over your own temper and your own feelings, and thus fitting yourself to control others.



Or are you, on the contrary, wasting the precious present time in vain repinings, in murmurings that weaken both mind and body, so that when the hour of trial comes you will be entirely unfitted to realize the beautiful ideal of the poet?—



Page 6

“A perfect woman, nobly plann’d
To warn, to counsel, to command:
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.”[4]

Then, again, I would ask you to make use of your powers of reflection and memory. Reflect what trials and difficulties are, in the common course of events, likely to assail you; remember former difficulties, former days or weeks of trial, when all your now dormant energies were developed and strained to the utmost. You felt then the need of much greater powers of mind and body than those which you now complain are lying dormant and useless. Further imagine the future cases that may occur in which every natural and acquired faculty may be employed for the great advantage of those who are dear to you, and when you will experience that this long interval of repose and preparation was altogether needful.

Such reflections, memories, and imaginations must, however, be carefully guarded, lest, instead of reconciling you to the apparent uselessness of your present life, they should contribute to increase your discontent. This they might easily do, even though such reflections and memories related only to trials and difficulties, instead of contemplating the pleasures and the importance of responsibilities. To an ardent nature like yours, trials themselves, even severe ones, which would exercise the powers of your mind and the energies of your character, would be more welcome than the tame, uniform life you at present lead.

The considerations above recommended can, therefore, be only safely indulged in connection with, and secondary to, a most vigilant and conscientious examination into the truth of one of your principal complaints, *viz.* that you have to do, like the Duke’s wife, “nothing at all.”[5] You may be “seeking great things” to do, and consequently neglecting those small charities which “soothe, and heal, and bless.” Listen to the words of a great teacher of our own day: “The situation that has not duty, its *ideal*, was never yet occupied by man. Yes, here, in this poor, miserable, pampered, despised actual, wherein thou even now standest, here, or nowhere, is thy *ideal*; work it out, therefore, and, working, believe, live, be free. Fool! the ideal is in thyself; the impediment, too, is in thyself: thy condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same ideal out of—what matters whether the stuff be of this sort or of that, so the form thou give it be heroic, be poetic? O thou that pinest in the imprisonment of the actual, and criest bitterly to the gods for a kingdom wherein to rule and create, know this of a truth,—the thing thou seekest is already with thee, ‘here, or nowhere,’ couldst thou only see.”

When you examine the above assertions by the light of Scripture, can you contradict their truth?

Page 7

Let us, however, ascend to a still higher point of view. Have we not all, under every imaginable circumstance, a work mighty and difficult enough to develop our strongest energies, to engage our deepest interests? Have we not all to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?”[6] Professing to believe, as we do, that the discipline of every day is ordered by Infinite Love and Infinite Wisdom, so as best to assist us in this awfully important task, can we justly complain of any mental void, of any inadequacy of occupation, in any of the situations of life?

The only work that can fully satisfy an immortal spirit’s cravings for excitement is the work appointed for each of us. It is one, too, that has no intervals of repose, far less of languor or *ennui*; the labour it demands ought never to cease, the intense and engrossing interest it excites can never vary or lessen in importance. The alternative is a more awful one than human mind can yet conceive: those who have not fulfilled their appointed work, those who have not, through the merits of Christ, obtained the “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord,”[7] “must depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”[8]

With a hell to avoid, and a heaven to obtain, do you murmur for want of interest, of occupation!

In the words of the old story, “Look below on the earth, and then above in heaven:” remember that your only business here is to get there; then, instead of repining, you will be thankful that no great temporal work is given you to do which might, as too often happens, distract your attention and your labours from the attainment of life eternal. Having been once convinced of the awful and engrossing importance of this “one thing” we have to “do,”[9] you will see more easily how many minor duties may be appointed you to fulfil, on a path that before seemed a useless as well as an uninteresting one. For you would have now learned to estimate the small details of daily life, not according to their insignificance, not as they may influence your worldly fate, but as they may have a tendency to mould your spirit into closer conformity to the image of the Son.[10] You will now no longer inquire whether you have any work to do which you might yourself consider suitable to your capabilities and energies; but whether there is within your reach any, the smallest, humblest work of love, contemned or unobserved before, when you were more proud and less vigilant.

Look, then, with prayer and watchfulness into all the details of your daily life, and you will assuredly find much formerly-unnoticed “stuff,” out of which “your ideal” may be wrought.



Page 8

You may, for instance, have no opportunity of teaching on an enlarged scale, or even of taking a class at a Sunday-school, or of instructing any of your poor neighbours in reading or in the word of God. Such labours of love may, it is possible, though not probable, be shut out of your reach: if, however, you are on the watch for opportunities, (and we are best made quick-sighted to their occurrence in the course of the day, by the morning's earnest prayer for their being granted to us,) you may be able to help your fellow-pilgrims Zion-ward in a variety of small ways. "A word in season, how good is it!" the mere expression of religious sympathy has often cheered and refreshed the weary traveller on his perhaps difficult and lonely way. A verse of Scripture, a hymn taught to a child, only the visitor of a day, has often been blessed by God to the great spiritual profit of the child so taught. Are not even such small works of love within your reach?

Again, with respect to family duties, I know that in some cases, when there are many to fulfil such duties, it is a more necessary and often a more difficult task to refrain altogether from interfering in them. They ought to be allowed to serve as a safety-valve for the energies of those members of the family who have no other occupations: of these there will always be some in a large domestic circle. Without, however, interfering actively and habitually, which it may not be your duty to do, are you always ready to help when you are asked, and to take trouble willingly upon yourself, when the excitement and the credit of the arrangement will belong exclusively to others? This is a good sign of the humility and lovingness of your spirit: how is the test borne?

Further, you may complain that your conversation is not valued, and that therefore you have no excitement to exertion for the amusement of others; that your cheerfulness and good temper under sorrows and annoyances are of no consequence, as you are not considered of sufficient importance for any display of feeling to attract attention. When I hear such complaints, and they are not unfrequent from the younger members of large families, I have little doubt that the sting in all these murmurs is infixed by their pride. They assure me, at the same time, that if there was any one to care much about it, to watch anxiously whether they were vexed or pleased, they would be able to exercise the strictest control over their feelings and temper,—and I believe it, for here their pride and their affection would both come to the assistance of duty. What God requires of us, however, is its fulfilment when all these things are against us. The effort to control grief, to conceal depression, to conquer ill-temper, will be a far more acceptable offering in his eyes, when they alone are expected to witness it. That which now his eyes alone see will one day be proclaimed upon the housetop.[11]

Page 9

I must, besides, remind you that your proud spirit may deceive you when it suggests, that because your sadness or your ill-humour attracts no expressed notice or excites no efforts to remove it, it does not therefore affect those around you. This is not the case; even the gloom and ill-humour of a servant, who only remains a few minutes in attendance, will be depressing and annoying to the most unobservant master and mistress, though they might make no efforts to remove it. How much more, then, may your want of cheerfulness and sweet temper affect, though it may be insensibly, the peace of your family circle. Here you are again seeking great things for yourself, and neglecting your appointed work, because it does not to you appear sufficiently worthy of your high capabilities. Your proud spirit needs being humbled, and therefore, probably, it is that you will not be allowed to do great things. No, you must first learn the less agreeable task of doing small things, of doing what would perhaps be called easy things by those who have never tried them. To wear a contented look when you know that, perhaps, the effort will not be observed, certainly not appreciated,—to take submissively the humblest part in the conversation, and still bear cheerfully that part,—to bear with patience every hasty word that may be spoken, and so to forget it that your future conduct may be uninfluenced by it,—to remove every difficulty, the removal of which is within your reach, without expecting that the part you have taken will be acknowledged or even observed,—to be always ready with your sympathy, encouragement, and counsel, however scornfully they may have before been rejected; these are all acts of self-renunciation which are peculiarly fitted to a woman's sphere of duty, and have a direct tendency to cherish the difficult and excellent grace of humility; they may, however, help to foster rather than to subdue a spirit of discontent, if they are performed from a motive of obtaining any, even the most exalted, human approbation. They must be done to God alone, and then the promise is sure, "thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." [12] Thus, too, the art of contentment may be much more easily learnt. Disappointment will surely sour your temper if you look forward to human appreciation of a self-denying habit of life; but when the approbation of God is the object sought for, no neglect from others can excite discontent or much regret. For here there can be no disappointment: that which comes to us through the day has all been decreed by him, and as it must therefore give us opportunities of fulfilling his will, and gaining his approbation, we must necessarily "be content."



Page 10

It must, indeed, be always owing to some deficiency in religious principle, that one discontented thought is suffered to dwell in the mind. If our heart and our treasure were in heaven,[13] should we be easily excited to regret and irritation about the inconveniences of our position on earth? If we sought "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"[14] should we have so much energy remaining to waste on petty worldly annoyances? If we obeyed the injunction, "have faith in God," should we daily and hourly, by our sinful murmuring, imply such doubts of the divine attributes of wisdom, love, and power? This is a want of faith you do not manifest towards men. You would trust yourself fearlessly to the care of some earthly physician; you would believe that he understood how to adapt his strengthening or lowering remedies to each varying feature of your case; you would even provide yourself with remedies, which, on the faith of his skill, you would trustingly use to meet every symptom that might arise on future occasions. But when the Great Physician manifests a still greater watchfulness to adapt his daily discipline to your varying temper and the different stages of your Christian growth, you murmur—you believe not in his wisdom as you do in that of the sons of earth.

Do not, then, take his wisdom on faith alone; you must indeed believe, you must believe or perish; but it may be as yet too difficult a lesson for you to believe against sense, against feeling. What I would urge upon you is, to strengthen your weak faith by the lessons of experience, to seek anxiously, and to pray to be enabled to see distinctly, the peculiar manner in which each trial of your daily lot is adapted to your own individual case.

I do not speak now of great trials, of such afflictions as crush the sufferer in the dust. When the hand of God is so plainly seen, it is comparatively easy to submit, and his Holy Spirit, ever fulfilling the promise "as thy day is, so shall thy strength be,"[15] sometimes makes the riven heart strong to bear that which, in prospective, it dares not even contemplate. You, however, have had no trial of this nature; yours are the petty irritations, the small vexations which "smart more because they hold in Holy Writ no place." [16] Even at more peaceful times, when you can contemplate with resignation the general features of your lot in life, you cannot subdue your spirit to patience under the hourly varying annoyances and temptations with which you are beset. The peculiar sensitiveness of your disposition, your affectionate, generous nature, your refinement of mind, and quick tact, all expose you to suffer more severely than others from the selfishness, the coarse-mindedness, the bluntness of perception of those around you. You often say, in the bitterness of your heart, Any other trial but this I could have borne; every other chastisement would have been light in comparison. But why have you so little faith? Why do you



Page 11

not see that it is because all these petty trials are so severe to you, therefore are they sent? All these amiable qualities that I have enumerated, and the love which they win for you, would make you admire and value yourself too much, unless your system were reduced, so to speak, by a series of petty but continued annoyances. As I said before, you must seek to strengthen your faith by tracing the close connection between these annoyances and the “needs be” for them. It is probably exactly at the time when you are too much elated by praise and admiration that you are sent some counterbalancing annoyance, or perhaps suffered to fall into some fault of temper which will lessen you in your own eyes, as well as in those of others. You are often troubled by some annoyance, too, when you have blamed others for being too easily overcome by an annoyance of the very same kind. “Stand upon” an anxious “watch,” and you will see how constantly severe judgments of others are punished by falling ourselves into temptations similar to those which we had treated as light ones when sitting in judgment upon others. If you would acquire the habit of exercising faith with respect to the smallest details of your every-day life, by such faith the light itself might be won, and your eyes be opened to see how wondrously all things, even those which appear the most needlessly worrying, are made to work together for your good.[17] These are, however, but the first lessons in the school of faith, the first steps on the road which leads to “rest in God.”

Severer trials are hastening onward, for which your present petty trials are serving as a preparatory discipline. According to the manner in which these are met and supported, will be your patience in the hour of deep darkness and bitter desolation. Waste not one of your present petty sorrows: let them all, by the help of prayer, and watchfulness, and self-control, work their appointed work in your soul. Let them lead you each day more and more trustingly to “cast all your care upon Him who careth for you.”[18] In the present hours of tranquillity and calm, let the light and infrequent storms, the passing clouds that disturb your peace, serve as warnings to you to find a sure refuge before the clouds of affliction become so heavy, and its storms so violent, that there will be no power of seeking a haven of security. That must be sought and found in seasons of comparative peace. Though the agonized soul may finally, through the waves of sorrow, make its way into the ark, its long previous struggles, and its after harrowing doubts and fears, will shatter it nearly to pieces before it finds a final refuge. It may, indeed, by the free grace of God, be saved at the last, but during the remainder of its earthly pilgrimage there is no hope for it of joy and peace in believing.

Page 12

But when the hour of earthly desolation comes to those who have long acknowledged the special providence of God in “all the dreary intercourse of daily life,” “they knew in whom they have believed,”[19] and no storms can shake that faith. They know from experience that all things work together for good to them that love God. In the loving, child-like confidence of long-trying and now perfecting faith, they are enabled to say from the depths of their heart, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”[20] They seek not now to ascertain the “needs be” for this particular trial. It might harrow up their human heart too much to trace the details of sorrows such as these, in the manner in which they formerly examined into the details of those of daily life. “It is the Lord;” these words alone not only still all complaining, but fill the soul with a depth of peace never experienced by the believer until all happiness is withdrawn but that which comes direct from God. “It is the Lord,” who died that we might live, and can we murmur even if we dared? No; the love of Christ constrains us to cast ourselves at his feet, not only in submission, but in grateful adoration. It is through his redeeming love that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Even the very depth of mystery which may attend the sorrowful dispensation, will only draw forth a stronger manifestation of the Christian's faith and love. She will be enabled to rejoice that God does not allow her to see even one reason for the stroke that lays low all her earthly happiness; as thus only, perhaps, can she experience all the fulness of peace that accompanies an unquestioning trust in the wisdom and love of his decrees. For such unquestioning trust, however, there must be a long and diligent preparation: it is not the growth of days or weeks; yet, unless it is begun even this very day, it may never be begun at all. The practice of daily contentment is the only means of finally attaining to Christian resignation.

I do not appeal to you for the necessity of immediate action, because this day may be your last. I do not exhort you “to live as if this day were the whole of life, and not a part or section of it,”[21] because it may, in fact, be the whole of life to you. It may be so, but it is not probable, and when you have certainties to guide you, they are better excitements to immediate action than the most solemn possibilities.

The certainty to which I now appeal is, that every duty I have been urging upon you will be much easier to you to-day than it would be, even so soon as to-morrow. One hour's longer indulgence of a discontented spirit, of rebellious and murmuring thoughts, will stamp on your mind an impression, which, however slight it may be, will entail upon you a lifelong struggle against it. Every indulged thought becomes a part of ourselves: you have the awful freedom of will to make yourself what you will to be. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,”[22] “Quench” the Spirit[23] and the holy flame will never be rekindled. Kneel, then, before God, even now, to pray that you may be enabled to will aright.

Page 13

Before you opened these pages, some of your daily irritations were probably preying on your mind. You have often, perhaps, recurred to the annoyance, whatever it may be, while you read on and on. Make this annoyance your first opportunity of victory, the first step in the path of contentment. Pray to an ever-present God, that he may open your eyes to see how large may have been the portion of blame to yourself in the annoyance you complain of,—in how far it may be the due and inevitable chastisement of some former sin; how, finally, it may turn to your present profit, by giving you a keener insight into the evils of your own heart, and a more indulgent view of the often imaginary wrongs of others towards you.

Let not this trial be lost to you; by faith and prayer, this cloud may rain down blessings upon you. The annoyance from which you are suffering may be a small one, casting but a temporary shadow, even like the

“Cloud passing over the moon;
'Tis passing, and 'twill pass full soon.”[24]

But ere that shadow has passed away, your fate may be as decided as that of the renegade in poetic fiction. During the time this cloud has rested upon you, the first link of an interminable chain of habits, for good or for ill, may have been fastened around you. Who can tell what “Now” it is that “is the accepted time?” We know from Scripture that there is this awful period, and your present temptation to murmuring and rebellion against the will of God (for it is still his will, though it may be manifested through a created instrument) may be to you that “Now.” Pray earnestly before you decide what use you will make of it.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Phil. iv. 6.

[2] Young’s Night Thoughts.

[3] “The Flight of the Duchess.” Browning.

[4] Wordsworth.

[5] See page 15.

[6] Phil. ii. 12.

[7] Heb. xii. 14.

[8] Matt. xxv. 41.



[9] Phil. iii. 13.

[10] Rom. viii. 29.

[11] Luke xii. 3.

[12] Matt. vi. 18.

[13] Matt. vi. 20, 21.

[14] Matt. vi. 33.

[15] Deut. xxxiii. 25.

[16] Lyra Apostolica.

[17] Rom. viii. 28.

[18] 1 Pet. v. 7.

[19] 2 Tim. i. 12.

[20] 1 Sam. iii. 18.

[21] Jean Paul Richter.

[22] 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

[23] Thess. v. 19.

[24] The Siege of Corinth.

LETTER II.

Temper.

The subject proposed for consideration in the following letter has been already treated of in perhaps all the different modes of which it appears susceptible. Every religious and moral motive has been urged upon the victim of ill-temper, and it is scarcely necessary to add that each has, in its turn, been urged in vain. This failing of the character comes gradually to be considered as one over which the rational will has no control; it is even supposed possible that a Christian may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Saviour while the vice of ill-temper is still flourishing triumphantly.



Page 14

It is, indeed, a certain fact that, unless the temper itself is specially controlled, and specially watched over, it may deteriorate even when the character in other respects improves; for the habit of defeat weakens the exercise of the will in this particular direction, and gradually diminishes the hope or the effort of acquiring a victory over the indulged failing. It is a melancholy consideration, if it be, as I believe, really the case, that a Christian may increase in love to God and man, while at the same time perpetually inflicting severe wounds on the peace and happiness of those who are nearest and dearest to her. Worse than all, she is, by such conduct, wounding the Saviour "in the house of his friends,"[25] bringing disgrace and ridicule upon the Holy Name by which she is called.

In the compatibility which is often tacitly inferred between a bad temper and a religious course of life, there seems to be an instinctive recognition of this peculiar vice being so much the necessary result of physical organization, that the motives proving effectual against other sins are ineffectual for the extirpation of this. Perhaps, if this recognition were distinct, and the details of it better understood, a new and more successful means might be made use of to effect the cure of ill-temper.

As an encouragement to this undertaking, there can be no doubt, from some striking instances within your own knowledge, that there are certain means by which, if they could only be discovered, the vice in question may be completely subdued. Even among heathen nations, we know that the art of self-control was so well understood, and so successfully practised, that Plato, Socrates, and other philosophers were able to bring their naturally fiery and violent tempers into complete subjection to their will. Can it be that this secret has been lost along with the other mysteries of those distant times, that the mode of controlling the temper is now as undiscoverable as the manner of preparing the Tyrian dye and other forgotten arts? It is surely a disgrace to those cowardly Christians who, having in addition to all the natural powers of the heathen moralist the freely-offered grace of God to work with them and in them, should still walk so unworthy of the high vocation wherewith they are called, as to shrink hopelessly from a moral competition with the ignorant worshippers of old.

My sister, these things ought not so to be; you feel they ought not, yet day after day you break through the resolutions formed in your calmer moments, and repeat, probably increase, your manifestations of uncontrolled ill-temper. This is not yet, however, in your case, a wilful sin; you still mourn bitterly over the shame to yourself and the annoyance to others caused by the indulgence of your ill-temper. You are also painfully alive to the doubts which your conduct excites in the mind of your more worldly associates as to the reality of a vital and transforming efficacy in religion. You feel that you are not only disobeying God yourself, but that you are providing others with excuses for disobeying him, and with examples of disobedience. You mourn over these considerations in bitterness of heart; you even pray for strength to resist this, your besetting sin, and then—you leave your room, and fall into the same sin on the very first opportunity.

Page 15

If, however, prayer itself does not prove an effectual safeguard from persistence in sin, you will ask what other means can be hopefully employed. None—none whatever; that from which real prayer cannot preserve us is an inevitable misfortune. But think you that any kind of sin can be among those misfortunes that cannot be avoided? No, my friend: “He is able to succour them that are tempted;”[26] and we are also assured that He is willing. Cease, then, from accusing the All-merciful, even by implication, of being the cause of your continuing in sin, and examine carefully into the nature of those prayers which you complain have never been answered. The Scripture reason for such disappointments is clearly and distinctly given: “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”[27] Examine, then, in the first place, whether you yourself are asking “amiss?” What is your primary motive for desiring the removal of this besetting sin? Is it the consideration of its being so hateful in the sight of God, of its being injurious to the cause of religion? or is it not rather because you feel that it makes you unloveable to those around you, and inflicts pain on those who are very dear to you, at the same time lessening your own dignity and wounding your self-respect? These are all proper and allowable motives of action while kept in their subordinate place; but if they become the primary actuating principle, instead of a conscientious hatred of sin because it is the abominable thing that God hates,[28] if pleasing man be your chief object, you have no reason to complain that your prayers are unanswered. The word of God has told you that it must be so. You have asked “amiss.” There is also a secondary sense in which we may “ask amiss:” when we pray without corresponding effort. Some worthy people think that prayer alone is to obtain for them all the benefits they can desire, and that the influences of the Holy Spirit will, unassisted by human effort, produce a transforming change in the temper and the conduct. This they call magnifying the grace of God, as if it could be supposed that his gracious help would ever be granted for the purpose of slackening, instead of encouraging and exciting, our own exertions. Do not the Scriptures abound in exhortations, warnings, and threatenings on the subject of individual watchfulness, diligence, and unceasing conflicts? “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”[29] Perhaps you have prayed under the mental delusion I have above described; you have expected the work should be done *for* you, instead of *with* you; that the constraining love of Christ would constrain you necessarily to abandon your sinful habits, while, in fact, its efficacy consists in constraining you to carry on a perpetual struggle against them.



Page 16

Look through the day that is past, or watch yourself through that which is to come, and observe whether any violent conflict takes place in your mind whenever you are tempted to sin. I fear, on the contrary, that you expect the efficacy of your prayers to be displayed in preserving you from any painful conflict whatever. It is strange, most strange, how generally this perversion of mind appears practically to exist. Notwithstanding all the opposing assertions of the Bible, people imagine that the Christian's life, after conversion, is to be one of freedom from temptation and from all internal struggles. The contrary fact is, that they only really begin when we ourselves begin the Christian course with earnestness and sincerity.

If you would possess the safety of preparation, you must look out for and expect constant temptations and perpetual conflicts. By such means alone can your character be gradually forming into "a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." [30] Whenever your conflicts cease, you will enter into your glorious rest. You will not be kept in a world of sin and sorrow one moment after that in which you have attained to sufficient Christian perfection to qualify you for a safe freedom from trials and temptations: but as long as you remain in a temporal school of discipline, "your only safety is to feel the stretch and energy of a continual strife." [31]

If I have been at all successful in my endeavours to alter your views of the *manner* in which you are first to set about acquiring a permanent victory over your besetting sin, you will be the more inclined to bestow your attention on the means which I am now going to recommend for your consequent adoption. They have been often tried and proved effectual: experience is their chief recommendation. They may indeed startle some pious minds, as seeming to encroach too far on what they think ought to be the unassisted work of the Spirit upon the human character; but you are too intelligent to allow such assertions, unfounded as they are on Scripture, to prove much longer a stumbling-block in your way. I would first of all recommend to you a very strict inquiry into the nature of the things that affect your temper, so that you may be for the future on your guard to avoid them, as far as lies in your power. Avoidance is always the safest plan when it involves no deviation from the straightforward path of duty; and there will be enough of inevitable conflicts left, to keep up the habits of self-control and watchfulness. Indeed, the avoidance which I recommend to you involves in itself the necessity of so much vigilance, that it will help to prepare you for measures of more active resistance. On this principle, then, you will shrink from every species of discussion, on either practical or abstract subjects, which is likely to excite you beyond control, and disable you from bearing with gentleness and calmness the triumph, either real or imaginary, of your opponent. The time will come, I trust, when no subject need be forbidden to you on these grounds, but at present you must submit to an invalid regimen, and shun every thing that has even a tendency to excitement.



Page 17

This system of avoidance is of the more importance, because every time your ill-temper acquires the mastery over you, its strength is tenfold increased for the next conflict, at the same time that your hopes of the power of resistance, afforded either by your own will or by the assisting grace of God, are of course weakened. You find, at each fall before the power of sin, a greater difficulty in exercising faith in either human or divine means of improvement. You do not, indeed, doubt the power of God, but a disbelief steals over you which has equally fatal tendencies. You allow yourself to indulge vague doubts of his willingness to help you, or a suspicion insinuates itself that the God whom you so anxiously try to please would not allow you to fall so constantly into error, if this error were of a very heinous nature. You should be careful to shun any course of conduct possibly suggestive of such dangerous doubts. You should seek to establish in your mind the habitual conviction that, victory being placed by God within your reach, you must conquer or perish! None but those who by obedience prove themselves children of God, shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.[32]

I have spoken of the vigilance and self-control required for the avoidance of every discussion on exciting subjects; but this difficulty is small indeed when compared with those unexpected assaults on the temper which we are exposed to at every hour of the day. It is to meet these with Christian heroism that the constant exertion of all our inherent and imparted powers is perpetually required. Every device that ingenuity can suggest, every practice that others have by experience found successful, is at least worth the trial. One plan of resistance suits one turn of mind; an entirely opposite one proves more useful for another. To you I should more especially recommend the habitual consideration that every trial of temper throughout the day is an opportunity for conflict and for victory. Think, then, of every such trial as an occasion of triumphing over your animal nature, and of increasing the dominion of your rational will over the opposing temptations of "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Consider each vexatious annoyance as coming, through human instruments, from the hand of God himself, and as an opportunity offered by his love and his wisdom for strengthening your character and bringing your will into closer conformity with his. You should cultivate the general habit of considering every trial in this peculiar point of view; thinking over the subject in your quiet hours especially, that you may thus have your spirit prepared for moments of unexpected excitement.



Page 18

To a person of your reflective turn of mind, the prudent management of the thoughts is one of the principal means towards the proper government of the temper. As some insects assume the colour of the plant they feed on, so do the thoughts on which the mind habitually nourishes itself impart their own peculiar colouring to the mental and moral constitution. On your thoughts, when you are alone, when you wander through the fields, or by the roadside, or sit at your work in useful hours of solitude, depends very much the spirit you are of when you again enter into society. If, for instance, you think over the trials of temper which you are inevitably exposed to during the day as indications of the unkindness of your fellow-creatures, you will not fail to exaggerate mere trifles into serious offences, and will prepare a sore place, as it were, in your mind, to which the slightest touch must give pain. On the contrary, if you forcibly withdraw yourself from any thought respecting the human instrument that has inflicted the wounds from which you suffer or are likely to suffer,—if you look upon the annoyance only as an opportunity of improvement and a message of mercy from God himself,—you will then gradually get rid of all mental irritation, and feel nothing but pity for your tormentors, feeling that you have in reality been benefited instead of injured. When you have acquired greater power of controlling your thoughts, it will be serviceable to you to think over all the details of the annoyance from which you are suffering, and to consider all the extenuating circumstances of the case; to imagine (this will be good use to make of your vivid imagination) what painful chord you may have unconsciously struck, what circumstances may possibly have led the person who annoys you to suppose that the provocation originated with yourself instead of with her. It may be possible that some innocent words of yours may have appeared to her as cutting insinuations or taunts, referring to some former painful circumstance, forgotten or unknown by you, but sorrowfully remembered by her, or a wilful contradiction of her known opinion and known wishes, for mere contradiction's sake.

By the time you have turned over in your mind all these possible or probable circumstances, you will generally see that the person offending may really be not so much (if at all) to blame; and then the candid and generous feelings of your nature will convert your anger into regret for the pain you have unintentionally inflicted. I do not, however, recommend you to venture upon this practice *yet*. Under present circumstances, any indulged reflection upon the minute features of the offence, and the possible feelings of the offender, will be more likely to increase your irritation than to subdue it; you will not be able to view your own case through an unprejudiced medium, until you have acquired the power of compelling your thoughts to dwell on those features only of an annoyance which may tend to soften your feelings, while you avoid all such as may irritate them.

Page 19

A much lower stage of self-control, and one in which you may immediately begin to exercise yourself, is the prevention of your thoughts from dwelling for one moment on any offence against you, looking upon such offence in this point of view alone, that it is one of those divinely-sent opportunities of Christian warfare without which you could make no advance in the spiritual life. The consideration of the subject of temper, as connected with habits of thought, on which I have dwelt so long and in so much detail, is of the greatest importance. It is absolutely impossible that you can exercise control over your temper, or charitable and forgiving feelings toward those around you, if you suffer your mind to dwell on what you consider their faults and your own injuries. Are you, however, really aware that you are in the habit of indulging such thoughts? I doubt it. Few people observe the direction in which their thoughts are habitually exercised until they have practised for some little time strict watchfulness over those shadowy and fleeting things upon which most of the realities of life depend. Watch yourself, therefore, I entreat you, even during this one day. I ask only for one day, because I know that, in a character like yours, such an examination, once begun in all earnestness, will only cease with life. It is of sins of ignorance and carelessness alone that I accuse you; not of wilfully harbouring malicious and revengeful thoughts. You have never, probably, observed their existence: how, then, could you be aware of their tendency? Perhaps the following illustration may serve to suggest to you proofs of the danger of the practice I have been warning you against. If one of your acquaintance had offended another, you would feel no doubt as to the sinfulness and the cruelty to both of dwelling on all the aggravating circumstances of the offence, until the temper of the offended one was thoroughly roused and exasperated, though, before the interference of a third person, the subject may have been passed over unnoticed. Is not this the very process you are continually carrying on in your own mind, to your own injury, indeed, far more than to any one else's? These habits of thought must be altered, or no other measures of self-control can prosper with you, though, in connection with this primary one, many others must be adopted.

One practice that has been found beneficial is that of offering up a short prayer, even as your hand is upon the door which is to admit you into family intercourse, an intercourse which, more than any other, involves duties and responsibilities as well as privileges and pleasures. This practice could insure your never entering upon a scene of trial, without having the subject of difficulty brought vividly before your mind. David's prayer—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips"[33]—would be very well suited to such occasions as these. This prayer would, at the same time, bring you down help from Heaven, and, by putting you on your guard, rouse your own energies to brave any temptation that may await you.



Page 20

There is another plan which has often been tried with success,—that of repeating the Lord's prayer deliberately through to oneself, before venturing to utter one word aloud on any occasion that excites the temper. The spirit of this practice is highly commendable, as, there being no direct petition against the sin of ill-temper, it is principally by elevating the spirit "into a higher moral atmosphere," that the experiment is expected to be successful. You will find that a scrupulous politeness towards the members of your family, and towards servants, will be a great help in preserving your temper through the trials of domestic intercourse. You are very seldom even tempted to indulge in irritable answers, impatient interruptions, abrupt contradictions, while in the society of strangers. The reason of this is that the indulgence of your temper on such occasions would oblige you to break through the chains of early and confirmed habits. From infancy those habits have been forming, and they impel you almost unconsciously to subdue even the very tones of your voice, while strangers are present. Have you not sometimes in the middle of an irritable observation caught yourself changing and softening the harsh uncontrolled tones of your voice, or the roughness of your manner, when you have discovered the unexpected presence of a stranger in the family circle? You have still enough of self-respect to feel deep shame when such things have happened; and the very moment when you are suffering from these feelings of shame is that in which you ought to form, and begin to execute, resolutions of future amendment. While under the influence of regretful excitement, you will have the more strength to break through the chains of your old habits, and to begin to form new ones. If the same courtesy, which until now you have only observed towards strangers, were habitually exercised towards the members of your domestic circle, it would, in time, become as difficult to break through the forms of politeness by indulging ill-temper towards them, as towards strangers or mere acquaintance.

This is a point I wish to urge on you, even more strongly with regard to servants. There is great meanness in any display of ill-temper towards those who will probably lose their place and their character, if they are tempted by your provocation (and without your restraints of good-breeding and good education) to the same display of ill-temper that you yourself are guilty of. On the other hand, there is no better evidence of dignity, self-respect, and refined generosity of disposition, than a scrupulous politeness in requiring and requiting those services for which the low-minded imagine that their money is a sufficient payment. You will not alone receive as a recompense the love and the grateful respect of those who serve you, but you will also be forming habits which will offer a powerful resistance to the temptations of ill-humour.

You will not surely object to any of the precautions or the practices recommended above, that they are too trifling or too troublesome; you have suffered so much from your besetting sin, that I can suppose you willing to try every possible means of cure.



Page 21

You should, however, to strengthen your desire of resistance and of victory, look much further than the unpleasant consequences of ill-temper in your own case alone. You are still young, life has gone prosperously with you, the present is fair and smiling, and the future full of bright hopes; you have, comparatively speaking, few occasions for irritation or despondency. A naturally warm temper is seen in you under the least forbidding aspect, combined, as it is, with gay animal spirits, strong affections, and ready good nature. You need only to look around, however, to see the probability of things being quite different with you some years hence, unless a thorough present change is effected. Look at those cases (only too numerous and too apparent) in which indulged habits of ill-temper have become stronger by the lapse of time, and are not now softened in their aspect by the modifying influences of youth, of hope, of health. See those victims to habitual ill-humour, who are weighed down by the cares of a family, by broken health, by disappointed hopes, by the inevitably accumulating sorrows of life. Do you not know that they bestow wretchedness instead of happiness, even on those who are dearest and nearest to them? Do you not know that their voice is dreaded and unwelcome, as it sounds through their home, deprived through them of the lovely peace of home? Is not their step shunned in the passage, or on the stairs, in the certainty of no kind or cheerful greeting? Do you not observe that every subject but the most indifferent is avoided in their presence, or kept concealed from their knowledge, in the vain hope of keeping away food for their excitement of temper? Deprived of confidence, deprived of respect, their society shunned even by the few who still love them, the unfortunate victims of confirmed ill-temper may at last make some feeble efforts to shake off their voluntarily imposed yoke.

But, alas! it is too late; in feeble health, in advanced years, in depressed spirits, their powers of "working together with God" are altogether broken. They may be finally saved indeed, but in this life they can never experience the peace that religion bestows on its faithful self-controlling followers. They can never bestow happiness, but always discomfort on those whom they best love; they can never glorify God by bringing forth the fruits of "a meek and quiet spirit." This is sad, very sad, but it is not the less true. Strange also it is, in some respects, that when sin is deeply mourned over and anxiously prayed against, its power cannot be more effectually weakened. This is, however, an invariable feature throughout all the dispensations of God, and you would do well to examine carefully into it, that you may add experience to your faith in the Scripture assertion, "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap."^[34] May you be given grace to sow such present seed as may bring forth a harvest of peace to yourself, and peace to your friends!



Page 22

I must not forget to make some observations with respect to those physical influences which affect the temper and spirits. It is true that these are, at some times, and for a short period, altogether irresistible. This is, however, only in the case of those whose character was not originally of sufficient force and strength to require much habitual self-control, as long as they possessed good health and spirits. When this original good health is altered in any way that alters their natural temper, (all diseases, however, have not this effect,) not having had any previous practice in resisting the new and unaccustomed evil, they yield to it as hopelessly as they would do to the pain attending the gout and the rheumatism. If, however, such persons as those above described are sincere in their desire to glorify God, and to avoid disturbing the peace of those around them, they will soon learn to make use of all the means within their reach to remove the moral disease, as assiduously and as vigorously as they would labour to remove the physical one. Their newly-acquired self-control will be blest to them in more ways than one, for the grace of God is always given in proportion to the need of those who are willing to work themselves, and who have not incurred the evil they now struggle against, by wilful and deliberate sin. I have spoken of only a few cases of ill-temper being irresistible, and even these few only to be considered so at first, before proper means of cure and prevention are used. Under other circumstances, though the ill-temper mourned over may be strongly influenced by physical causes, the sin must still remain the same as if the causes were strictly moral ones. For instance, if you know that by sitting up at night an hour or two later than usual, or by not taking regular exercise, or by eating of indigestible food, you will put it out of your power to avoid being ill-tempered and disagreeable on the following day, the failure is surely a moral one. That the immediate causes of your ill-humour may be physical ones, does not at all affect the matter, seeing that such causes are, in this case, completely under your own control. From this it follows that it must be a duty to watch carefully the effects produced on your temper by every habit of your life. If you do not abandon such of these as produce undesirable effects, you deserve to experience the consequences in the gradual diminution of the respect and affection of those who surround you.

Should the habits producing irritation of temper be such as you cannot abandon without loss or detriment to yourself or others, the object in view will be equally attained by exercising a more vigilant self-control while you are exposed to a dangerous influence. For instance, you have often heard it remarked, and have perhaps observed in your own case, that poetry and works of fiction excite and irritate the temper. You may know some people who exhibit this influence so strongly that no one will venture to make them



Page 23

a request or even to apply to them about necessary business, while they are engaged in the perusal of any thing interesting. I know more than one excellent person, who, in consequence of observing the effect produced on their temper, by novels, &c., have given up this style of reading altogether. So far as the sacrifice was made from a conscientious motive, they doubtless have their reward. From the consequences, however, I should be rather inclined to think that they were in many cases not only mistaken in the nature of the precautions they adopted, but also in their motives for adopting them. Such persons too frequently seem to have no more control over their temper when exposed to other and entirely inevitable temptations, than they had before the cultivation of their imagination was given up. They do not, in short, seem to exercise, under circumstances that cannot be escaped, that vigilant self-control which would be the only safe test of the conscientiousness of their intellectual sacrifice.

For you, I should consider any sacrifice of the foregoing kind especially inexpedient. Your deep thoughtfulness of mind, and your habitual delicacy of health, make it impossible for you to give up light literature with any degree of safety; even were it right that you should abandon that species of mental cultivation which is effected by this most important branch of study. People who never read difficult books, and who are not of reflective habits of mind, can little understand the necessity that at times exists for entire repose to the higher powers of the mind—a repose which can be by no means so effectually procured as by an interesting work of fiction. A drive in a pretty country, a friendly visit, an hour's work in the garden, any of these may indeed effect the same purpose, and on some occasions in a safer way than a novel or a poem. The former, however, are means which are not always within one's reach, which are impossible at seasons when entire rest to the mind is most required,—viz. during days and weeks of confinement to a sick and infected room. At such periods, it is true that the more idle the mind can be kept the better; even the most trifling story may excite a dangerous exertion of its nervous action; at times, however, when it is sufficiently strong and disengaged to feel a craving for active employment, it is of great importance that the employment should be such as would involve no exercise of the higher intellectual faculties. I have known serious evils result to both mind and body from an imprudent engagement in intellectual pursuits during temporary, and as it may often appear trifling, illness. Whenever the body is weak, the mind also should be allowed to rest, if the invalid be a person of thought and reflection; otherwise Butler's Analogy itself would not do her any harm. It is *only* "Lorsqu'il y a vie, il y a danger." This is a long digression, but one necessary to my subject; for I feel the importance

Page 24

of impressing on your mind that it can never be your duty to give up that which is otherwise expedient for you, on the grounds of its being a cause of excitement. You must only, under such circumstances, exercise a double vigilance over your temper. Thus you must try to avoid speaking in an irritated tone when you are interrupted; you must be always ready to help another, if it be otherwise expedient, however deep may be the interest of the book in which you are engaged; and, finally, if you are obliged to refuse your assistance, you should make a point of expressing your refusal with gentleness and courtesy.

You should show others, as well as be convinced of it yourself, that the refusal to oblige is altogether irrespective of any effect produced on your temper by the studies in which you are engaged. Perhaps during the course of even this one day, you may have an opportunity of experiencing both the difficulty and advantage of attending to the foregoing directions.

In conclusion, I would remind you, that it may, some time or other, be the will of God to afflict you with heavy and permanent sickness, habitually affecting your temper, generating despondency, impatience, and irritation, and making the whole mind, as it were, one vast sore, shrinking in agony from every touch. If such a trial should ever be allotted to you, (and it may be sent as a punishment for the neglect of your present powers of self-control,) how will you be able to avoid becoming a torment to all around you, and at the same time bringing doubt and ridicule on your profession of religion?

If, during your present enjoyment of mental and bodily health, you do not acquire a mastery over your temper, it will be almost impossible to do so when the effects of disease are added to the influences of nature and habit. On the other hand, from Galen down to Sir Henry Haller, there is high medical authority for the important fact that self-control acquired in health may be successfully exercised to subdue every external sign, at least, of the irritation and depression often considered inevitably attendant on many peculiar maladies. There are few greater temporal rewards of obedience than the consciousness, under such trying circumstances, of still possessing the power of procuring peace for oneself, love from one's neighbour, and glory to God.

Remember, finally, that every day and every hour you pause and hesitate about beginning to control your temper, may probably expose you to years of more severe future conflict. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," is fully as true when asserted of the beginning of the slow moral process by which our own conformity "to the image of the Son" is effected, as of the saving moment in which we "arise and go to our Father." [35]

FOOTNOTES:

[25] Zach. xiii. 6.

[26] Heb. ii. 18.

[27] James iv. 3.



Page 25

[28] Jer. xlv. 4.

[29] Isa. viii. 20.

[30] Col. i. 12.

[31] Archdeacon Manning.

[32] Matt. xxv. 24.

[33] Ps. cxli. 3.

[34] Gal. vi. 7.

[35] Luke xv.

LETTER III.

Falsehood and truthfulness.

I do not accuse you of being a liar—far from it; on the contrary, I believe that if truth and falsehood were distinctly placed before you, and the opportunity of a deliberate choice afforded you, you would rather expose yourself to serious injury than submit to the guilt of falsehood. It is, therefore, with the more regret that your conscientious friends observe a daily-growing disregard of absolute truth in your statement of indifferent things, and, *a plus forte raison*, in your statement of your own side of the question as opposed to that of another. There are, unfortunately, a thousand opportunities and temptations to the exaggerated mode of expression for which I blame you; and these temptations are generally of so trifling a nature, that the whole energies of the conscience are never awakened to resist them, as might be the case were the evil to others and the disgrace to yourself more strikingly manifest. Few people seem to be at all aware of the difficulties that really attend speaking the *exact* truth, or they would shrink from indulging in any habits that immeasurably increase these difficulties,—increase it, indeed, to such a degree, that some minds appear to have lost the very power of perceiving truth; so that, even when they are extremely anxious to be correct in their statement, there is a total incapacity of transmitting a story to another in the way that they themselves received it. This is one of the most striking temporal punishments of sin,—one of those that are the inevitable consequences of the sin itself, and quite independent of the other punishments which the revealed will of God attaches to it. The persons of whom I speak must sooner or later perceive that no dependence is placed on their statements, that even when respect and affection for their other good qualities may prevent a clear recognition of the falsehood of their character, yet that they are now never applied to for information on any matters of importance. Perhaps, to those who have any sensitiveness of observation, such doubts are even the more painful the more



vaguely they are implied. For myself, I have long acquired the habit of translating the assertions and the stories of the persons of whom I speak into the language in which I judge they originally existed. By the aid of a small degree of ingenuity, it is not very difficult to ascertain, from the nature of the refracting medium, the degree and the direction of the change that has taken place in the pure ray of truth.



Page 26

Yet such people as these often deserve pity as much as blame: they are, perhaps, unconscious of the degree in which habit has made them insensible to the perversion of truth in their statements; and even now they scarcely believe that what seems to them so true should appear and really be false to others. The intellectual effects of such habits are equally injurious with the moral ones. All natural clearness and distinctness of intellect becomes gradually obscured; the memory becomes perplexed; the very style of writing acquires the taint of the perverted mind. Truth is impressed upon every line of Dr. Arnold's vigorous diction, while other writers of equal, perhaps, but less respectable eminence, betray, even in their mode of expression, the habitual want of honesty in their character and in their statements.

In your case, none of the habits of which I have spoken are, as yet, firmly implanted. A warm temper, ardent feelings, and a vivid imagination are, as yet, the only causes of your errors. You have still time and power to struggle against them, as the chains of habit have not been added to those of nature. But, before the struggle begins, you must be convinced of its necessity; and this is probably the point on which you are entirely incredulous. Listen to me, then, while I help you to discover the hidden mysteries of a heart that "is deceitful above all things," and let the self-examination I urge upon you be prompt, be immediate. Let it be exercised through the day that is coming; watch the manner in which you express yourself on every subject; observe, especially those temptations which will assail you to venture upon greater deviations from truth than those which you think you may harmlessly indulge in, under the sanction of vivid imagination, poetic fancy, &c. This latter part of the examination may throw great light on the subject: people are not assailed frequently and strongly by temptations that have never, at any former time, been yielded to.

I have reason to believe that, as one of the preparations for such self-examination, you entertain a deep sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and feel an anxious desire to approve yourself as a faithful servant to your heavenly Master. I do not, therefore, suppose that at present any temptation would induce you to incur the guilt of a deliberate falsehood. The perception of moral evil may, however, be so blunted by habits of mere carelessness, that I should have no dependence on your adhering for many future years to even this degree of plain, downright truth, unless those habits are decidedly broken through. But do not, from this, imagine that I consider a distinct, decided falsehood more, but rather less, dangerous for the future of your character than those lighter errors of which I have spoken. Though you may sink so far, in course of time, as to consider even a direct lie a very small transgression of the law of God, you will never be able to persuade yourself



Page 27

that it is entirely free from sin. The injury, too, to our neighbour, of a direct lie, can be so much more easily guarded against, that, for the sake of others, I am far more earnest in warning you against equivocation than against decided falsehood. It is sadly difficult for the injured person to ward off the effects of a deceitful glance, a misleading action, an artful insinuation. No earthly defence is of any avail here, as the sorrows of many a wounded heart can testify; but for such injured ones there is a sure, though it may be a long-suffering, Defender. He is the Judge of all the earth; and even in this world he will visit, with a punishment inevitably involved in the consequences of their crime, those who have in any manner deceived their neighbour to his hurt.

I do not, however, accuse you of exaggerating or equivocating from malice alone: no, —more frequently it is for the sake of mere amusement, or, at the worst, in cowardly self-defence; that is, you prefer throwing the blame by insinuation upon an innocent person to bearing courageously what you deserve yourself. In most cases, indeed, you can plead in excuse that the blame is not of any serious nature; that the insinuated accusation is slight enough to be entirely harmless: so it may appear to you, but so it frequently happens not to be. This insinuated accusation, appearing to you so unimportant, may have some peculiar relations that make it more injurious to the slandered one than the original blame could have been to yourself. It may be the means of separating her from her chief friend, or shaking her influence in quarters where perhaps it was of great importance to her that it should be preserved unimpaired. When we lay sinful hands on the complicated machinery of God's providence, it is impossible for us to see how far the derangement may extend.

You may, during the course of this coming day, have an opportunity of giving your own version of a matter in which another was concerned with you, and in which, if the blame is thrown on her, she will have no opportunity of defending herself. Be on your guard, then; have a noble courage; fear nothing but the meanness and the wickedness of accusing the absent and the defenceless. The opportunity offered you to-day of speaking conscientiously, however trifling it may in itself appear, may possibly be the turning point of your life; may lead you on to future habits of cowardice and deceit, or may impart to you new vigilance and energy for future victories over temptation.

You may, also, during the course of this day, be strongly tempted as to the mode of repeating what another has said in conversation: the slightest turn in the expression of the sentence, the insertion or omission of one little word, the change of a weaker to a stronger expression, may exactly adapt to your purpose the sentence you are tempted to repeat. You may also often be able to say to yourself that you are giving the



Page 28

impression of the real meaning of the speaker, only withheld by herself because she had not courage to express it. Opportunities such as these are continually offering themselves to you, and you have ingenuity enough to make the desired change in the repeated sentence so effectual, that there will be no danger of contradiction, even if the betrayed person should discover that she is called upon to defend herself. I have heard this so cleverly done, that the success was complete, and the poor slandered one lost, in consequence, her admirer or her friend, or at least much of her influence over them. You, too, may in like manner succeed: but what is the loss of others in comparison of the penalty of your success? The punishment of successful sin is not to be escaped.

In any of the cases I here bring forward as illustrations, as helps to your self-examination, I am not supposing that there is any tangible, positive, wilful deceit in your heart, or that you deliberately contemplate any very serious injury being inflicted on the persons whose conversations and actions you misrepresent. On the contrary, I know that you are not thus hardened in sin. With regard, however, to the deceit not assuming any tangible form in your own eyes, you ought to remember the solemn words, "Thou, O God I seest me;" and what is sin in his eyes can only fail to be so in ours from the neglect of strict self-examination and prayer that the Spirit of the Lord may search the very depths of the heart. Sins of ignorance seem to assume even a deeper dye than others, when the ignorance only arises from wilful neglect of the means of knowledge so abundantly and freely bestowed. When you once begin in right earnest to try to speak the truth from your heart, in the smallest as well as in the greatest things, you will be surprised to find how difficult it is. Carelessness, false shame, a desire for admiration, a vanity that leads you to disclaim any interest in that which you cannot obtain,—these are all temptations that beset your path, and ought to terrify you against adding the chains of habit to so many other difficulties.

There is one more point of view in which I wish you to consider this subject; that, namely, of "honesty being the best policy." There is no falsehood that is not found out in the end, and so turned to the shame of the person who is guilty of it. You may perpetually dread, even at present, the eye of the discriminating observer; she can see through you, even at the very moment of your committal of sin; she quickly discovers that it is your habit to depreciate people or things, only because you are not in your turn valued by them, or because you cannot obtain them; she can see, in a few minutes' conversation, that it is your habit to say that you are admired and loved, that your society is eagerly sought for by such and such people, whether it be the case or not. Quick observers discover in a first interview what others will not fail to discover after a time.

Page 29

They will then cease to depend upon you for information on any subject in which your own interest or your vanity is concerned. They will turn up their eyes in wonder, from habit and politeness, not from belief. They will always suspect some hidden motive for your words, instead of the one you put forward; nay, your giving one reason for your actions will, by itself alone, set them on the search to discover a different one. All this, perhaps, will in many cases take place without their accusing you, even in their secret thoughts, of being a liar. They have only a vague consciousness that you are, it may be involuntarily, quite incapable of giving correct information.

The habitual, the known truth-speaker, occupies a proud position. Alas! that it should be so rare. Alas! that, even among professedly religious people, there should be so few who speak the truth from the heart; so few to whom one can turn with a fearless confidence to ask for information on any points of personal interest. I need not to be told that it is during childhood that the formation of strict habits of truthfulness is at once most sure and most easy. The difficulty is indeed increased ten thousandfold, when the neglect of parents has suffered even careless habits on this point to be contracted. The difficulties, however, though great, are not insuperable to those who seek the freely-offered grace of God to help them in the conflict. The resistance to temptation, the self-control, will indeed be more difficult when the effort begins later in life; but the victory will be also the more glorious, and the general effects on the character more permanent and beneficial. Not that this serves as any excuse for the cruel neglect of parents, for they can have no certainty that future repentance will be granted for those habits of sin, the formation of which they might have prevented.

Dwelling, however, even in thought, on the neglect of our parents can only lead to vain murmurings and complainings, and prevent the concentration of all our energies and interest upon the extirpation of the dangerous root of evil.

In this case, as in all others, though the sin of the parent is surely visited on the children, the very visitation is turned into a blessing for those who love God. To such blessed ones it becomes the means of imparting greater strength and vigour to the character, from the perpetual conflicts to which it is exposed in its efforts to overcome early habits of evil.

Thus even sin itself is not excepted from the "all things" that "work together for good to them that love God." [36]

FOOTNOTES:

[36] Rom. viii. 28.

LETTER IV.

Envy.

It is, perhaps, an "unknown friend" only who would venture to address a remonstrance to you on that particular sin which forms the subject of the following pages; for it seems equally acknowledged by those who are guilty of it, and those who are entirely free from its taint, that there is no bad quality meaner, more degrading, than that of envy. Who, therefore, could venture openly to accuse another of such a failing, however kind and disinterested the motive, and still be admitted to rank as her friend?



Page 30

There is, besides, a strong impression that, where this failing does exist, it is so closely interwoven with the whole texture of the character, that it can never be separated from it while life and this body of sin remain. This is undoubtedly thus far true, that its ramifications are more minute, and more universally pervading, than those of any other moral defect; so that, on the one hand, while even an anxious and diligent self-examination cannot always detect their existence, so, on the other, it is scarcely possible for its victims to be excited by an emotion of any nature with which envy will not, in some manner or other, connect itself. It is still further true, that no vice can be more difficult of extirpation, the form it assumes being seldom sufficiently tangible to allow of the whole weight of religious and moral motives being brought to bear upon it. But the greatest difficulty of all is, in my mind, the inadequate conception of the exceeding evil of this disposition, of the misery it entails on ourselves, the danger and the constant annoyance to which it exposes all connected with us. Few would recognise their own picture, however strong the likeness in fact might be, in the following vivid description of Lavater's:—"Lorsque je cherche a represente Satan, je me figure une personne que les bonnes qualites d'autrui font souffrir, et qui se rejouit des fautes et des malheurs du prochain."

Analyze strictly, however, during even this one day, the feelings that have given you the most annoyance, and the contemplated or executed measures of deed or word to which those feelings have prompted you, and you must plead guilty to the heinous charge of "rejoicing at your brother's faults and misfortunes." It is not so much, indeed, with relation to important matters that this feeling is excited within you. If you hear of your friends being left large fortunes, or forming connections calculated to promote their happiness, you are not annoyed or grieved: you may even, perhaps, experience some sensations of pleasure. If, however, the circumstances of good fortune are brought more home to yourself, perhaps into collision with yourself, by being of a more trifling nature, you often experience a regret or annoyance at the success or the happiness of others, which would be ludicrous, if it were not so wicked. Neither is there any vice which displays itself so readily to the keen eye of observation: even when the guarded tongue restrains the disclosure, the expression of the lip and eye is unmistakable, and gradually impresses a character on the countenance which remains at times when the feeling itself is quite dormant. Only contemplate your case in this point of view: is it not, when dispassionately considered, shocking to think, that when a stranger hopes to gratify you by the praise, the judicious and well-merited praise, of your dearest friend, a pang is inflicted on you by the very words that ought to sound as pleasant



Page 31

music in your ears? I have even heard some persons so incautious, under such circumstances, as to qualify the praise that gives them pain, by detracting from the merits of the person under discussion, though that person be their particular friend. This is done in a variety of ways: her merits and advantages may be accounted for by the peculiarly favouring circumstances in which she has been placed; or different disparaging opinions entertained of her, by other people better qualified to judge, may also be mentioned. Now, many persons thus imprudent are by no means utterly foolish at other times; yet, in the moment of temptation from their besetting sin, they do not observe how inevitable it is that the stranger so replied to should immediately detect their unamiable motives, and estimate them accordingly.

You will not, perhaps, fall into so open a snare, for you have sufficient tact and quickness of perception to know that, under such circumstances, you must, on your own account, bury in your bosom those emotions of pain which I much fear you will generally feel. It is not, however, the outward expression of such emotions, but their inward experience, which is the real question we are considering, both as regards your present happiness and your eternal interest. Ask yourself whether it is a pleasurable sensation, or the contrary, when those you love (I am still putting a strong case) are admired and appreciated, ire held up as examples of excellence? If you love truly, if you are free from envy, such praise will be far sweeter to your ears than any bestowed on yourself could ever be. Indeed, it might be considered a sufficient punishment for this vice, to be deprived of the deep and virtuous sensation of delight experienced by the loving heart when admiration is warmly expressed for the objects of their affection.

There has been a time when I should have scornfully rejected the supposition that such a failing as envy could exist in companionship with aught that was loveable or amiable. More observation of character has, however, given me the unpleasant conviction that it occasionally may be found in the close neighbourhood of contrasting excellences. Alas! instead of being concealed or gradually overgrown by them, it, on the contrary, spreads its deadly blight over any noble features that may have originally existed in the character. Nothing but the severest discipline, external and internal, can arrest this, its natural course.

When you were younger, the feelings which I now warn you against were called jealousy, and even now some indulgent friends may continue to give them this false name. Do not you suffer the dangerous delusion! Have the courage to place your feelings in all their natural deformity before you, and this sight will give you energy to pursue any regimen, however severe, that may be required to subdue them.



Page 32

I do really believe that it is the false name of jealousy that prevents many an early struggle against the real vice of envy. I have heard young women even boast of the jealousy of their disposition, insinuating that it was to be considered as a proof of warm feelings and an affectionate heart. Perhaps genuine jealousy may deserve to be so considered: the anxious watching over even imaginary diminution of affection or esteem in those we love and respect, the vigilance to detect the slightest external manifestation of any diminution in their tenderness and regard, though proving a deficiency in that noble faith which is the surest safeguard and the firmest foundation of love and friendship, may, in some cases, be an evidence of affection and warmth in the disposition and the heart. So close, however, is the connection between envy and jealousy, that the latter in one moment may change into the former. The most watchful circumspection, therefore, is required, lest that which is, even in its best form, a weakness and an instrument of misery to ourselves and others, should still further degenerate into a meanness and a vice;—as, for instance, when you fear that the person you love may be induced, by seeing the excellences of another, to withdraw from you some of the time, admiration, and affection you wish to be exclusively bestowed upon yourself. In this case, there is a strong temptation to display the failings of the dreaded rival, or, at the best, to feel no regret at their chance display. Under such circumstances, even the excusable jealousy of affection passes over into the vice of envy. The connection between them is, indeed, dangerously close; but it is easy to trace the boundary line, if we are inclined to do so. Jealousy is contented with the affection and admiration of those it loves and respects; envy is in despair, if those whom it despises bestow the least portion of attention or admiration on those whom perhaps she despises still more. Jealousy inquires only into the feelings of the few valued ones; envy makes no distinction in her cravings for universal preference. The very attentions and admiration which were considered valueless, nay, troublesome, as long as they were bestowed on herself, become of exceeding importance when they are transferred to another. Envy would make use of any means whatever to win back the friend or the admirer whose transferred attentions were affording pleasure to another. The power of inflicting pain and disappointment on one whose superiority is envied, bestows on the object of former indifference, or even contempt, a new and powerful attraction. This is very wicked, very mean, you will say, and shrink back in horror from the supposition of any resemblance to such characters as those I have just described. Alas! your indignation may be honest, but it is without foundation. Already those earlier symptoms are constantly appearing, which, if not sternly checked, must in time grow into hopeless deformity of character.



Page 33

There is nothing that undermines all virtuous and noble qualities more surely or more insidiously than the indulged vice of envy. Its unresisting victims become, by degrees, capable of every species of detraction, until they lose even the very power of perceiving that which is true. They become, too, incapable of all generous self-denial and self-sacrifice; feelings of bitterness towards every successful rival (and there are few who may not be our rivals on some one point or other) gradually diffuse themselves throughout the heart, and leave no place for that love of our neighbour which the Scriptures have stated to be the test of love to God.[37]

Unlike most other vices, envy can never want an opportunity of indulgence; so that, unless it is early detected and vigilantly controlled, its rapid growth is inevitable.

Early detection is the first point; and in that I am most anxious to assist you. Perhaps, till now, the possibility of your being guilty of the vice of envy has never entered your thoughts. When any thing resembling it has forced itself on your notice, you have probably given it the name of jealousy, and have attributed the painful emotions it excited to the too tender susceptibilities of your nature. Ridiculous as such self-deception is, I have seen too many instances of it to doubt the probability of its existing in your case.

I am not, in general, an advocate for the minute analysis of mental emotions: the reality of them most frequently evaporates during the process, as in anatomy the principle of life escapes during the most vigilant anatomical examination. In the case, however, of seeking the detection of a before unknown failing, a strict mental inquiry must necessarily be instituted. The many great dangers of mental anatomy may be partly avoided by confining your observations to the external symptoms, instead of to the state of mind from whence they proceed. This will be the safer as well as the more effectual mode of bringing conviction home to your mind. For instance, I would have you watch the emotions excited when enthusiastic praise is bestowed upon another, with relation to those very qualities you are the most anxious should be admired in yourself. When the conversation or the accomplishments of another fix the attention which was withheld from your own,—when the opinion of another, with whom you fancy yourself on an equality, is put forward as deserving of being followed in preference to your own, I can imagine you possessed of sufficient self-respect to restrain any external tokens of envy: you will not insinuate, as meaner spirits would do, that the beauty, or the dress, or the accomplishments so highly extolled are preserved, cherished, and cultivated at the expense of time, kindly feelings, and the duty of almsgiving—that the conversation is considered by many competent judges flippant, or pedantic, or presuming—that the opinion cannot be of much value when the conduct has been in some instances so deficient in prudence.



Page 34

These are all remarks which envy may easily find an opportunity of insinuating against any of its rivals; but, as I said before, I imagine that you have too much self-respect to manifest openly such feelings, to reveal such meanness to the eyes of man. Alas! you have not an equal fear of the all-seeing eye of God. What I apprehend most for you is the allowing yourself to cherish secretly all these palliative circumstances, that you may thus reconcile yourself to a superiority that mortifies you. If you habitually allow yourself in this practice, it will be almost impossible to avoid feeling pleasure instead of pain when these same circumstances happen to be pointed out by others, and when you have thus all the benefit, and none of the guilt or shame, of the disclosure. When envy is freely allowed to take these two first steps, a further progress is inevitable. Self-respect itself will not long preserve you from outward demonstrations of that which is inwardly indulged, and you are sure to become in time the object of just contempt and ridicule. It will soon be well known that the surest way to inflict pain upon you is to extol the excellences or to dwell on the happiness of others, and your failings will be considered an amusing subject for jesting observation to experimentalize upon. I have often watched the downward progress I have just described; and, unless the grace of God, working with your own vigorous self-control, should alter your present frame of mind, I can see no reason why you should escape when others inevitably fall.

The circumstance in which this vice manifests itself most painfully and most dangerously is that of a large family. How deplorable is it, when, instead of making each separate interest the interest of the whole, and rejoicing in the love and admiration bestowed on each separate individual, as if it were bestowed on the whole, such love and such admiration excite, on the contrary, irritation and regret.

Among children, this evil seldom attracts notice; if one girl is praised for dancing or singing much better than her sister, and the sister taunted into further efforts by insulting comparisons, the poor mistaken parent little thinks that, in the pain she inflicts on the depreciated child, she is implanting a perennial root of danger and sorrow. The child may cry and sob at the time, and afterward feel uncomfortable in the presence of one whose superiority has been made the means of worrying her; and, if envious by nature, she will probably take the first opportunity of pointing out to the teachers any little error of her sister's. The permanent injury, however, remains to be effected when they both grow to woman's estate; the envious sister will then take every artful opportunity of lessening the influence of the one who is considered her superior, of insinuating charges against her to those whose good opinion they both value the most. And she is only too easily successful; she is successful, that success may bring upon her the penalty of her sin, for Heaven is then the most incensed against us when our sin appears to prosper. Various and inexhaustible are the mere temporal punishments of this sin of envy; of the sin which deprives another of even one shade of the influence, admiration, and affection, they would otherwise have enjoyed.



Page 35

If the preference of a female friend excites angry and jealous feelings, the attentions of an admirer are probably still more envied. In some unhappy families, one may observe the beginning of any such attentions by the vigilant depreciation of the admirer, and the anxious manoeuvres to prevent any opportunities of cultivating the detected preference. What prosperity can be hoped for to a family in which the supposed advantage and happiness of one individual member is feared and guarded against, instead of being considered an interest belonging to the whole? You will be shocked at such pictures as these: alas! that they should be so frequent even in domestic England, the land of happy homes and strong family ties. You are of course still more shocked at hearing that I attribute to yourself any shade of so deadly a vice as that above described; and as long as you do not attribute it to yourself, my warning voice will be raised in vain: I am not, however, without hope that the vigilant self-examination, which your real wish for improvement will probably soon render habitual, may open your eyes to your danger while it can still be easily averted. Supposing this to be the case, I would earnestly suggest to you the following means of cure. First, earnest prayer against this particular sin, earnest prayer to be brought into "a higher moral atmosphere," one of unfeigned love to our neighbour, one of rejoicing with all who do rejoice, "and weeping with those who weep." This general habit is of the greatest importance to cultivate: we should strive naturally and instinctively to feel pleasure when another is loved, or praised, or fortunate; we should try to strengthen our sympathies, to make the feelings of others, as much as possible, our own. Many an early emotion of envy might be instantly checked by throwing one's self into the position of the envied one, and exerting the imagination to conceive vividly the pleasure or the pain she must experience: this will, even at the time, make us forgetful of self, and will gradually bring us into the habit of feeling for the pain and pleasure of others, as if we really believed them to be members of the same mystical body.[38] We should, in the next place, attack the symptoms of the vice we wish to eradicate; we should seek by reasonable considerations to realize the absurdity of our envy: for this, nothing is more essential than the ascertaining of our own level, and fairly making up our minds to the certain superiority of others. As soon as this is distinctly acknowledged, much of the pain of the inferior estimation in which we are held will be removed: "There is no disgrace in being eclipsed by Jupiter." Next, let us examine into the details of the law of compensation—one which is never infringed; let us consider that the very superiority of others involves many unpleasantnesses, of a kind, perhaps, the most disagreeable to us. For instance, it often involves the necessity of a sacrifice of time



Page 36

and feelings, and almost invariably creates an isolation,—consequences from which we, perhaps, should fearfully shrink. On the brilliant conversationist is inflicted the penalty of never enjoying a rest in society: her expected employment is to amuse others, not herself; the beauty is the dread of all the jealous wives and anxious mothers, and the object of a notice which is almost incompatible with happiness: I never saw a happy beauty, did you? The great genius is shunned and feared by, perhaps, the very people whom she is most desirous to attract; the exquisite musician is asked into society *en artiste*, expected to contribute a certain species of amusement, the world refusing to receive any other from her. The woman who is surrounded by admirers is often wearied to death of attentions which lose all their charm with their novelty, and which frequently serve to deprive her of the only affection she really values. Experience will convince you of the great truth, that there is a law of compensation in all things. The same law also holds good with regard to the preferences shown to those who have no superiority over us, who are nothing more than our equals in beauty, in cleverness, in accomplishments. If Ellen B. or Lydia C. is liked more than you are by one person, you, in your turn, will be preferred by another; no one who seeks for affection and approbation, and who really deserves it, ever finally fails of acquiring it. You have no right to expect that every one should like you the best: if you considered such expectations in the abstract, you would be forced to acknowledge their absurdity. Besides, would it not be a great annoyance to you to give up your time and attention to conversing with, or writing to, the very people whose preference you envy for Ellen B. or Lydia C.? They are suited to each other, and like each other: in good time, you will meet with people who suit you, and who will consequently like you; nay, perhaps at this present moment, you may have many friends who delight in your society, and admire your character: will you lose the pleasure which such blessings are intended to confer, by envying the preferences shown to others? Bring the subject distinctly and clearly home to your mind. Whenever you feel an emotion of pain, have the courage to trace it to its source, place this emotion in all its meanness before you, then think how ridiculous it would appear to you if you contemplated it in another. Finally, ask yourself whether there can be any indulgence of such feelings in a heart that is bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,—whether there can be any room for them in a temple of God wherein the spirit of God dwelleth.[39]

FOOTNOTES:

[37] 1 John iii.

[38] 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

[39] Cor. iii. 16.

LETTER V.

SELFISHNESS AND UNSELFISHNESS.



Page 37

This is a difficult subject to address you upon, and one which you will probably reject as unsuited to yourself. There are few qualities that the possessor is less likely to be conscious of than either selfishness or unselfishness; because the actions proceeding from either are so completely instinctive, so unregulated by any appeal to principle, that they never, in the common course of things, attract any particular notice. We go on, therefore, strengthening ourselves in the habits of either, until a double nature, as it were, is formed, overlaying the first, and equally powerful with it. How unlovely is this in the case of selfishness, even where there are, besides, fine and striking features in the general character, and how lovely in the case of unselfishness, even when, as too frequently happens, there is little comparative strength or nobleness in its intellectual and moral accompaniments!

You are now young, you are affectionate, good-natured, obliging, possessed of gay and happy spirits, and a sweetness of temper that is seldom seen united with so much sparkling wit and lively sensibilities. Altogether, then, you are considered a very attractive person, and, in the love which all those qualities have won for you from those around you, may bring forward strong evidence against my charge of selfishness. But is not this love more especially felt by those who are not brought into daily and hourly collision with you. They only see you bright with good-humour, ready to talk, to laugh, and to make merry with them in any way they please. They therefore, in all probability, do not think you selfish. Are you certain, however, that the estimate formed of you by your nearest relatives will not be the estimate formed of you by even acquaintance some years hence, when lessened good-humour and strengthened habits of selfishness have brought out into more striking relief the natural faults of your character?

The selfishness of the gay, amusing, good-humoured girl is often unobserved, almost always tolerated; but when youth, beauty, and vivacity are gone, the vice appears in its native deformity, and she who indulges it becomes as unlovely as unloved. It is for the future you have cause to fear,—a future for which you are preparing gloom and dislike by the habits you are now forming in the small details of daily life, as well as in the pleasurable excitements of social intercourse. As I said before, these, at present almost imperceptible, habits are unheeded by those who are only your acquaintance: but they are not the less sowing the seeds of future unhappiness for you. You will, assuredly, at some period or other, reap in dislike what you are now sowing in selfishness. If, however, the warning voice of an “unknown friend” is attended to, there is yet time to complete a comparatively easy victory over this, your besetting sin; while, on the contrary, every week and every month’s delay, by riveting more strongly the chains of habit, increases at once your difficulties and your consequent discouragement.



Page 38

This day, this very hour, the conflict ought to begin: but, alas! how may this be, when you are not yet even aware of the existence of that danger which I warn you. It is most truly "a part of sin to be unconscious of itself." [40] It will also be doubly difficult to effect the necessary preliminary of convincing you of selfishness, when I am so situated as not to be able to point out to you with certainty any particular act indicative of the vice in question. This obliges me to enter into more varied details, to touch a thousand different strings, in the hope that, among so many, I may by chance touch upon the right one.

Now, it is a certain fact, that in such inquiries as the present, our enemies may be of much more use to us than our friends. They may, they generally do, exaggerate our faults, but the exaggeration gives them a relief and depth of colouring which may enable the accusation to force its way through the dimness and heavy-sightedness of our self-deception. Examine yourself, then, with respect to those accusations which others bring against you in moments of anger and excitement; place yourself in the situation of the injured party, and ask yourself whether you would not attach the blame of selfishness to similar conduct in another person. For instance, you may perhaps be seated in a comfortable chair by a comfortable fire, reading an interesting book, and a brother or sister comes in to request that you will help them in packing something, or writing something that must be finished at a certain time, and that cannot be done without your assistance: the interruption alone, at a critical part of the story, or in the middle of an abstruse and interesting argument, is enough to irritate your temper and to disqualify you for listening with an unprejudiced ear to the request that is made to you. You answer, probably, in a tone of irritation; you say that it is impossible, that the business ought to have been attended to earlier, and that they could then have concluded it without your assistance; or perhaps you rise and go with them, and execute the thing to be done in a most ungracious manner, with a pouting lip and a surly tone, insinuating, too, for days afterwards, how much you had been annoyed and inconvenienced. The case would have been different if a stranger had made the request of you, or a friend, or any one but a near and probably very dear relative. In the former case, there would have been, first, the excitement which always in some degree distinguishes social from mere family intercourse; there would have been the wish to keep up their good opinion of your character, which they may have been deluded into considering the very reverse of unselfish. Lastly, their thanks would of course be more warm than those which you are likely to receive from a relative, (who instinctively feels it to be your duty to help in the family labours,) and thus your vanity would have been sufficiently gratified to reconcile you to the trouble and interruption to which you had been exposed.

Page 39

Still further, it is, perhaps, only to your own family that you would have indulged in that introductory irritation of which I have spoken. We have all witnessed cases in which inexcusable excitement has been displayed towards relatives or servants who have announced unpleasant interruptions, in the shape of an unwelcome visitor; while the moment afterwards the real offender has been greeted with an unclouded brow and a warm welcome, she not having the misfortune of being so closely connected with you as the innocent victim of your previous ill-temper.

I enter into these details, not because they are necessarily connected with selfishness, for many unselfish, generous-minded people are the unfortunate victims of ill-temper, to which vice the preceding traits of character more peculiarly belong; but for the purpose of showing you that your conduct towards strangers can be no test of your unselfishness. It is only in the more trying details of daily life that the existence of the vice or the virtue can be evidenced. It is, nevertheless, upon qualities so imperceptible to yourself as to require this close scrutiny that most of the happiness and comfort of domestic life depends.

You know the story of the watch that had been long out of order, and the cause of its irregularity not to be discovered. At length, one watchmaker, more ingenious than the rest, suggested that a magnet might, by some chance, have touched the mainspring. This was ascertained by experiment to have been the case; the casual and temporary neighbourhood of a magnet had deranged the whole complicated machinery: and on equally imperceptible, often undiscoverable, trifles does the healthy movement of the mainspring of domestic happiness depend. Observe, then, carefully, every irregularity in its motion, and exercise your ingenuity to discover the cause in good time; the derangement may otherwise soon become incurable, both by the strengthening of your own habits, and the dispositions towards you which they will impress on the minds of others.

Do let me entreat you, then, to watch yourself during the course of even this one day,—first, for the purpose of ascertaining whether my accusation of selfishness is or is not well founded, and afterwards, for the purpose of seeking to eradicate from your character every taint of so unlovely, and, for the credit of the sex, I may add, so unfeminine a failing.

Before we proceed further on this subject, I must attempt to lay down a definition of selfishness, lest you should suppose that I am so mistaken as to confound with the vice above named that self-love, which is at once an allowable instinct and a positive duty.



Page 40

Selfishness, then, I consider as a perversion of the natural and divinely-impressed instinct of self-love. It is a desire for things which are not really good for us, followed by an endeavour to obtain those things to the injury of our neighbour.[41] Where a sacrifice which benefits your neighbour can inflict no *real* injury on yourself, it would be selfishness not to make the sacrifice. On the contrary, where either one or the other must suffer an equal injury, (equal in all points of view—in permanence, in powers of endurance, &c.,) self-love requires that you should here prefer yourself. You have no right to sacrifice your own health, your own happiness, or your own life, to preserve the health, or the life, or the happiness of another; for none of these things are your own: they are only entrusted to your stewardship, to be made the best use of for God's glory. Your health is given you that you may have the free disposal of all your mental and bodily powers to employ them in his service; your happiness, that you may have energy to diffuse peace and cheerfulness around you; your life, that you may "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We read of fine sacrifices of the kind I deprecate in novels and romances: we may admire them in heathen story; but with such sacrifices the real Christian has no concern. He must not give away that which is not his own. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."[42]

In the case of a sacrifice of life—one which, of course, can very rarely occur,—the dangerous results of thus, as it were, taking events out of the hand of God cannot be always visible to our sight at present: we should, however, contemplate what they might possibly be. Let us, then, consider the injury that may result to the self-sacrificer, throughout the countless ages of eternity, from the loss of that working-time of hours, days, and years, wilfully flung from him for the uncertain benefit of another. Yes, uncertain, for the person may at that time have been in a state of greater meetness for heaven than he will ever again enjoy: there may be future fearful temptations, and consequent falling into sin, from which he would have been preserved if his death had taken place when the providence of God seemed to will it. Of course, none of us can, by the most wilful disobedience, dispose events in any way but exactly that which his hand and his counsel have determined before the foundation of the world;[43] but when we go out of the narrow path of duty, we attempt, as far as in us lies, to reverse his unchangeable decrees, and we "have our reward;" we mar our own welfare, and that of others, when we make any effort to take the providing for it out of the hands of the Omnipotent.

It is, however, only for the establishment of a principle that it could be necessary to discuss the duties involved in such rare emergencies. I shall therefore proceed without further delay to the more common sacrifices of which I have spoken, and explain to you what I mean by such sacrifices.



Page 41

I have alluded to those of health and happiness. We have all known the first wilfully thrown away by needless attendance on such sick friends as would have been equally well taken care of had servants or hired nurses shared in the otherwise overpowering labour. Often is this labour found to incapacitate the nurse-tending friend for fulfilling towards the convalescent those offices in which no menial could supply her place — such as the cheering of the drooping spirit, the selection and patient perusal of amusing books, an animated, amusing companionship in their walks and drives, the humouring of their sick fancy—a sickness that often increases as that of the body decreases. For all these trying duties, during the often long and always painfully tedious period of convalescence, the nightly watcher of the sick-bed has, it is most likely, unfitted herself. The affection and devotion which were useless and unheeded during days and nights of stupor and delirium have probably by this time worn out the weak body which they have been exciting to efforts beyond its strength, so that it is now incapable of more useful demonstrations of attachment. Far be it from me to depreciate that fond, devoted watching of love, which is sometimes even a compensation to the invalid for the sufferings of sickness, at periods, too, when hired attendance could not be tolerated. Here woman's love and devotion are often brightly shown. The natural impulses of her heart lead her to trample under foot all consideration of personal danger, fatigue, or weakness, when the need of her loved ones demands her exertions.

This, however, is comparatively easy; it is only following the instincts of her loving nature never to leave the sick room, where all her anxiety, all her hopes and fears are centred,—never to breathe the fresh air of heaven,—never to mingle in the social circle,—never to rest the weary limbs, or close the languid eye. The excitement of love and anxiety makes all this easy as long as the anxiety itself lasts: but when danger is removed, and the more trying duties of tending the convalescent begin, the genuine devotion of self-denial and unselfishness is put to the test.

Nothing is more difficult than to bear with patience the apparently unreasonable depression and ever-varying whims of the peevish convalescent, whose powers of self-control have been prostrated by long bodily exhaustion. Nothing is more trying than to find anxious exertions for their comfort and amusement, either entirely unnoticed and useless, or met with petulant contradiction and ungrateful irritation. Those who have themselves experienced the helplessness caused by disease well know how bitterly the trial is shared by the invalid herself. How deeply she often mourns over the unreasonableness and irritation she is without power to control, and what tears of anguish she sheds in secret over those acts of neglect and words of unkindness her own ill-humour and apparent ingratitude have unintentionally provoked.

Page 42

Those who feel the sympathy of experience will surely wish, under all such circumstances, to exercise untiring patience and unremitting attention; but, however strong this wish may be, they cannot execute their purpose if their own health has been injured by previous unnecessary watchings, by exclusion from fresh air and exercise. Those whose nervous system has been thus unstrung will never be equal to the painful exertion which the recovering invalid now requires. How much better it would have been for her if walks and sleep had been taken at times when an attentive nurse would have done just as well to sit at the bedside, when absence would have been unnoticed, or only temporarily regretted! This prudent, and, we must remember, generally self-denying care of one's self, would have averted the future bodily illness or nervous depression of the nurse of the convalescent, at a time too when the latter has become painfully alive to every look and word, as well as act, of diminished attention and watchfulness; you will surely feel deep self-reproach if, from any cause, you are unable to control your own temper, and to bear with cheerful patience the petulance of hers.

I have dwelt so long on this part of my subject, because I think it very probable that, with your warm affections, and before your selfishness has been hardened by habits of self-indulgence, you might some time or other fall into the error I have been describing. In the ardour of your anxiety for some beloved relative, you may be induced to persevere in such close attendance on the sick-bed as may seriously injure your own health, and unfit you for more useful, and certainly more self-denying exertion afterwards. How much easier is it to spend days and nights by the sick-bed of one from whom we are in hourly dread of a final separation, whose helpless and suffering state excites the strongest feelings of compassion and anxiety, than to sit by the sofa, or walk by the side, of the same invalid when she has regained just sufficient strength to experience discomfort in every thing;—when she never finds her sofa arranged or placed to her satisfaction; is never pleased with the carriage, or the drive, or the walk you have chosen; is never interested in the book or the conversation with which you anxiously and laboriously try to amuse her. Here it is that woman's power of endurance, that the real strength and nobleness of her character is put to the most difficult test. Well, too, has this test been borne: right womanly has been the conduct of many a loving wife, mother, and sister, under the trying circumstances above described. Woman alone, perhaps, can steadily maintain the clear vision of what the beloved one really is, and can patiently view the wearisome ebullitions of ill-temper and discontent as symptoms equally physical with a cough or a hectic flush.

This noble picture of self-control can be realized only by those who keep even the best instincts of a woman's nature under the government of strict principle, remembering that the most beautiful of these instincts may not be followed without guidance or restraint. Those who yield to such instincts without reflection and self-denial will exhaust their energies before the time comes for the fulfilment of duties.



Page 43

The third branch of my subject is the most difficult. It may, indeed, appear strange that we should not have the right to sacrifice our own happiness: that surely belongs to us to dispose of, if nothing else does. Besides, happiness is evidently not the state of being intended for us here below; and that much higher state of mind from which all "*hap*"[44] is excluded—viz. blessedness—is seldom granted unless the other is altogether withdrawn.

You must, however, observe that this blessedness is only granted when the lower state—that of happiness—could not be preserved except by a positive breach of duty, or when it is withheld or destroyed by the immediate interposition of God Himself, as in the case of death, separation, incurable disease, &c. Under any of the above circumstances, we have the sure promise of God, "As thy days are, so shall thy strength be." The lost and mourned happiness will not be allowed to deprive us of the powers of rejoicing in hope, and serving God in peace; also of diffusing around us the cheerfulness and contentment which is one of the most important of our Christian duties. These privileges, however, we must not expect to enjoy, if, by a mistaken unselfishness, (often deeply stained with pride,) we sacrifice to another the happiness that lay in our own path, and which may, in reality, be prejudicial to them, as it was not intended for them by Providence: while, on the contrary, it may have been by the same Providence intended for us as the necessary drop of sweetness in the otherwise overpowering bitterness of our earthly cup.

We take, as it were, the disposal of our fate out of the hands of God as much when we refuse the happiness He sends us as when we turn aside from the path of duty on account of some rough passage we see there before us. Good and evil both come from the hands of the Lord. We should be watchful to receive every thing exactly in the way He sees it fit for us.

Experience, as well as theory, confirms the truth of the above assertions. Consider even your own case with relation to any sacrifice of your own real happiness to the supposed happiness of another. I can imagine this possible even in a selfish disposition, not yet hardened. Your good-nature, warm feelings, and pride (in you a powerfully actuating principle) may have at times induced you to make, in moments of excitement, sacrifices of which you have not fully "counted the cost." Let us, then, examine this point in relation to yourself, and to the petty sacrifices of daily life. If you have allowed others to encroach too much on your time, if you have given up to them your innocent pleasures, your improving pursuits, and favourite companions, has this indulgence of their selfishness really added to their happiness? Has it not rather been unobserved, except so far to increase the unreasonableness of their expectations from you, to make them angry when it at last becomes necessary to resist their advanced



Page 44

encroachments? On your own side, too, has it not rather tended to irritate you against people whom you formerly liked, because you are suffering from the daily and hourly pressure of the sacrifices you have imprudently made for them? Believe me, there can be no peace or happiness in domestic life without a *bien entendu* self-love, which will be found by intelligent experience to be a preservative from selfishness, instead of a manifestation of it.

From all that I have already said, you will, I hope, infer that I am not likely to recommend any extravagant social sacrifices, or to bring you in guilty of selfishness for actions not really deserving of the name. Indeed, I have said so much on the other side, that I may now have some difficulty in proving that, while defending self-love, I have not been defending you. We must therefore go back to my former definition of selfishness—namely, a seeking for ourselves that which is not our real good, to the neglect of all consideration for that which is the real good of others. This is viewing the subject *an grand*,—a very general definition, indeed, but not a vague one, for all the following illustrations from the minor details of life may clearly be referred under this head.

These are the sort of illustrations I always prefer—they come home so much more readily to the heart and mind. Will not some of the following come home to you? The indulgence of your indolence by sending a tired person on a message when you are very well able to go yourself—sending a servant away from her work which she has to finish within a certain time—keeping your maid standing to bestow much more than needful decoration on your dress, hair, &c., at a time when she is weak or tired—driving one way for your own mere amusement, when it is a real inconvenience to your companion not to go another—expressing or acting on a disinclination to accompany your friend or sister when she cannot go alone—refusing to give up a book that is always within your reach to another who may have only this opportunity of reading it—walking too far or too fast, to the serious annoyance of a tired or delicate companion—refusing, or only consenting with ill-humour, to write a letter, or to do a piece of work, or to entertain a visitor, or to pay a visit, when the person whose more immediate business it is, has, from want of time, and not from idleness or laziness, no power to do what she requests of you—dwelling on all the details of a painful subject, for the mere purpose of giving vent to and thus relieving your own feelings, though it may be by the harrowing up of those of others who are less able to bear it. All these are indeed trifles—but

Trifles make the sum of human things,[45]

and are sure to occur every day, and to form the character into such habits as will fit or unfit it for great proofs of unselfishness, should such be ever called for. Besides, it is on trifles such as these that the smoothness of “the current of domestic joy” depends. It is a smoothness that is easily disturbed: do not let your hand be the one to do it.



Page 45

In all the trifling instances of selfishness above enumerated, I have generally supposed that a request has been made to you, and that you have not the trouble of finding out the exact manner in which you can conquer selfishness for the advantage of your neighbour. I must now, however, remind you that one of the penalties incurred by past indulgence in selfishness is this, that those who love you will not continue to make those requests which you have been in the habit of refusing, or, if you ever complied with them, of reminding the obliged person, from time to time, how much serious inconvenience your compliance has subjected you to. This, I fear, may have been your habit; for selfish people exaggerate so much every “little” (by “the good man”) “nameless, unremembered act,” that they never consider them gratefully enough impressed on the heart of the receiver without frequent reminders from themselves. If such has been the case, you must not expect the frank, confiding request, the entire trust in your willingness to make any not unreasonable sacrifice, with which the unselfish are gratified and rewarded, and for which perhaps you often envy them, though you would not take the trouble to deserve the same confidence yourself. Even should you now begin the attempt, and begin it in all earnestness, it will take some time to establish your new character. *En attendant*, you must be on the watch for opportunities of obliging others, for they will not be freely offered to you; you must now exercise your own observation to find out what they would once have frankly told you, —whether you are tiring people physically or distressing them morally, or putting them to practical inconvenience. I do not make the extravagant supposition that all those with whom you associate have attained to Christian perfection; the proud and the resentful, as well as the delicate-minded, will suffer much rather than repeat appeals to your unselfishness which have often before been disregarded. They may exercise the Christian duty of forgiveness in other ways, but this is the most difficult of all. Few can attain to it, and you must not hope it.

Finally; I wish to warn you against believing those who tell you that such minute analysis of motives, such scrutiny into the smallest details of daily conduct, has a tendency to produce an unhealthy self-consciousness. This might, indeed, be true, if the original state of your nature, before the examination began, were a healthy one. “If Adam had always remained in Paradise, there would have been no anatomy and no metaphysics:” as it is not so, we require both. Sin has entered the world, and death by sin; and therefore it is that both soul and body require a care and a minute watchfulness that cannot, in the present state of things, originate either disease or sin. They have both existed before.

No one ever became or can become selfish by a prayerful examination into the fact of being so or not. In matters of mere feeling, it is indeed dangerous to scrutinize too narrowly the degree and the nature of our emotions. We have no standard by which to try them. If a medical man cannot be trusted to ascertain correctly the state of his own pulse, how much more difficult is it for the amateur to sit in judgment on the strength and number of the pulsations of his own heart and mind.



Page 46

The case is quite different when feelings manifest themselves in overt acts: then they become of a nature requiring and susceptible of minute analyzation. This is the self-scrutiny I recommend to you.

May you be led to seek earnestly for help from above to overcome the hydra of selfishness, and may you be encouraged, by that freely offered help, to exert your own energies to the utmost!

Let me urge on your especial attention the following verses from the Bible on the subjects which we have been considering. If you selected each one of these for a week's *practice*, making it at once a question, a warning, and a direction, it would be a tangible, so to speak, use of the Holy Scriptures, that has been found profitable to many:—

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. Even Christ pleased not himself."[46]

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."[47]

"He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."[48]

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."[49]

"Let all your things be done with charity."[50]

"By love serve one another."[51]

"But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."[52]

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."[53]

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."[54]

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."[55]

FOOTNOTES:

[40] Archdeacon Manning.

[41] See Bishop Butler's Sermons.



[42] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[43] Acts iv. 28.

[44] Coleridge's Aids to Reflection.

[45] Hannah More.

[46] Rom. xv. 1, 2, 3.

[47] Matt. xx. 28.

[48] 2 Cor. v. 15.

[49] Phil. ii. 4.

[50] 1 Cor. xvi. 14.

[51] Gal. v. 13.

[52] Thess. iv. 9.

[53] 1 John iii. 18.

[54] Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

[55] Matt. vii. 12.

LETTER VI.

SELF-CONTROL.

You will probably think it strange that I should consider it necessary to address you, of all others, upon the subject of self-control,—you who are by nature so placid and gentle, so dignified and refined, that you have never been known to display any of the outbreaks of temper which sometimes disgrace the conduct of your companions.



Page 47

You compare yourself with others, and probably cannot help admiring your superiority. You have, besides, so often listened to the assurances of your friends that your temper is one that cannot be disturbed, that you may think self-control the very last point to which your attention needed to be directed. Self-control, however, has relation to many things besides mere temper. In your case I readily believe that to be of singular sweetness, though even in your case the temper itself may still require self-control. You will esteem it perhaps a paradox when I tell you that the very causes which preserve your temper in an external state of equability, your refinement of mind, your self-respect, your delicate reserve, your abhorrence of every thing unfeminine and ungraceful, may produce exactly the contrary effect on your feelings, and provoke internally a great deal of contempt and dislike for those whose conduct transgresses from your exalted ideas of excellence.

On your own account you would not allow any unkind word to express such feelings as I have described, but you cannot or do not conceal them in the expression of your features, in the very tones of your voice. You further allow them free indulgence in the depths of your heart; in its secret recesses you make no allowances for the inferiority of people so differently constituted, educated, and disciplined from yourself,—people whom, instead of despising and avoiding, you ought certainly to pity, and, if possible, to sympathize with.

In this respect, therefore, the control which I recommend to you has reference even to your much vaunted temper, for though any outward display of ill-breeding and petulance might be much more opposed to your respect for yourself, any inward indulgence of the same feelings must be equally displeasing in the sight of God, and nearly as prejudicial to the passing on of your spirit towards being “perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”[56]

Besides, though there may be no outbreak of ill-temper at the time your annoyance is excited, nor any external manifestation of contempt even in your expressive countenance, you will certainly be unable to preserve kindness and respect of manner towards those whose errors and failings are not met by internal self-control. You will be contemptuously heedless of the assertions of those whose prevarication you have even once experienced; those who have once taunted you with obligation will never be again allowed to confer a favour upon you; you will avoid all future intercourse with those whose unkind and taunting words have wounded your refinement and self-respect. All this would contribute to the formation of a fine character in a romance, for every thing that I have spoken of implies your own truth and honesty, your generous nature, your delicate and sensitive habits of mind, your dread of inflicting pain. For all these admirable qualities I give you full credit, and, as I said before, they would

Page 48

make an heroic character in a romance. In real life, however, they, every one of them, require strict self-control to form either a Christian character, or one that will confer peace and happiness. You may be all that I have described, and I believe you to be so, while, at the same time your severe judgments and unreasonable expectations may be productive of unceasing discomfort to yourself and all around you. Your friends plainly see that you expect too much from them, that you are annoyed when their duller perceptions can discover no grounds for your annoyance, that you decline their offers of service when they are not made in exactly the refined manner your imagination requires. Your annoyance may seldom or never express itself in words, but it is nevertheless perceptible in the restraint of your manner, in your carelessness of sympathy on any point with those who generally differ from you, in the very tone of your voice, in the whole character of your conversation. Gradually the gulf becomes wider and wider that separates you from those among whom it has pleased God that your lot should be cast.

You cannot yet be at all sensible of the dangers I am now pointing out to you. You cannot yet understand the consequences of your present want of self-control in this particular point. The light of the future alone can waken them out of present darkness into distinct and fatal prominence.

Habit has not yet formed into an isolating chain that refinement of mind and loftiness of character which your want of self-control may convert into misfortunes instead of blessings. Whenever, even now, a sense of total want of sympathy forces itself upon you, you console yourself with such thoughts as these: "Sheep herd together, eagles fly alone,"[57]&c.

Small consolation this, even for the pain your loneliness inflicts on yourself, still less for the breach of duties it involves.

There must, besides, be much danger in a habit of mind that leads you to attribute to your own superiority those very unpleasantnesses which would have no existence if that superiority were more complete. For, in truth, if your spiritual nature asserted its due authority over the animal, you would habitually exercise the power which is freely offered you, of supreme control over the hidden movements of your heart as well as over the outward expression of the lips.

I would strongly urge you to consider every evidence of your isolation—of your want of sympathy with others—as marks of moral inferiority; then, from your conscientiousness of mind, you would seek anxiously to discover the causes of such isolation, and you would endeavour to remove them.



Page 49

Nothing is more difficult than the perpetual self-control necessary for this purpose. Constant watchfulness is required to subdue every feeling of superiority in the contemplation of your own character, and constant watchfulness to look upon the words and actions of others through, as it were, a rose-coloured medium. The mind of man has been aptly compared to cut glass, which reflects the very same light in various colours as well as different shapes, according to the forms of the glass. Display then the mental superiority of which you are justly conscious, by moulding your mind into such forms as will represent the words and actions of others in the most favourable point of view. The same illustration will serve to suggest the best manner of making allowances for those whose minds are unmanageable, because uneducated and undisciplined. They cannot see things in the same point of view that you do; how unreasonable then is it of you to expect that they should form the same estimate of them.

Let us now enter into the more minute details of this subject, and consider the many opportunities for self-control which may arise in the course of even this one day. I will begin with moral evil.

You may hear falsehoods asserted, you may hear your friend traduced, you may hear unfair and exaggerated statements of the conduct of others, given to the very people with whom they are most anxious to stand well. These are trials to which you may be often exposed, even in domestic life; and their judicious management, the comparative advantages to one's friends or one's self of silence or defence, will require your calmest judgment and your soundest discretion; qualities which of course cannot be brought into action without complete self-control. I can hardly expect, or, indeed, wish that you should hear the falsehoods of which I have spoken without some risings of indignation; these, however, must be subdued for your friend's sake as well as your own. You would think it right to conquer feelings of anger and revenge if you were yourself unjustly accused, and though the other excitement may bear the appearance of more generosity, you must on reflection admit that it is equally your duty to subdue such feelings when they are aroused by the injuries inflicted on a friend. The happy safeguard, the *instinctive* test, by which the well-regulated and comparatively innocent mind may safely try the right or the wrong of every indignant feeling is this: so far as the feeling is painful, so far is it tainted with sin. To "be angry and sin not,"[58] there must be no pain in the anger: pain and sin cannot be separated: there may indeed be sorrow, but this is to be carefully distinguished from pain. The above is a test which, after close examination and experience, you will find to be a safe and true one. Whenever they are thus safe and true, our instinctive feelings ought to be gratefully made use of; thus even our animal nature may be made to come to the assistance of our spiritual nature, against which it is too often arrayed in successful opposition.



Page 50

I have spoken of the exceeding difficulty of exercising self-control under such trying circumstances as those above described, and this difficulty will, I candidly confess, be likely to increase in proportion to your own honesty and generosity. Be comforted, however, by this consideration, that, conflict being the only means of forming the character into excellence, and your natural amiability averting from you many of the usual opportunities for exercising self-control, you would be in want of the former essential ingredient in spiritual discipline did not your very virtues procure it for you.

While, however, I allow you full credit for these virtues, I must insist on a careful distinction between a mere virtue and a Christian grace. Every virtue becomes a vice the moment it overpasses its prescribed boundaries, the moment it is given free power to follow the bent of animal nature, instead of being, even though a virtue, kept under the strict control of religious principle.

I must now suggest to you some means by which I have known self-control to be successfully exhibited and perpetuated, with especial reference to that annoyance which we have last considered. Instead, then, of dwelling on the deviations from truth of which I have spoken, even when they are to the injury of a friend, try to banish the subject from your mind and memory; or, if you are able to think of it in the very way you please, try to consider how much the original formation of the speaker's mind, careless habits, and want of any disciplining education, may each and all contribute to lessen the guilt of the person who has annoyed you. No one knows better than yourself that the original nature of the mind, as well as its implanted habits, modifies every fact presented to its notice. Still further, the point of view from which the fact or the character has been seen may have been entirely different from yours. These other persons may absolutely have *seen* the thing spoken of in a position so completely unlike your mental vision of it, that they are as incapable of understanding your view as you may be of understanding theirs. If sincere in your wish for improvement, you had better prove the truth of the above assertion by the following process. Take into your consideration any given action, not of a decidedly honourable nature—one which, perhaps, to most people would appear of an indifferent nature,—but to your lofty and refined notions deserving of some degree of reprehension. You have a sufficiently metaphysical head to be able to abstract yourself entirely from your own view of the case, and then you can contemplate it with a total freedom from prejudice. Such a contemplation can only be attempted when no feeling is concerned,—feeling giving life to every peculiarity of moral sentiment, as the heat draws out those characters which would otherwise have passed unknown and unnoticed. I would then have you examine carefully into all the considerations which might qualify and alter, even your own view of the case. Dwell long and carefully upon this part of the process. It is astonishing (incredible indeed until it is tried) how much our opinions of the very same action may alter if we determinately confine ourselves to the favourable aspect in which it may be viewed, keeping the contrary side entirely out of sight.



Page 51

As soon as this has been carried to the utmost, you must further (that my experiment may be fairly tried) endeavour to throw yourself, in imagination, not only into the position, but also into the natural and acquired mental and moral perceptions of the person whose action you are taking into your consideration. For this purpose you must often imagine—natural dimness of perception, absence of acute sensibility, indifference to wounding the feelings of others from mere carelessness and want of reflective powers, little natural conscientiousness, an entire absence of the taste or the power of metaphysical examination into the effect produced by our actions. All these natural deficiencies, you must further consider, may in this case be increased by a totally neglected education,—first, by the want of parental discipline, and afterwards of that more important self-education which few people have sufficient strength of character to subject themselves to. Lastly, I would have you consider especially the moral atmosphere in which they have habitually breathed: according to the nature of this the mental health varies as certainly as the physical strength varies in a bracing or relaxing air. A strong bodily constitution may resist longer, and finally be less affected by a deleterious atmosphere than a weak or diseased frame; and so it is with the mental constitution. Minds insensibly imbibe the tone of the atmosphere in which they most frequently dwell; and though natural loftiness of character and natural conscientiousness may for a very long period resist such influences, it cannot be expected that inferior natures will be able to do so.

You are then to consider whether the habits of mind and conversation among those who are the constant associates of the persons you blame have been such as to cherish or to deaden keen and refined perceptions of moral excellence and nobility of mind; still further, whether their own literary tastes have created around them an even more penetrating atmosphere; whether from the elevated inspirations of appreciated poetry, from the truthful page of history, or from the stirring excitements of romantic fiction, their heart and their imagination have received those lofty lessons for which you judge them responsible, without knowing whether they have ever received them.

There is still another consideration. While the actions of those who are not habitually under the control of high principle depend chiefly on the physical constitution, as they are too often a mere yielding to the immediate impulse of the senses, their judgment of men and things, on the contrary, when uninfluenced by *personal* feeling, depend probably more on that keen perception of the beautiful which is the natural instinct of a superior organization. Morality and religion will indeed supply the place of these lofty *natural* instincts, by giving habits of mind which may in time become so burnt in, as it were, that they assume the form of natural instincts, while they are at once much safer guides and much stronger checks.

Page 52

It is surprising that a mere sense of the beautiful will often confer the clearest perceptions of the real nature of moral excellence. You may hear the devoted worldling, or the selfish sensualist, giving the highest and most inspiring lessons of self-renunciation, self-sacrifice, and devotedness to God. Their lessons, truthful and impressive, because dictated by a keen and exquisite perception of the beautiful, which ever harmonizes with the precepts and doctrines of Christianity, have kindled in many a heart that living flame, which in their own has been smothered by the fatal homage of the lips and of the feelings only, while the actions of the life were disobedient. Often has such a writer or speaker stood in stern and truthfully severe judgment on the weak "brother in Christ" when he has acted or spoken with an inconsistency which the mere instinct of the beautiful would in his censor have prevented. Such censors, however, ought to remember that these weak brethren, though their instincts be less lofty, their sensibility less acute, live closer to their principles than they themselves do to their feelings; for the moment the natural impulse, in cases where that is the only guide, is enlisted on the side of passion, the perception of the beautiful is entirely sacrificed to the gratification of the senses. When the animal nature comes into collision with the spiritual, the highest dictates of the latter will be unheeded, unless the supremacy of the spiritual nature be habitually maintained in practice as well as in theory. In short, that keen perception of the true and the beautiful, which is an essential ingredient in the formation of a noble character, becomes, in the case of the self-indulgent worldling, only an increase of his responsibility, and a deepening dye to his guilt. At present, however, I suppose you to be sitting in judgment on those who are entirely destitute of the aids and the responsibilities of a keen sense of the beautiful: by nature or by education they know or have learned nothing of it. How different, then, from your own must be their estimate of virtue and duty! Add this, therefore, to all the other allowances you have to make for them, and I will answer for it that any action viewed through this qualifying medium will entirely change its aspect, and your blame will most frequently turn to pity, though of course you can feel neither sympathy nor respect.

On the other hand, the practice of dwelling only on the aggravating circumstances of a case, will magnify into crime a trifling and otherwise easily forgotten error. This is a fact in the mind's history of which few people seem to be aware, and only few may be capable of understanding. Its truth, however, may be easily proved by watching the effect of words in irritating one person against another, and increasing, by repeated insinuations, the apparent malignity of some really trifling action. No one, probably, has led so blessed a life as not to have been sometimes

Page 53

pained by observing one person trying to exasperate another, who is, perhaps, rather peacefully inclined, by pointing out all the aggravating circumstances of some probably imaginary offence, until the listener is wrought up to a state of angry excitement, and induced to look on that as an exaggerated offence which would probably otherwise have passed without notice. What is in this case the effect of another's sin is a state often produced in their own mind by those who would be incapable of the more tangible, and therefore more evidently sinful act of exciting the anger of one friend or relative against another.

The sin of which I speak is peculiarly likely to be that of a thoughtful, reflective, and fastidious person like yourself. It is therefore to you of the utmost importance to acquire, and to acquire at once, complete control over your thoughts,—first, carefully ascertaining which those are that you ought to avoid, and then guarding as carefully against such as if they were the open semblance of positive sin. This is really the only means by which a truthful and candid nature like your own can ever maintain the deportment of Christian love and charity towards those among whom your lot is cast. You must resolutely shut your eyes against all that is unlovely in their character. If you suffer your thoughts to dwell for a moment on such subjects, you will find additional difficulty afterwards in forcing them away from that which is their natural tendency, besides having probably created a feeling against which it will be vain to struggle. It is one of the strongest reasons for the necessity of watchful self-control, that no mind, however powerful, can exercise a direct authority over the feelings of the heart; they are susceptible of indirect influence alone. This much increases the necessity of our watchfulness as to the indirect tendencies of thoughts and words, and our accountability with respect to them. Our anxiety and vigilance ought to be altogether greater than if we could exercise over our feelings that direct and instantaneous control which a strong mind can always assert in the case of words and actions.

Unless the indirect influence of which I have spoken were practicable, the warnings and commands of Scripture would be a mockery of our weakness,—a cruel satire on the helplessness of a victim whose efforts to fulfil duty must, however strenuous, prove unavailing. The child is commanded to honour his parent, the wife to reverence her husband; and you are to observe attentively that there is no exception made for the cases of those whose parents or husbands are undeserving of love and reverence. There must, then, be a power granted, to such as ask and *strive* to acquire it, of closing the mental eyes resolutely against those features in the character of the persons to whom we are bound by the ties of duty, which would unfit us, if much dwelt upon, for obedience in such important particulars as the love and reverence we are commanded to feel towards them.



Page 54

Even where there is such high principle and such uncommon strength of character as to induce perseverance in the mere external forms of obedience, how vain are all such while the heart has turned aside from the appointed path of duty, and broken those commands of God which, we should always remember, have reference to feeling as well as to action:—"Honour thy father and thy mother;"[59] "Let the wife see that she reverence her husband."[60]

In the habitual exercise of that self-control which I now urge upon you, you will experience an ample fulfilment of that promise,—“The work of righteousness shall be peace.”[61] Instead of becoming daily further and further severed from those who are indeed your inferiors, but towards whom God has imposed duties upon you, you will daily find that, in proportion to the difficulty of the task, will be the sweetness and the peace rewarding its fulfilment. No affection resulting from the most perfect sympathy of mind and heart will ever confer so deep a pleasure, or so holy a peace, as the blind, unquestioning, “unsifting”[62] tenderness which a strong principle of duty has cherished into existence.

Glorious in every way will be the final result to those who are capable (alas! few are so) of such a course of conduct. Far different in its effects from the blind tenderness of infatuated passion is the noble blindness of Christian self-control. While the one warms into existence, or at least into open manifestation, all the selfishness and wilfulness of the fondled plaything, the other creates a thousand virtues that were not known before. Flowers spring up from the hardest rocks, the coldest, sternest natures are gradually softened into gentleness, the faults of temper or of character that never meet with worrying opposition, or exercise unforgiving influence, gradually die away, and fade from the memory of both. The very atmosphere alone of such rare and lovely self-control seems to have a moral influence resembling the effects of climate upon the rude and rugged marble,—every roughness is by degrees smoothed away, and even the colouring becomes subdued into calm harmony with all the features of its allotted position.

To the rarity of the virtue upon which I have so long dwelt, we may trace the cause of almost all the domestic unhappiness we witness whenever the veil is withdrawn from the secrets of *home*. Alas! how often is this blessed word only the symbol of freely-indulged ill-tempers, unresisted selfishness, or, perhaps the most dangerous of all, exacting and unforgiving requirements. While the one party select their home as the only scene where they may safely and freely vent their caprices and ill-humours, the other require a stricter compliance with their wishes, a more exact conformity with their pursuits and opinions, than they meet with even from the temporary companions of their lighter hours. They forget that these companions have only to exert themselves for a short time for their gratification, and that they can then retire to their own home, probably to be as disagreeable there as the relations of whom the others complain. For then the mask is off, and they are at liberty,—yes, at liberty,—freed from the inspection and the judgments of the world, and only exposed to those of God!



Page 55

My friend, I am sure you have often shared in the pain and grief I feel, that in so few cases should home be the blessed, peaceful spot that poetry pictures to us. There is no real poetry that is not truth in its purest form—truth as it appears to eyes from which the mists of sense are cleared away. Surely our earthly homes ought to realize the representations of poetry; they would then become each day a nearer, though ever a faint type of, that eternal home for which our earthly one ought daily to prepare us.

Poetry and religion always teach the same duties, instil the same feelings. Never believe that any thing can be truly noble or great, that any thing can be really poetical, which is not also religious. The poet is now partly a priest, as he was in the old heathen world; and though, alas! he may, like Balaam, utter inspirations which his heart follows not, which his life denies, yet, like Balaam also, his words are full of lessons for us, though they may only make his own guilt the deeper.

I have been led to these concluding considerations respecting poetry by my anxiety that you should turn your refined tastes and your acute perceptions of the beautiful to a universally moral purpose. There is no teaching more impressive than that which comes to us through our passions. In the moment of excited feeling stronger impressions may be made than by any of the warnings of duty and principle. If these latter, however, be not motives co-existent, and also in strength and exercise, the impressions of feeling are temporary, and even dangerous. It is only to the faithful followers of duty that the excitements of romance and poetry are useful and improving. To such they have often given strength and energy to tread more cheerfully and hopefully over many a rugged path, to live more closely to their beau-ideal, a vivid vision of which has, by poetry, been awakened and refreshed in their hearts.

To others, on the contrary, the danger exceeds the profit. By the excitement of admiration they may be deceived into the belief that there must be in their own bosoms an answering spirit to the greatness, the self-sacrifice, the pure and lofty affections they see represented in the mirror of poetry. They are deceived, because they forget that we have each within us two natures struggling for the mastery. As long as we practically allow the habitual supremacy of the lower over the higher, there can be no real excellence in the character, however a mere sense of the beautiful may temporarily exalt the feelings, and thus increase our responsibility, and consequent condemnation.

I am sure you have experimentally understood the subject on which I have been writing. I am sure you have often risen from the teaching of the poet with enthusiasm in your heart, ready to trample upon all those temptations and difficulties which had, perhaps an hour before, made the path of self-denial and self-control apparently impracticable.



Page 56

Receive such intervals of excitement as heaven-sent aids, to help you more easily over, it may be, a wearying and dreary path. They are most probably sent in answer to prayer—in answer to the prayers of your own heart, or to those of some pious friend.

Our Father in heaven works constantly by earthly means, and moulds the weakest, the often apparently useless instrument to the furtherance of his purposes of mercy, one of which you know is your own sanctification. It is not his holy word only that gives you appointed messages and helps exactly suited to your need. The flower growing by the way-side, the picture or the poem, the works of God's own hand, or the works of the genius which he has breathed into his creature Man, may all alike bear you messages of love, of warning, of assistance.

Listen attentively, and you will hear—clearer still and clearer—every day and hour. It is not by chance you take up that book, or gaze upon that picture; you have found, because you are on the watch for it, in the first, a suggestion that exactly suits your present need, in the latter an excitement and an inspiration which makes some difficult action you may be immediately called on to perform comparatively easy and comparatively welcome.

There is a deep and universal meaning in the vulgar[63] proverb, "Strike while the iron is hot." If it be left to cool without your purpose being effected, the iron becomes harder than ever, the chains of nature and of habit are more firmly riveted.

There are some other features of self-control to which I wish, though more cursorily, to direct your attention. They have all some remote bearing on your moral nature, and may exercise much influence over your prospects in life.

Like many other persons of a refined and sensitive organization, you suffer from the very uncommon disease of shyness. At the very time, perhaps, when you desire most to please, to interest, to amuse, your over-anxiety defeats its own object. The self-possession of the indifferent generally carries off the palm from the earnest and the anxious. This is ridiculous; this is degrading. What you wish to do you ought to be able to do, and you will be able, if you habitually exercise control over the physical feelings of your nature.

I am quite of the opinion of those who hold that shyness is a bodily as well as a mental disease, much influenced by our state of health, as well as by the constitutional state of the circulation; but I only put forward this opinion respecting its origin as additional evidence that it too may be brought under the authority of self-control. If the grace of God, giving efficacy and help to our own exertions, can enable us to resist the influence of indigestion and other kinds of ill-health upon the temper and the spirits, will not the same means be found effectual to subdue a shyness which almost sinks us to the level of the brute creation by depriving us of the advantages of a rational will? Even this

latter distinguishing feature of humanity is prostrated before the mysterious power of shyness.



Page 57

You understand, doubtless, the wide distinction that exists between modesty and shyness. Modesty is always self-possessed, and therefore clear-sighted and cool-headed. Shyness, on the contrary, is too confused either to see or hear things as they really are, and as often assumes the appearance of forwardness as any other disguise. Depriving its victims of the power of being themselves, it leaves them little freedom of choice, as to the sort of imitations the freaks of their animal nature may lead them to attempt. You feel, with deep annoyance, that a paroxysm of shyness has often made you speak entirely at random, and express the very opposite sentiments to those you really feel, committing yourself irretrievably to, perhaps, falsehood and folly, because you could not exercise self-control. Try to bring vividly before your mental eye all that you have suffered in the recollection of past weaknesses of this kind, and that will give you energy and strength to struggle habitually, incessantly, against every symptom of so painful a disease. It is, at first, only the smaller ones that can be successfully combated; after the strength acquired by perseverance in lesser efforts, you may hope to overcome your powerful enemy in his very stronghold.

Even in the quietest family life many opportunities will be offered you of combat and of victory. False shame, the fear of being laughed at now, or taunted afterwards, will often keep you silent when you ought to speak; and you ought to speak very often for no other than the sufficient reason of accustoming yourself to disregard the hampering feeling of "What will people say?" "What do I expose myself to by making this observation?" Follow the impulses of your own noble and generous nature, speak the words it dictates, and then you may and ought to trample under foot the insinuations of shyness, as to the judgments which others may pass upon you.

You may observe that those censors who make a coward of you can always find something to say in blame of every action, some taunt with which to reflect upon every word. Do not, then, suffer yourself to be hampered by the dread of depreciating remarks being made upon your conversation or your conduct. Such fears are one of the most general causes of shyness. You must not suffer your mind to dwell upon them, except to consider that taunting and depreciating remarks may and will be made on every course of conduct you may pursue, on every word you or others may speak.

I have myself been cured of any shackling anxiety as to "What will people say?" by a long experience of the fact, that the remarks of the gossip are totally irrespective of the conduct or the conversation they gossip over. That which is blamed one moment, is highly extolled the next, when the necessity of depreciating contrast requires the change; and as for the *inconsequence* of the remarks so rapidly following each other, the gossip is "thankful she has not an argumentative head." She is, therefore, privileged one moment to contradict the inevitable consequences of the assertions made the moment before.



Page 58

You cannot avoid such criticisms; brave them nobly. The more you disregard them, the more true will you be to yourself, the more free will you be from that shyness which, though partly the result of keen and acute perceptions and refined sensibilities, has besides a large share of over-anxious vanity and deeply-rooted pride.

Do not believe those who tell you that shyness will decrease of itself, as you advance in age, and mix more in the world. There is, indeed, a species of shyness which may thus be removed; but it is not that which arises from a morbid refinement. This latter species, unguarded by habitual self-control, will, on the contrary, rather increase than decrease, as further experience shows you the numerous modes of failure, the thousand tender points in which you may be assailed by the world without.

Be assured that your only hope of safety is in an early and persevering struggle, accompanied by faith in final victory,—without that who can have strength for conflict? Do not treat your boasted intellect so depreciatingly as to doubt its power of giving you successful aid in your triumph over difficulties. What has been done may be done again,—why not by you?

Nothing is more interesting (and also imposing) than to see a strong mind evidently struggling against, and obtaining a victory over, the shyness of its animal nature. The appreciative observer pays it, at the same time, the involuntary homage which always attends success, and the still deeper respect due to those who having been thus “Caesar unto themselves,”^[64] are also sure, in time, to conquer all external things.

In conclusion, I must remind you that your life has, as yet, flowed on in a smooth and untroubled course, so that you cannot from experience be at all aware of the much greater future necessity there may be for those habits of self-control which I am now urging upon you. But though no overwhelming shocks, no stunning surprises, have, as yet, disturbed the “even tenor of your way,” it cannot be always thus. Alas! the time must come when sorrows will pour in upon you like a flood, when you will be called upon for rapid decisions, for far-sighted and comprehensive arrangements, for various exercises of the coolest, calmest judgment, at the very moment that present anguish and anxiety for the future are raising whirlwinds of clouds around your mental vision. If you are not now acquiring the power of self-control in minor affairs by managing them judiciously under circumstances of trifling excitement or disturbance, how will you be able to act your part with skill and courage, when the hours of real trial overtake you? A character like yours, as it possesses the power, so likewise is it responsible for the duty of moving on steadily through moral clouds and storms, seeing clearly, resisting firmly, and uninfluenced by any motives but those suggested by your higher nature.



Page 59

The passing shadow, or the gleam of sunshine, the half-expressed sneer, or the tempests of angry passion, the words of love and flattery, or the cruel insinuations of envy and jealousy, may pale your cheek, or call into it a deeper flush; may kindle your eye with indignation, or melt its rays in sorrow; but they must not, for all that, turn you aside one step from the path which your calm and deliberate judgment had before marked out for you: your insensibility to such annoyances as those I have described would show an unfeminine hardness of character; your being influenced by them would strengthen into habit any natural unfitness for the high duties you may probably be called on to fulfil. When in future years you may be appealed to, by those who depend on you alone, for guidance, for counsel, for support in warding off, or bearing bravely, dangers, difficulties, and sorrows, you will have cause for bitter repentance if you are unable to answer such appeals; nor can you answer them successfully unless, in the present hours of comparative calm, you are, in daily trifles, habituating yourself to the exercise of self-control. Every day thus wasted now will in future cause you years of unavailing regret.

FOOTNOTES:

[56] Matt. v. 48.

[57] Sir Philip Sidney.

[58] Eph. iv. 26.

[59] Ex. xx. 12.

[60] Eph. v. 33.

[61] Isa. xxxii. 17.

[62]

Maria. How can we love?—

Giovanna (interrupting). Mainly, by hearing none Decry the object, then by cherishing The good we see in it, and overlooking What is less pleasant in the paths of life. All have some virtue if we leave it them In peace and quiet, all may lose some part By sifting too minutely good and bad. The tenderer and the timider of creatures Often desert the brood that has been handled, Or turned about, or indiscreetly looked at. The slightest touches, touching constantly, Irritate and inflame.

LANDOR'S *Giovanna and Andrea*.

[63] Miss Edgeworth says that proverbs are vulgar because they are common sense.



[64] Emerson.

LETTER VII.

ECONOMY.

Perhaps there is no lesson that needs to be more watchfully and continually impressed on the young and generous heart than the difficult one of economy. There is no virtue that in such natures requires more vigilant self-control and self-denial, besides the exercise of a free judgment, uninfluenced by the excitement of feeling.

To you this virtue will be doubly difficult, because you have so long watched its unpleasant manifestations in a distorted form. You are exposed to danger from that which has perverted many notions of right and wrong; you have so long heard things called by false names that you are inclined to turn away in disgust from a noble reality. You have been accustomed to hear the name of economy given to penuriousness and meanness, so that now, the wounded feelings and the refined tastes of your nature having been excited to disgust by this system of falsehood, you will find it difficult to realize in economy a virtue that joins to all the noble instincts of generosity the additional features of strong-minded self-control.



Page 60

It will therefore be necessary, before I endeavour to impress upon your mind the duty and advantages of economy, that I should previously help you to a clear understanding of the real meaning of the word itself.

The difficulty of forming a true and distinct conception of the virtue thus denominated is much increased by its being equally misrepresented by two entirely opposite parties. The avaricious, those to whom the expenditure of a shilling costs a real pang of regret, claim for their mean vice the honour of a virtue that can have no existence, unless the same pain and the same self-control were exercised in withholding, as with them would be exercised in giving. On the other hand, the extravagant, sometimes wilfully, sometimes unconsciously, fall into the same error of applying to the noble self-denial of economy the degrading misnomers of avarice, penuriousness, &c.

It is indeed possible that the avaricious may become economical,—after first becoming generous, which is an absolutely necessary preliminary. That which is impossible with man is possible with God, and who may dare to limit his free grace? This, however, is one of the wonders I have never yet witnessed. It seems indeed that the love of money is so literally the “root of all evil,”^[65] that there is no room in the heart where it dwells for any other growth, for any thing lovely or excellent. The taint is universal, and while much that is amiable and interesting may originally exist in characters containing the seeds of every other vice, (however in time overshadowed and poisoned by such neighbourhood,) it would seem that “the love of money” always reigns in sovereign desolation, admitting no warm or generous feeling into the heart which it governs. Such, however, you will at once deny to be the case of those from whose penuriousness your early years have suffered; you know that their character is not thus bare of virtues. But do not for this contradict my assertion; theirs was not always innate love of money for its own sake, though at length they may have unfortunately learned to love it thus, which is the true test of avarice. It has, on the contrary, been owing to the faults of others, to their having long experienced the deprivations attendant on a want of money, that they have acquired the habit of thinking the consciousness of its possession quite as enjoyable as the powers and the pleasures its expenditure bestows. They know too well the pain of want of money, but have never learned that the real pleasure of its possession consists in its employment.^[66] It is only from habit, only from perverted experience, that they are avaricious, therefore I at once exonerate them from the charges I have brought against those whose very nature it is to love money for its own sake. At the same time the strong expressions I have made use of respecting these latter, may, I hope, serve to obviate the suspicion that I have any indulgence for so despicable a vice, and may induce you to expect an unprejudiced statement of the merits and the duty of economy.



Page 61

It is carefully to be remembered that the excess of every natural virtue becomes a vice, and that these apparently opposing qualities are only divided from each other by almost insensible boundaries. The habitual exercise of strong self-control can alone preserve even our virtues from degenerating into sin, and a clear-sightedness as to the very first step of declension must be sought for by self-denial on our own part, and by earnest prayer for the assisting graces of the Holy Spirit, to search the depths of our heart, and open our eyes to see.

Thus it is that the free and generous impulses of a warm and benevolent nature, though in themselves among the loveliest manifestations of the merely natural character, will and necessarily must degenerate into extravagance and self-indulgence, unless they are kept vigilantly and constantly under the control of prudence and justice. And this, if you consider the subject impartially, is fully as much the case when these generous impulses are not exercised alone in procuring indulgences for one's friends or one's self, but even when they excite you to the relief of real suffering and pitiable distress.

This last is, indeed, one of the severest trials of the duty of economy; but that it is a part of that duty to resist even such temptations, will be easily ascertained if you consider the subject coolly,—that is, if you consider it when your feelings are not excited by the sight of a distressed object, whose situation may be readily altered by some of that money which you think, and think justly, is only useful, only enjoyable, in the moment of expenditure.

The trial is, I confess, a difficult one: it is best the decision with respect to it should be made when your feelings are excited on the opposite side, when some useful act of charity to the poor has incapacitated you from meeting the demands of justice.

I am sure your memory, ay, and your present experience too, can furnish you with some cases of this kind. It may be that the act of generosity was a judicious and a useful one, that the suffering would have been great if you had not performed it; but, on the other hand, it has disabled you from paying some bills that you knew at the very time were lawfully due as the reward of honest labour, which had trusted to your honour that this reward should be punctually paid. You have a keen sense of justice as well as a warm glow of generosity; one will serve to temper the other. Let the memory of every past occasion of this kind be deeply impressed, not only on your mind but on your heart, by frequent reflection on the painful thoughts that then forced themselves upon you,—the distress of those upon whose daily labour the daily maintenance of their family depends, the collateral distress of the artisans employed by them, whom they cannot pay because you cannot pay, the degradation to your own character, from the experience of your creditors that you have expended that which was in



Page 62

fact not your own, the diminished, perhaps for ever injured, confidence which they and all who become acquainted with the circumstances will place in you, and, finally, the probability that you have deprived some honest, industrious, self-denying tradesman of his hardly-earned dues, to bestow the misnamed generosity upon some object of distress, who, however real the distress may be now, has probably deserved it by a deficiency in all those good qualities which maintain in respectability your defrauded creditor. The very character, too, of your creditor may suffer by your inability to pay him, for he, miscalculating on your honesty and truthfulness, may, on his side, have engaged to make payments which become impossible for him, when you fail in your duty, in which case you can scarcely calculate how far the injury to him may extend; becoming a more permanent and serious evil than his incapacity to answer those daily calls upon him of which I have before spoken. In short, if you will try to bring vividly before you all the painful feelings that passed through your mind, and all the contingencies that were contemplated by you on any one of these occasions, you will scarcely differ from me when I assert my belief that the name of dishonesty would be a far more correct word than that of generosity to apply to such actions as the above: you are, in fact, giving away the money of another person, depriving him of his property, his time, or his goods, under false pretences, and, in addition to this, appropriating to yourself the pleasure of giving, which surely ought to belong by right to those to whom the gift belongs.

I have here considered one of the most trying cases, one in which the withholding of your liberality becomes a really difficult duty, so difficult that the opportunity should be avoided as much as possible; and it is for this very purpose that the science of economy should be diligently studied and practised, that so "you may have to give to him that needeth," without taking away that which is due to others. Probably in most of the cases to which I have referred your memory, some previous acts of self-denial would have saved you from being tempted to the sin of giving away the property of another. I would not willingly suppose that an act of self-denial at the very time you witnessed the case of distress might have provided you with the means of satisfying both generosity and honesty, for, as I said before, I know you to have a keen sense of justice; and though you have never yet been vigilant enough in the practice of economy, I cannot believe that, with an alternative before you, you would indulge in any personal expenditure, even bearing the appearance of almost necessity, that would involve a failure in the payment of your debts. I speak, then, only of acts of previous self-denial, and I wish you to be persuaded, that unless these are practised habitually and incessantly you can never be truly generous. A readiness to give that which costs you nothing, that which is so truly a superfluity that it involves no sacrifice, is a mere animal instinct, as selfish perhaps, though more refinedly so than any other species of self-indulgence. Generosity is a nobler quality, and one that can have no real existence without economy and self-denial.



Page 63

I have spoken several times of the study of economy, and of the science of economy; and I used these words advisedly. However natural and comparatively easy it may be to some persons to form an accurate judgment of the general average of their ordinary expenses, and of all the contingencies that are perpetually arising, I do not believe that you possess this power by nature: you only need, however, to force your intellectual faculties into this direction to find that here, as elsewhere, they may be made available for every imaginable purpose. You have sometimes probably envied those among your acquaintance, much less highly gifted perhaps than yourself, who have so little difficulty in practising economy, that without any effort at all, they have always money in hand for any unexpected exigency, as well as to fulfil all regular demands upon their purse. It is an observation made by every one, that among the same number of girls, some will be found to dress better, give away more, and be better provided for sudden emergencies, than their companions. Nor are these ordinarily the more clever girls of one's acquaintance: I have known some who were decidedly below par as to intellect who yet possessed in a high degree the practical knowledge of economy. Instead of vainly lamenting your natural inferiority on such an important point, you should seek diligently to remove it.

An acquired knowledge of the art of economy is far better than any natural skill therein; for the acquisition will involve the exercise of many intellectual faculties, such as generalization, foresight, calculation, at the same time that the moral faculties are strengthened by the constant exercise of self-control. For, granted that the naturally economical are neither shabbily penurious nor deficient in the duty of almsgiving, it is still evident that it cannot be the same effort to them to deny themselves a tempting act of liberality, or the gratification of elegant and commendable tastes, as it must be to those who are destitute of equally instinctive feelings as to the inadequacy of their funds to meet demands of this nature. It is invariably true that economy must be difficult, and therefore admirable in proportion to the warm-heartedness and the refined tastes of those who practise it. The highly-gifted and the generous meet with a thousand temptations to expenditure beyond their means, of the number and strength of which the less amiable and refined can form no adequate conception. If, however, those above spoken of are exposed to stronger temptations than others, they also carry within themselves the means, if properly employed, of more powerful and skillful defence. There is, as I said before, no right purpose, however contrary to the natural constitution of the mind, for which intellectual powers may not be made available; and if strong feelings render self-denial more difficult, especially in points of charity or generosity, they, on the other hand, serve to impress more deeply and vividly on the mind the painful self-reproach consequent to any act of imprudence and extravagance.



Page 64

The first effort made by your intellectual powers towards acquiring a practical knowledge of the science of economy should be the important one of generalizing all your expenses, and then performing the same process upon the funds that there is a fair probability of your having at your disposal. The former is difficult, as the expenditure of even a single person, independent of any establishment, involves so many unforeseen contingencies, that, unless by combining the past and the future you generalize a probable average, and then bring this average *within* your income, you can never experience any of the peace of mind and readiness to meet the calls of charity which economy alone bestows.

No one of strict justice can combine tranquillity with the indulgence of generosity unless she lives *within* her income. Whether the expenditure be on a large or a small scale, it signifies little; she alone is truly rich who has brought her wants sufficiently within the bounds of her income to have always something to spare for unexpected contingencies. In laying down rules for your expenditure, you will, of course, impose upon yourself a regular dedication of a certain part of your income to charitable purposes. This ought to be considered as entirely set apart, as no longer your own: your opportunities must determine the exact proportion; but the tenth, at least, of the substance which God has given you must be considered as appropriated to his service; nor can you hope for a blessing upon the remainder, if you withhold that which has been distinctly claimed from you. Besides the regular allowance for the wants of the poor, I can readily suppose that it will be a satisfaction to you to deny yourself, from time to time, some innocent gratification, when a greater gratification is within your reach, by laying out your money "to make the widow's heart to sing for joy; to bring upon yourself the blessing of him that was ready to perish." [67] Here, however, will much watchfulness be required; you must be sure that it is only some self-indulgence you sacrifice, and nothing of that which the claims of justice demand. For when, after systematic, as well as present, self-denial, you still find that you cannot afford to relieve the distress which it pains your heart to witness, be careful to resist the temptation of giving away that which is lawfully due to others. For the purpose of saving suffering in one direction you may cause it in another; and besides, you set yourself as plainly in opposition to that which is the will of God concerning you as if your imprudent expenditure were caused by some temptation less refined and unselfish than the relief of real distress. The gratification that another woman would find in a splendid dress, you derive from more exalted sources; but if you or she purchase your gratification by an act of injustice, by spending money that does not belong to you, you, as well as she, are making an idol of self, in choosing

Page 65

to have that which the providence of God has denied you. "The silver and the gold is mine, saith the Lord;" and it cannot be without a special purpose, relating to the peculiar discipline requisite for such characters, that this silver and gold is so often withheld from those who would make the best and kindest use of it. Murmur not, then, when this hard trial comes upon you, when you see want and sorrow which you cannot in justice to others relieve; and when you see thousands, at the very moment you experience this generous suffering, expended on entirely selfish, perhaps sinful gratifications, neither be tempted to murmur or to act unjustly. "Is it not the Lord;" has not he in his infinite love and infinite wisdom appointed this very trial for you? Bow your head and heart in submission, and dare not to seek an escape from it by one step out of the path of duty. It may be that close examination, a searching of the stores of memory, will bring even this trial under the almost invariable head of needful chastisement; it may be that it is the consequence of some former act of self-indulgence and extravagance, which would have been forgotten, or not deeply enough repented of, unless your sin had in this way been brought to remembrance. Thus even this trial assumes the invariable character of all God's chastisements: it is the inevitable consequence of sin,—as inevitable as the relation of cause and effect. It results from no special interposition of Providence, but is the natural result of those decrees upon which the whole system of the world is founded; secondarily, however, overruled to work together for good to the penitent sinner, by impressing more deeply on his mind the humbling remembrance of past sin, and leading to a more watchful future avoidance of the same.

It is indeed probable, that without many trials of this peculiarly painful kind, the duty of economy could not be deeply enough impressed on a naturally generous and warm heart. The restraints of prudence would be unheeded, unless bitter experience, as it were, burned them in.

I have spoken of two necessary preparations for the practice of economy,—the first, a clear general view of our probable expenses; the second, which I am now about to notice, is the calculation of the probable funds that are to meet these expenses. In your case, there is a certain income, with sundry contingencies, very much varying, and altogether uncertain. Such probabilities, then, as the latter, ought to be appropriated to such expenses as are occasional and not inevitable: you must never calculate on them for any of your necessary expenditure, except in the same average manner as you have calculated that expenditure; and you must estimate the average considerably within probabilities, or you will be often thrown into discomfort. It is much better that all indulgences of mere taste, of entirely personal gratification, should be dependent on this uncertain fund; and here

Page 66

again I would warn you to keep in view the more pressing wants that may arise in the future. The gratification in which you are now indulging yourself may be a perfectly innocent one; but are you quite sure that you are not expending more money than *you* can prudently, or, to speak better, conscientiously afford, on that which offers only a temporary gratification, and involves no improvement or permanent benefit? You certainly are not sufficiently rich to indulge in any merely temporary gratification, except in extreme moderation. With relation to that part of your income which is varying and uncertain, I have observed that it is a very common temptation assailing the generous and thoughtless, (about money matters, often those who are least thoughtless about other things,) that there is always some future prospect of an increase of income, which is to free them from present embarrassments, and enable them to pay for the enjoyment of all those wishes that they are now gratifying. It is a future, however, that never arrives; for every increase of property brings new claims or new wants along with it; and it is found, too late, that, by exceeding present income, we have destroyed both the present and the future, we have created wants which the future income will find a difficulty in supplying, having in addition its own new ones to provide for.

It may indeed in a few, a very few, cases be necessary, in others expedient, to forestall that money which we have every certainty of presently possessing; but unless the expenditure relates to particulars coming under the term of "daily bread," it appears to me decided dishonesty to lay out an uncertain future income. Even if it should become ours, have we not acted in direct contradiction to the revealed will of God concerning us? The station of life in which God has placed us depends very much on the expenditure within our power; and if we double that, do we not in fact choose wilfully for ourselves a different position from that which he has appointed, and withdraw from under the guiding hand of his providence? Let us not hope that even temporal success will be allowed to result from such acts of disobedience.

What a high value does it stamp on the virtue of economy, when we thus consider it as one of the means towards enabling us to submit ourselves to the will of God!

I cannot close a letter to a woman on the subject of economy without referring to the subject of dress. Though your strongest temptations to extravagance may be those of a generous, warm heart, I have no doubt that you are also, though in an inferior degree, tempted by the desire to improve your personal appearance by the powerful aid of dress. It ought not to be otherwise; you should not be indifferent to a very important means of pleasing. Your natural beauty would be unavailing unless you devoted both time and care to its preservation and adornment. You should be solicitous to win the affection of those around



Page 67

you; and there are many who will be seriously influenced by any neglect of due attention to your personal appearance. Besides the insensible effect produced on the most ignorant and unreasonable spectator, those whom you will most wish to please will look upon it, and with justice, as an index to your mind; and a simple, graceful, and well-ordered exterior will always give the impression that similar qualities exist within. Dressing well is some a natural and easy accomplishment; to others, who may have the very same qualities existing in their minds without the power (which is in a degree mechanical) of displaying the same outward manifestation of them, it will be much more difficult to attain the same object with the same expense. Your study, therefore, of the art of dress must be a double one,—must first enable you to bring the smallest details of your apparel into as close conformity as possible to the forms and tastes of your mind, and, secondly, enable you to reconcile this exercise of taste with the duties of economy. If fashion is to be consulted as well as taste, I fear that you will find this impossible; if a gown or a bonnet is to be replaced by a new one, the moment a slight alteration takes place in the fashion of the shape or the colour, you will often be obliged to sacrifice taste as well as duty. Rather make up your mind to appear no richer than you are; if you cannot afford to vary your dress according to the rapidly—varying fashions, have the moral courage to confess this in action. Nor will your appearance lose much by the sacrifice. If your dress is in accordance with true taste, the more valuable of your acquaintance will be able to appreciate that, while they would be unconscious of any strict and expensive conformity to the fashions of the month. Of course, I do not speak now of any glaring discrepancy between your dress and the general costume of the time. There could be no display of a simple taste while any singularity in your dress attracted notice; neither could there be much additional expense in a moderate attention to the prevailing forms and colours of the time,—for bonnets and gowns do not, alas, last for ever. What I mean to deprecate is the laying aside any one of these, which is suitable in every other respect, lest it should reveal the secret of your having expended nothing upon dress during this season. Remember how many indulgences to your generous nature would be procured by the price of, a fashionable gown or bonnet, and your feelings will provide a strong support to your duty. Another way in which you may successfully practise economy is by taking care of your clothes, having them repaired in proper time, and neither exposing them to sun or rain unnecessarily. A ten-guinea gown may be sacrificed in half an hour, and the indolence of your disposition would lead you to prefer this sacrifice to the trouble of taking any preservatory precautions, or thinking about the matter at all. Is this right? Even if you can procure money to satisfy

Page 68

the demands of mere carelessness, are you acting as a faithful steward by thus expending it? I willingly grant to you that some women are so wealthy, placed in situations requiring so much representation, that it would be degrading to them to take much thought about any thing but the beauty and fashion of their clothes; and that an anxiety on their part about the preservation of, to them, trifles would indicate meanness and parsimoniousness. Their office is to encourage trade by a lavish expenditure, conformable to the rank in life in which God has placed them. Happy are they if this wealth do not become a temptation too hard to be overcome! Happier those from whom such temptations, denounced in the word of God more strongly than any other, are entirely averted!

This is your position; and as much as it is the duty of the very wealthy to expend proportionally upon their dress, so is it yours to be scrupulously economical, and to bring down your aspiring thoughts from the regions of poetry and romance to the homely duties of mending and caretaking. There will be poetry and romance too in the generous and useful employment you may make of the money thus economised. Besides, if you do not yet see that they exist in the smallest and homeliest of every-day cares, it is only because your mind has not been sufficiently developed by experience to find poetry and romance in every act of self-control and self-denial.

There is, I believe, a general idea that genius and intellectual pursuits are inconsistent with the minute observations and cares that I have been recommending; and by nature perhaps they are so. The memoirs of great men are filled with anecdotes of their incompetency for commonplace duties, their want of observation, their indifference to details: you may observe, however, that such men were great in learning alone; they never exhibited that union of action and thought which is essential to constitute a heroic character.

We read that a Charlemagne and a Wallenstein could stoop, in the midst of their vast designs and splendid successes, to the cares of selling the eggs of their poultry-yard, [68] and of writing minute directions for its more skilful management.[69] A proper attention to the repair of the strings of your gowns or the ribbons of your shoes could scarcely be farther, in comparison, beneath your notice.

The story of Sir Isaac Newton's cat and kitten has often made you smile; but it is no smile of admiration: such absence of mind is simply ridiculous. If, indeed, you should refer to its cause you may by reflection ascertain that the concentration of thought secured by such abstraction, in his particular case, may have been of use to mankind in general; but you must at the same time feel that he, even a Sir Isaac Newton, would have been a greater man had his genius been more universal, had it extended from the realms of thought into those of action.



With women the same case is much stronger; their minds are seldom, if ever, employed on subjects the importance and difficulty of which might make amends for such concentration of thought as would necessarily, except in first-rate minds, produce abstraction and inattention to homely every-day duties.



Page 69

Even in the case of a genius, one of most rare occurrence, an attention to details, and thoughtfulness respecting them, though certainly more difficult, is proportionally more admirable than in ordinary women.

It was said of the wonderful Elizabeth Smith, that she equally excelled in every department of life, from the translation of the most difficult passages of the Hebrew Bible down to the making of a pudding. You should establish it as a practical truth in your mind, that, with a strong will, the intellectual powers may be turned into every imaginable direction, and lead to excellence in one as surely as in another.

Even where the strong will is wanting, and there may not be the same mechanical facility that belongs to more vigorous organizations, every really useful and necessary duty is still within the reach of all intellectual women. Among these, you can scarcely doubt that the science of economy, and that important part of it which consists in taking care of your clothes, is within the power of every woman who does not look upon it as beneath her notice. This I suppose you do not, as I know you to take a rational and conscientious view of the minor duties of life, and that you are anxious to fulfil those of exactly "that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call you." [70]

I must not close this letter without adverting to an error into which those of your sanguine temperament would be the most likely to fall.

You will, perhaps—for it is a common progress—run from one extreme to another, and from having expended too large a proportion of your income on personal decoration, you may next withdraw even necessary attention from it. "All must be given to the poor," will be the decision of your own impulses and of over-strained views of duty.

This, however, is, in an opposite direction, quitting the station of life in which God has placed you, as much as those do who indulge in an expenditure of double their income. Your dressing according to your station in life is as much in accordance with the will of God concerning you, as your living in a drawing-room instead of a kitchen, in a spacious mansion instead of a peasant's cottage. Besides, as you are situated, there is another consideration with respect to your dress which must not be passed over in silence. The allowance you receive is expressly for the purpose of enabling you to dress properly, suitably, and respectably; and if you do not in the first place fulfil the purpose of the donor, you are surely guilty of a species of dishonesty. You have no right to indulge personal feeling, or gratify a mistaken sense of duty, by an expenditure of money for a different purpose from that for which it was given to you; nor even, were your money exclusively your own, would you have a right to disregard the opinions of your friends by dressing in a different manner from them, or from what they consider suitable for you. If you thus err, they will neither allow



Page 70

you to exercise any influence over them, nor will they be at all prejudiced in favour of the, it may be, stricter religious principles which you profess, when they find them lead to unnecessary singularity, and to disregard of the feelings and wishes of those around you. It is therefore your duty to dress like a lady, and not like a peasant girl,—not only because the former is the station in life God himself has chosen for you, but also because you have no right to lay out other people's money on your own devices; and, lastly, because it is your positive duty, in this as in all other points, to consult and consider the reasonable wishes and opinions of those with whom God has connected you by the ties of blood or friendship.

FOOTNOTES:

[65] 1 Tim. vi. 10.

[66] The saying of the "Great Captain," Gonsalvo di Cordova.

[67] Job xxix. 13.

[68] Montesquieu. *Esprit des Lois*.

[69] Colonel Mitchell's *Life of Wallenstein*.

[70] *The Church Catechism*.

LETTER VIII.

THE CULTIVATION OF THE MIND.

In writing to you upon the subject of mental cultivation, it would seem scarcely necessary to dwell for a moment on its advantages; it would seem as if, in this case at least, I might come at once to the point, and state to you that which appears to me the best manner of attaining the object in view. Experience, however, has shown me, that even into such minds as yours, doubts will often obtain admittance, sometimes from without, sometimes self-generated, as to the advantages of intellectual education for women. The time will come, even if you have never yet momentarily experienced it, when, saddened by the isolation of superiority, and witnessing the greater love or the greater prosperity acquired by those who have limited or neglected intellects, you may be painfully susceptible to the slighting remarks on clever women, learned ladies, &c., which will often meet your ear,—remarks which you will sometimes hear from uneducated women, who may seem to be in the enjoyment of much more peace and happiness than yourself, sometimes from well-educated and sensible men, whose



opinions you justly value. I fear, in short, that even you may at times be tempted to regret having directed your attention and devoted your early days to studies which have only attracted envy or suspicion; that even you may some day or other attribute to the pursuits which are now your favourite ones those disappointments and unpleasantnesses which doubtless await your path, as they do that of every traveller along life's weary way. This inconsistency may indeed be temporary; in a character such as yours it must be temporary, for you will feel, on reflection, that nothing which others have gained, even were your loss of the same occasioned by your devotion to your favourite pursuits, could make amends



Page 71

to you for their sacrifice. A mind that is really susceptible of culture must either select a suitable employment for the energies it possesses, or they will find some dangerous occupation for themselves, and eat away the very life they were intended to cherish and strengthen. I should wish you to be spared, however, the humiliation of even temporary regrets, which, at the very least, must occasion temporary loss of precious hours, and a decrease of that diligent labour for improvement which can only be kept in an active state of energy by a deep and steady conviction of its nobleness and utility; further still, (which would be worse than the temporary consequences to yourself,) at such times of despondency you might be led to make admissions to the disadvantage of mental cultivation, and to depreciate those very habits of study and self-improvement which it ought to be one of the great objects of your life to recommend to all. You might thus discourage some young beginner in the path of self-cultivation, who, had it not been for you, might have cheered a lonely way by the indulgence of healthy, natural tastes, besides exercising extensive beneficial influence over others. Your incautious words, doubly dangerous because they seem to be the result of experience, may be the cause of such a one's remaining in useless and wearisome, because uninterested idleness. That you may guard the more successfully against incurring such responsibilities, you should without delay begin a long and serious consideration, founded on thought and observation, both as to the relative advantages of ignorance and knowledge. When your mind has been fully made up on the point, after the careful examination I recommend to you, you must lay your opinion aside on the shelf, as it were, and suffer it no longer to be considered as a matter of doubt, or a subject for discussion. You can then, when temporarily assailed by weak-minded fears, appeal to the former dispassionate and unprejudiced decision of your unbiassed mind. To one like you, there is no safer appeal than that from a present excited, and consequently prejudiced self, to another dispassionate, and consequently wiser self. Let us then consider in detail what foundation there may be for the remarks that are made to the depreciation of a cultivated intellect, and illustrate their truth or falsehood by the examples of those upon whose habits of life we have an opportunity of exercising our observation.

First, then, I would have you consider the position and the character of those among your unmarried friends who are unintellectual and uncultivated, and contrast them with those who have by education strengthened natural powers and developed natural capabilities: among these, it is easy for you to observe whose society is the most useful and the most valued, whose opinion is the most respected, whose example is the most frequently held up to imitation,—I mean by those alone whose esteem is worth possessing. The giddy, the



Page 72

thoughtless, and the uneducated may indeed manifest a decided preference for the society of those whose pursuits and conversation are on a level with their own capacity; but you surely cannot regret that they should even manifestly (which however is not often ventured upon) shrink from your society. "Like to like" is a proverb older than the time of Dante, whose answer it was to Can della Scala, when reproached by him that the society of the most frivolous persons was more sought after at court than that of the poet and philosopher. "Given the amuser, the amusee must also be given." [71] You surely ought not to regret the *cordon sanitaire* which protects you from the utter weariness, the loss of time, I might almost add of temper, which uncongenial society would entail upon you. In the affairs of life, you must generally make up your mind as to the good that deserves your preference, and resolutely sacrifice the inferior advantage which cannot be enjoyed with the greater one. You must consequently give up all hope of general popularity, if you desire that your society should be sought and valued, your opinion respected, your example followed, by those whom you really love and admire, by the wise and good, by those whose society you can yourself in your turn enjoy. You must not expect that at the same time you should be the favourite and chosen companion of the worthless, the frivolous, the uneducated; you ought not, indeed, to desire it. Crush in its very birth that mean ambition for popularity which might lead you on to sacrifice time and tastes, alas! sometimes even principles, to gain the favour and applause of those whose society ought to be a weariness to you. Nothing, besides, is more injurious to the mind than a studied sympathy with mediocrity: nay, without any "study," any conscious effort to bring yourself down to their level, your mind must insensibly become weakened and tainted by a surrounding atmosphere of ignorance and stupidity, so that you would gradually become unfitted for that superior society which you are formed to love and appreciate. It is quite a different case when the dispensations of Providence and the exercise of social duties bring you into contact with uncongenial minds. Whatever is a duty will be made safe to you: it can only be from your own voluntary selection that any unsuitable association becomes injurious and dangerous. Notwithstanding, however, that it may be laid down as a general rule that the wise will prefer the society of the wise, the educated that of the educated, it sometimes happens that highly intellectual and cultivated persons select, absolutely by their own choice, the frivolous and the ignorant for their constant companions, though at the same time they may refer to others for counsel, and direction, and sympathy. Is this choice, however, made on account of the frivolity and ignorance of the persons so selected? I am sure it is not. I am sure, if you inquire into every case of this kind, you will



Page 73

see for yourself that it is not. Such persons are thus preferred, sometimes on account of the fairness of their features, sometimes on account of the sweetness of their temper, sometimes for the lightheartedness which creates an atmosphere of joyousness around them, and insures their never officiously obtruding the cares and anxieties of this life upon their companions. Do not, then, attribute to want of intellect those attractions which only need to be combined with intellect to become altogether irresistible, but which, however, I must confess, it may have an insensible influence in destroying. For instance, the sweetness, of the temper is seldom increased by increased refinement of mind; on the contrary, the latter serves to quicken susceptibility and render perception more acute; and therefore, unless it is guarded by an accompanying increase of self-control, it will naturally produce an alteration for the worse in the temper. This is one point. For the next, personal beauty may be injured by want of exercise, neglect of health, or of due attention to becoming apparel, which errors are often the results of an injudicious absorption in intellectual pursuits. Lastly, a thoughtful nature and habit of mind must of course induce a quicker perception, and a more frequent contemplation of the sorrows and dangers of this mortal life, than the volatile and thoughtless nature and habit of mind have any temptation to; and thus persons of the former class are often induced, sometimes usefully, sometimes unnecessarily, but perhaps always disagreeably, to intrude the melancholy subjects of their own meditations upon the persons with whom they associate, often making their society evidently unpleasant, and, if possible, carefully avoided. It is, however, unjust to attribute any of the inconveniences just enumerated to those intellectual pursuits which, if properly pursued, would prove effectual in improving, nay, even in bestowing, intelligence, prudence, tact, and self-control, and thus preserving from those very inconveniences to which I have referred above. Be it your care to win praise and approbation for the habits of life you have adopted, by showing that such are the effects they produce in you. By your conduct you may prove that, if your perceptions have been quickened and your sensibilities rendered more acute, you have at the same time, and by the same means, acquired sufficient self-control to prevent others from suffering ill-effects from that which would in such a case be only a fancied improvement in yourself. Further, let it be your care to bestow more attention than before on that external form which you are now learning to estimate as the living, breathing type of that which is within. Finally, while your increased thoughtfulness and the developed powers of your reason will give you an insight in dangers and evils which others never dream of, be careful to employ your knowledge only for the improvement or preservation of the happiness



Page 74

of your friends. Guard within your own breast, however you may long for the relief of giving a free vent to your feelings, any sorrows or any apprehensions that cannot be removed or obviated by their revelation. Thus will you unite in yourself the combined advantages of the frivolous and intellectual; your society will be loved and sought after as much as that of the first can be, (only, however, by the wise and good—my assertion extends no further,) and you will at the same time be respected, consulted, and imitated, as the clever and educated can alone be.

I have hitherto spoken only of the unmarried among your acquaintance: let us now turn to the wives and mothers, and observe, with pity, the position of her, who, though she may be well and fondly loved, is felt at the same time to be incapable of bestowing sympathy or counsel. It is indeed, perhaps, the wife and mother who is the best loved who will at the same time be made the most deeply to feel her powerlessness to appreciate, to advise, or to guide: the very anxiety to hide from her that it is the society, the opinion, and the sympathy of others which is really valued, because it alone can be appreciative, will make her only the more sensibly aware that she is deficient in the leading qualities that inspire respect and produce usefulness.

She must constantly feel her unfitness to take any part in the society that suits the taste of her more intellectual husband and children. She must observe that they are obliged to bring down their conversation to her level, that they are obliged to avoid, out of deference to, and affection for her, all those varied topics which make social intercourse a useful as well as an agreeable exercise of the mental powers, an often more improving arena of friendly discussion than perhaps any professed debating society could be. No such employment of social intercourse can, however, be attempted when one of the heads of the household is uneducated and unintellectual. The weather must form the leading, and the only safe topic of conversation; for the gossip of the neighbourhood, commented on in the freedom and security of family life, imparts to all its members a petty censoriousness of spirit that can never afterwards be entirely thrown off. Then the education of the children of such a mother as I have described must be carried on under the most serious disadvantages. Money in abundance may be at her disposal, but that is of little avail when she has no power of forming a judgment as to the abilities of the persons so lavishly paid for forming the minds of the children committed to their charge: the precious hours of their youth will thus be very much wasted; and when self-education, in some few cases, comes in time to repair these early neglects, there must be reproachful memories of that ignorance which placed so many needless difficulties in the path to knowledge and advancement.



Page 75

It is not, however, those alone who are bound by the ties of wife and mother, whose intellectual cultivation may exercise a powerful influence in their social relations: each woman in proportion to her mental and moral qualifications possesses a useful influence over all those within her reach. Moral excellence alone effects much: the amiable, the loving, and the unselfish almost insensibly dissuade from evil, and persuade to good, those who have the good fortune to be within the reach of such soothing influences. Their persuasions are, however, far more powerful when vivacity, sweetness, and affection are given weight to by strong natural powers of mind, united with high cultivation. Of all the "talents" committed to our stewardship, none will require to be so strictly accounted for as those of intellect. The influence that we might have acquired over our fellow-men, thus winning them over to think of and practise "all things lovely and of good report," if it be neglected, is surely a sin of deeper dye than the misemployment of mere money. The disregard of those intellectual helps which we might have bestowed on others, and thus have extensively benefited the cause of religion, one of whose most useful handmaids is mental cultivation, will surely be among the most serious of the sins of omission that will swell our account at the last day. The intellectual Dives will not be punished only for the misuse of his riches, as in the case of a Byron or a Shelley; the neglect of their improvement, by employing them for the good of others, will equally disqualify him for hearing the final commendation of "Well done, good and faithful servant." [72] This, however, is not a point on which I need dwell at any length while writing to you: you are aware, fully, I believe, of the responsibilities entailed upon you by the natural powers you possess. It is from worldly motives of dissuasion, and not from any ignorance with regard to that which you know to be your duty, that you may be at times induced to slacken your exertions in the task of self-improvement. You will not be easily persuaded that it is not your duty to educate yourself; the doubt that will be more easily instilled into your mind will be respecting the possible injury to your happiness or worldly advancement by the increase of your knowledge and the improvement of your mind. Look, then, again around you, and see whether the want of employment confers happiness, carefully distinguishing, however, between that happiness which results from natural constitution and that which results from acquired habits. It is true that many of the careless, thoughtless girls you are acquainted with enjoy more happiness, such as they are capable of, in mornings and evenings spent at their worsted-work, than the most diligent cultivation of the intellect can ever insure to you. But the question is, not whether the butterfly can contentedly dispense with the higher instincts of the industrious, laborious, and useful



Page 76

bee, but whether the superior creature could content itself with the insipid and objectless pursuits of the lower one. The mind requires more to fill it in proportion to the largeness of its grasp: hope not, therefore, that you could find either their peace or their satisfaction in the purse-netting, embroidering lives of your thoughtless companions. Even to them, be sure, hours of deep weariness must come: no human being, whatever her degree on the scale of mind, is capable of being entirely satisfied with a life without object and without improvement. Remember, however, that it is not at all by the comparative contentedness of their mere animal existence that you can test the qualifications of a habit of life to constitute your own happiness; that must stand on a far different basis.

In the case of a very early marriage, there may be indeed no opportunity for the weariness of which I have above spoken. The uneducated and uncultivated girl who is removed from the school-room to undertake the management of a household may not fall an early victim to *ennui*; that fate is reserved for her later days. Household details (which are either degrading or elevating according as they are attended to as the favourite occupations of life, or, on the other hand, skilfully managed as one of its inevitable and important duties) often fill the mind even more effectually to the exclusion of better things than worsted-work or purse-netting would have done. The young wife, if ignorant and uneducated, soon sinks from the companion of her husband, the guide and example of her children, into the mere nurse and housekeeper. A clever upper-servant would, in nine cases out of ten, fulfil all the offices which engross her time and interest a thousand times better than she can herself. For her, however, even for the nurse and housekeeper, the time of *ennui* must come; for her it is only deferred. The children grow up, and are scattered to a distance; requiring no further mechanical cares, and neither employing time nor exciting the same kind of interest as formerly. The mere household details, however carefully husbanded and watchfully self-appropriated, will not afford amusement throughout the whole day; and, utterly unprovided with subjects for thought or objects of occupation, life drags on a wearisome and burdensome chain. We have all seen specimens of this, the most hopeless and pitiable kind of *ennui*, when the time of acquiring habits of employment, and interest in intellectual pursuits is entirely gone, and resources can neither be found in the present, or hoped for in the future. Hard is the fate of those who are bound to such victims by the ties of blood and duty. They must suffer, secondhand, all the annoyances which *ennui* inflicts on its wretched victims. No natural sweetness of temper can long resist the depressing influence of dragging on from day to day an uninterested, unemployed existence; and besides, those who can find no occupation



Page 77

for themselves will often involuntarily try to lessen their own discomfort by disturbing the occupations of others. This species of *ennui*, of which the sufferings begin in middle-life and often last to extreme old age, (as they have no tendency to shorten existence,) is far more pitiable than that from which the girl or the young woman suffers before her matron-life begins. Then hope is always present to cheer her on to endurance; and there is, besides, at that time, a consciousness of power and energy to change the habits of life into such as would enable her to brave all future fears of *ennui*. It is of great importance, however, that these habits should be acquired immediately; for though they may be equally possible of acquisition in the later years of youth, there are in the mean time other dangerous resources which may tempt the unoccupied and uninterested girl into their excitements. Those whose minds are of too active and vivacious a nature to live on without an object, may too easily find one in the dangerous and selfish amusements of coquetry—in the seeking for admiration, and its enjoyment when obtained. The very woman who might have been the most happy herself in the enjoyment of intellectual pursuits, and the most extensively useful to others, is often the one who, from misdirected energies and feeling, will pursue most eagerly, be most entirely engrossed by, the delights of being admired and loved by those to whom in return she is entirely indifferent. Having once acquired the habit of enjoying the selfish excitement, the simple, safe, and ennobling employments of self-cultivation, of improving others, are laid aside for ever, because the power of enjoying them is lost. Do not be offended if I say that this is the fate I fear for you. At the present moment, the two paths of life are open before you; youth, excitement, the example of your companions, the easiness and the pleasure of the worldling's career, make it full of attractions for you. Besides, your conscience does not perhaps speak with sufficient plainness as to its being the career of the worldling; you can find admirers enough, and give up to them all the young, fresh interests of your active mind, all the precious time of your early youth, without ever frequenting the ball-room, or the theatre, or the race-course,—nay, even while professedly avoiding them on principle: we know, alas! that the habits of the selfish and heartless coquette are by no means incompatible with an outward profession of religion.

It is to save you from any such dangers that I earnestly press upon you the deliberate choice and immediate adoption of a course of life in which the systematic, conscientious improvement of your mind should serve as an efficacious preservation from all dangerously exciting occupations. You should prepare yourself for this deliberate choice by taking a clear and distinct view of your object and your motives. Can you say with sincerity that they are such as the following,—that

Page 78

of acquiring influence over your fellow-creatures, to be employed for the advancement of their eternal interests—that of glorifying God, and of obtaining the fulfilment of that promise, “They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.”[73] If this be the case, your choice must be a right and a noble one; and you will never have reason to repent of it, either in this world or the next. Among the collateral results of this conscientious choice will be a certain enjoyment of life, more independent of either health or external circumstances than any other can be, and the lofty self-respect arising from a consciousness of never having descended to unworthy methods of amusement and excitement.

To attain, however, to the pleasures of intellectual pursuits, and to acquire from them the advantages of influence and respect, is quite a distinct thing from the promiscuous and ill-regulated habits of reading pursued by most women. Women who read at all, generally read more than men; but, from the absence of any intellectual system, they neither acquire well-digested information, nor, what is of far more importance, are the powers of their mind strengthened by exercise. I have known women read for six hours a day, and, after all, totally incapable of enlightening the inquirer upon any point of history or literature; far less would they be competent to exercise any process of reasoning, with relation either to the business of life or the occurrences of its social intercourse. How many difficulties and annoyances in the course of every-day life might be avoided altogether if women were early exercised in the practice of bringing their reasoning powers to bear upon the small duties and the petty trials that await every hour of our existence! Their studies are altogether useless, unless they are pursued with the view of acquiring a sounder judgment, and quicker and more accurate perceptions of the every-day details of business and duty. That knowledge is worse than useless which does not lead to wisdom. To women, more especially, as their lives can never be so entirely speculative as those of a few learned men may justifiably be, the great object in study is the manner in which they can best bring to bear each acquisition of knowledge upon the improvement of their own character or that of others. The manner in which they may most effectually promote the welfare of their fellow-creatures, and how, as the most effectual means to that end, they can best contribute to their daily and hourly happiness and improvement,—these, and such as these, ought to be the primary objects of all intellectual culture. Mere reading would never accomplish this; mere reading is no more an intellectual employment than worsted-work or purse-netting. It is true that none of these latter employments are without their uses; they may all occupy the mind in some degree, and soothe it, if it were only by creating a partial distraction from the perpetual contemplation of petty irritating



Page 79

causes of disquiet. But while we acknowledge that they are all good in their way for people who can attain nothing better, we must be careful not to fall into the mistake of confounding the best of them, *viz. mere* reading, with intellectual pursuits: if we do so, the latter will be involved in the depreciation that often falls upon the former when it is found neither to improve the mind or the character, nor to provide satisfactory sources of enjoyment.

There is a great deal of truth in the well-known assertion of Hobbes, however paradoxical it may at first appear: "If I had read as much as others, I should be as ignorant." One cannot but feel its applicability in the case of some of our acquaintance, who have been for years mere readers at the rate of five or six hours a day. One of these same hours daily well applied would have made them more agreeable companions and more useful members of society than a whole life of their ordinary reading.

There must be a certain object of attainment, or there will be no advance: unless we have decided what the point is that we desire to reach, we never can know whether the wind blows favourably for us or not.

In my next letter, I mean to enter fully into many details as to the best methods of study; but during the remainder of this, I shall confine myself to a general view of the nature of that foundation which must first be laid, before any really valuable or durable superstructure can be erected.

The first point, then, to which I wish your attention to be directed is the improvement of the mind itself,—point of far more importance than the furniture you put into it. This improvement can only be effected by exercising deep thought with respect to all your reading, assimilating the ideas and the facts provided by others until they are blended into oneness with the forms of your own mind.

During your hours of study, it is of the utmost importance that no page should ever be perused without carefully subjecting its contents to the thinking process of which I have spoken: unless your intellect is actively employed while you are professedly studying, your time is worse than wasted, for you are acquiring habits of idleness, that will be most difficult to lay aside.

You should always be engaged in some work that affords considerable exercise to the mind—some book over the sentences of which you are obliged to pause, to ponder—some kind of study that will cause the feeling of almost physical fatigue; when, however, this latter sensation comes on, you must rest; the brain is of too delicate a texture to bear the slightest over-exertion with impunity.[74] Premature decay of its powers, and accompanying bodily weakness and suffering, will inflict upon you a severe penalty for



any neglect of the symptoms of mental exhaustion.[75] Your mind, however, like your body, ought to be exercised to the very verge of fatigue; you cannot otherwise be certain that there has been exercise sufficient to give increased strength and energy to the mental or physical powers.



Page 80

The more vigorous such exercise is, the shorter will be the time you can support it. Perhaps even an hour of close thinking would be too much for most women; the object, however, ought not to be so much the quantity as the quality of the exercise. If your peculiarly delicate and sensitive organization cannot support more than a quarter of an hour's continuous and concentrated thought, you must content yourself with that. Experience will soon prove to you that even the few minutes thus employed will give you a great superiority over the six-hours-a-day readers of your acquaintance, and will serve as a solid and sufficient foundation for all the lighter superstructure which you will afterwards lay upon it. This latter, in its due place, I should consider as of nearly as much importance as the foundation itself; for, keeping steadily in view that usefulness is to be the primary object of all your studies, you must devote much more time and attention to the embellishing, because refining branches of literature, than would be necessary for those whose office is not so peculiarly that of soothing and pleasing as woman's is. Even these lighter studies, however, must be subjected to the same reflective process as the severer ones, or they will never become an incorporate part of the mind itself: they will, on the contrary, if this process is neglected, stand out, as the knowledge of all uneducated people does, in abrupt and unharmonizing prominence.

It is not to be so much your object to acquire the power of quoting poetry or prose, or to be acquainted with the names of the authors of celebrated fictions and their details, as to be imbued with the spirit of heroism, generosity, self-sacrifice,—in short, the practical love of the beautiful which every universally-admired fiction, whether it have a professedly moral tendency or not, is calculated to excite. The refined taste, the accurate perceptions, the knowledge of the human heart, and the insight into character, which intellectual culture can highly improve, even if it cannot create, are to be the principal results as well as the greatest pleasures to which you are to look forward. In study, as in every other important pursuit, the immediate results—those that are most tangible and encouraging to the faint and easily disheartened—are exactly those which are least deserving of anxiety. A couple of hours' reading of poetry in the morning might qualify you to act the part of oracle that very evening to a whole circle of inquirers; it might enable you to tell the names, and dates, and authors of a score of remarkable poems: and this, besides, is a species of knowledge which every one can appreciate. It is not, however, comparable in kind to the refinement of mind, the elevation of thought, the deepened sense of the beautiful, which a really intellectual study of the same works would impart or increase. I do not wish to depreciate the good offices of the memory; it is very valuable as a handmaid to the higher



Page 81

powers of the intellect. I have, however, generally observed that where much attention has been devoted to the recollection of names, facts, dates, &c., the higher species of intellectual cultivation have been neglected: attention to them, on the other hand, would never involve any neglect of the advantages of memory; for a cultivated intellect can suggest to itself a thousand associative links by which it can be assisted and rendered much more extensively useful than a mere verbal memory could ever be. The more of these links (called by Coleridge hooks-and-eyes) you can invent for yourself, the more will your memory become an intellectual faculty. By such means, also, you can retain possession of all the information with which your reading may furnish you, without paying such exclusive attention to those tangible and immediate results of study as would deprive you of the more solid and permanent ones. These latter consist, as I said before, in the improvement of the mind itself, and not in its furniture. A modern author has remarked, that the improvement of the mind is like the increase of money from compound interest in a bank, as every fresh increase, however trifling, serves as a new link with which to connect still further acquisitions. This remark is strikingly illustrative of the value of an intellectual kind of memory. Every new idea will serve as a "hook-and-eye," with which you can fasten together the past and the future; every new fact intellectually remembered will serve as an illustration of some formerly-established principle, and, instead of burdening you with the separate difficulty of remembering itself, will assist you in remembering other things.

It is a universal law, that action is in inverse proportion to power; and therefore the deeply-thinking mind will find a much greater difficulty in drawing out its capabilities on short notice, and arranging them in the most effective position, than a mind of mere cleverness, of merely acquired, and not assimilated knowledge. This difficulty, however, need not be permanent, though at first it is inevitable. A woman's mind, too, is less liable to it; as, however thoughtful her nature may be, this thoughtfulness is seldom strengthened by habit. She is seldom called upon to concentrate the powers of her mind on any intellectual pursuits that require intense and long-continuous thought. The few moments of intense thought which I recommend to you will never add to your thoughtfulness of nature any habits that will require serious difficulty to overcome. It is also, unless a man be in public life, of more importance to a woman than to him to possess action, *viz.* great readiness in the use and disposal of whatever intellectual powers she may possess. Besides this, you must remember that a want of quickness and facility in recollection, of ease and distinctness in expression, is quite as likely to arise from desultory and wandering habits of thought as from the slowness referable to deep reflection. Most people find difficulty in forcing their thoughts to concentrate themselves on any given subject, or in afterwards compelling them to take a comprehensive glance of every feature of that subject. Both these processes require much the same habits of mind: the latter, perhaps, though apparently the more discursive in its nature, demands a still greater degree of concentration than the former.



Page 82

When the mind is set in motion, it requires a stronger exertion to confine its movements within prescribed limits than when it is steadily fixed on one given point. For instance, it would be easier to meditate on the subject of patriotism, bringing before the mind every quality of the heart and head that this virtue would have a tendency to develop, than to take in, at one comprehensive glance,[76] the different qualities of those several individuals who have been most remarked for the virtue. Unless the thoughts were under strong and habitual control, they would infallibly wander to other peculiarities of these same individuals, unconnected with the given subject, to curious facts in their lives, to contemporary characters, &c.; thus loitering by the way-side in amusing, but here unprofitable reflection: for every exercise of thought like that which I have described is only valuable in proportion to the degree of accuracy with which we can contemplate with one instantaneous glance, laid out upon a map as it were, those features *only* belonging to the given subject, and keeping out of view all foreign ones. There is perhaps no faculty of the mind more susceptible of evident, as it were tangible, improvement than this: besides, the exercise of mind which it procures us is one of the highest intellectual pleasures; you should therefore immediately and perseveringly devote your efforts and attention to seek out the best mode of cultivating it. Even the reading of books which require deep and continuous thought is only a preparation for this higher exercise of the faculties—a useful, indeed a necessary preparation, because it promotes the habit of fixing the attention and concentrating the powers of the mind on any given point. In assimilating the thoughts of others, however, with your own mind and memory, the mind itself remains nearly passive; it is as the wax that receives the impression, and must for this purpose be in a suitable state of impressibility. In exact proportion to the suitability of this state are the clearness and the beauty of the impression; but even when most true and most deep, its value is extrinsic and foreign: it is only when the mind begins to act for itself and weaves out of its own materials a new and native manufacture, that the real intellectual existence can be said to commence. While, therefore, I repeat my advice to you, to devote some portion of every day to such reading as will require the strongest exertion of your powers of thought, I wish, at the same time, to remind you that even this, the highest species of *reading*, is only to be considered as a means to an end: though productive of higher and nobler enjoyments than the unintellectual can conceive, it is nothing more than the stepping-stone to the genuine pleasures of pure intellect, to the ennobling sensation of directing, controlling, and making the most elevated use of the powers of an immortal mind.



Page 83

To woman, the power of abstracted thought, and the enjoyment derived from it, is even more valuable than to man. His path lies in active life; and the earnest craving for excitement, for action, which is the characteristic of all powerful natures, is in man easily satisfied: it is satisfied in the sphere of his appointed duty; "he must go forth, and resolutely dare." Not so the woman, whose scene of action is her quiet home: her virtues must be passive ones; and with every qualification for successful activity, she is often compelled to chain down her vivid imagination to the most monotonous routine of domestic life. When she is entirely debarred from external activity, a restlessness of nature, that can find no other mode of indulgence, will often invent for itself imaginary trials and imaginary difficulties: hence the petty quarrels, the mean jealousies, which disturb the peace of many homes that might have been tranquil and happy if the same activity of thought and feeling had been early directed into right channels. A woman who finds real enjoyment in the improvement of her mind will neither have time nor inclination for tormenting her servants and her family; an avocation in which many really affectionate and professedly religious women exhaust those superfluous energies which, under wise direction, might have dispensed peace and happiness instead of disturbance and annoyance. A woman who has acquired proper control over her thoughts, and can find enjoyment in their intellectual exercise, will have little temptation to allow them to dwell on mean and petty grievances. That admirable Swedish proverb, "It is better to rule your house with your head than with your heels," will be exemplified in all her practice. Her well-regulated and comprehensive mind (and comprehensiveness of mind is as necessary to the skilful management of a household as to the government of an empire) will be able to contrive such systems of domestic arrangement as will allot exactly the suitable works at the suitable times to each member of the establishment: no one will be over-worked, no one idle; there will not only be a place for every thing, and every thing in its place, but there will also be a time for every thing, and every thing will have its allotted time. Such a system once arranged by a master-mind, and still superintended by a steady and intelligent, but not *incessant* inspection, raises the character of the governed as well as that of her who governs: they are never brought into collision with each other; and the inferior, whose manual expertness may far exceed that to which the superior has even the capability of attaining, will nevertheless look up with admiring respect to those powers of arrangement, and that steady and uncapriciously-exerted authority, which so facilitate and lighten the task of obedience and dependence. This mode of managing a household, even if they found it possible, would of course be disliked by those who, having no higher resources, would find the day hang heavy on their hands unless they watched all the details of household work, and made every action of every servant result from their own immediate interference, instead of from an enlarged and uniformly operating system.

Page 84

This subject has brought me back to the point from which I began,—the *practical* utility of a cultivated intellect, and the additional power and usefulness it confers,—raising its possessor above all the mean and petty cares of daily life, and enabling her to impart ennobling influences to its most trifling details.

The power of thought, which I have so earnestly recommended you to cultivate, is even still more practical, and still more useful, when considered relatively to the most important business of life—that of religion. Prayer and meditation, and that communion with the unseen world which imparts a foretaste of its happiness and glory, are enjoyed and profited by in proportion to the power of controlling the thoughts and of exercising the mind. Having a firm trust, that to you every other object is considered subordinate to that of advancement in the spiritual life, it must be a very important consideration whether, and how far, the self-education you may bestow on yourself will help you towards its attainment. In this point of view there can be no doubt that the mental cultivation recommended in this letter has a much more advantageous influence upon your religious life than any other manner of spending your time. Besides the many collateral tendencies of such pursuits to favour that growth in grace which I trust will ever remain the principal object of your desires, experience will soon show you that every improvement in the reflective powers, every additional degree of control over the movements of the mind, may find an immediate exercise in the duties of religion.

The wandering thoughts which are habitually excluded from your hours of study will not be likely to intrude frequently or successfully during your hours of devotion; the habit of concentrating all the powers of your mind on one particular subject, and then developing all its features and details, will require no additional effort for the pious heart to direct it into the lofty employments of meditation on eternal things and communion with our God and Saviour: at the same time, the employments of prayer and meditation will in their turn react upon your merely secular studies, and facilitate your progress in them by giving you habits of singleness of mind and steadiness of mental purpose.

FOOTNOTES:

[71] Carlyle.

[72] Matt. xxv. 23.

[73] Dan. xii. 3.

[74] “The vessel whose rupture occasioned the paralysis was so minute and so slightly affected by the circulation, that it could have been ruptured only by the over-action of the mind”—*Bishop Jebb's Life*.



[75] “This is nature’s law; she will never see her children wronged. If the mind which rules the body, ever forgets itself so far as to trample upon its slave, the slave is never generous enough to forgive the injury but will rise and smite its oppressor. Thus has many a monarch been dethroned.”—*Longfellow*.



Page 85

[76] It is the theory of Locke, that the angels have all their knowledge spread out before them, as in a map,—all to be seen together at one glance.

LETTER IX.

THE CULTIVATION OF THE MIND

(Continued)

In continuation of my last letter, I shall proceed at once to the minor details of study, and suggest for your adoption such practices as others by experience have found conducive to improvement. Not that one person can lay down any rules for another that might in every particular be safely followed: we must, each for ourselves, experimentalize long and variously upon our own mind, before we can understand the mode of treatment best suited to it; and we may, perhaps, in the progress of such experiments, derive as much benefit from our mistakes themselves as if the object of our experiments had been at once attained. It is not, however, from wilful mistakes, or from deliberate ignorance, that we ever derive profit. Instead, therefore, of striking out entirely new plans for yourself, in which time and patience and even hope may be exhausted, I should advise you to listen for direction to the suggestions of those who by more than mere profession have frequented the road upon which you are anxious to make a rapid progress. In books you may find much that is useful; from the conversation of those who have been self-educated you may receive still greater assistance,—as the advice thus personally addressed must of course be more discriminating and special. For this latter reason, in all that I am now about to write, I keep in view the peculiar character and formation of your mind. I do not address the world in general, who would profit little by the course of education here recommended: I only write to my Unknown Friend.

In the first place, I should advise, as of primary importance, the laying down of a regular system of employment. Impose upon yourself the duty of getting through so much work every day; even, if possible, lay down a plan as to the particular period of the day in which each occupation is to be attended to; many otherwise wasted moments would be saved by having arranged beforehand that which is successively to engage the attention. The great advantage of such regularity is experienced in the acknowledged truth of Lord Chesterfield's maxim: "He who has most business has most leisure." When the multiplicity of affairs to be got through absolutely necessitates the arrangement of an appointed time for each, the same habits of regularity and of undilatoriness (if I may be allowed the expression) are insensibly carried into the lighter pursuits of life. There is another important reason for the self-imposition of those systematic habits which to men of business are a necessity; it is, however, one which you cannot at all appreciate until you have experienced its importance: I refer to the advantage of being, by a self-imposed



Page 86

rule, provided with an immediate object, in which the intellectual pursuits of a woman must otherwise be deficient. I would not depreciate the mightiness of "the future;"[77] but it is evident that the human mind is so constituted as to feel that motives increase in strength as they approach in nearness; otherwise, why should it require such strong faith, and that faith a supernatural gift, to enable us to sacrifice the present gratification of a moment to the happiness of an eternity. While, therefore, you seek by earnest prayer and reverential desire to bring the future into perpetually operating force upon your principles and practice, do not, at the same time, be deterred by any superstitious fears from profiting by yourself and urging on others every immediate and temporal motive, not inconsistent with the great one, "to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever."[78]

While your principal personal object and personal gratification in your studies is to be derived from the gradual improvement of your mind and tastes, this gradual improvement will be often so imperceptible that you will need support and cheering during many weeks and months of apparently profitless mental application. Such support you may provide for yourself in the daily satisfaction resulting from having fulfilled a certain task, from having obeyed a law, though only a self-imposed one. Men, in their studies, have almost always that near and immediate object which I recommend to you to create for yourself. For them, as well as for you, the distant future of attained mental eminence and excellence is indeed the principal object. They, however, have it in their power to cheat the toil and cheer the way by many intermediate steps, which serve both as landmarks in their course and objects of interest within their immediate reach. They can almost always have some special object in view, as the result and reward of the studies of each month, or quarter, or year. They read for prizes, scholarships, fellowships, &c.; and these rewards, tangibly and actually within their reach, excite their energies and quicken their exertions.

For women there is nothing of the kind; it is therefore a useful exercise of her ingenuity to invent some substitute, however inferior to the original. For this purpose, I have never found any thing so effectual as a self-imposed system of study,—the stricter the better. It is not desirable, however, that this system should be one of very constant employment; the strictness of which I spoke only refers to its regularity. As the great object is that you should break through your rules as seldom as possible, it would be better to fix the number of your hours of occupation rather below, certainly not above, your average habits. The time that may be to spare on days in which you meet with no interruption from visitors may also be systematically disposed of: you may always have some book in hand which will be ready to fill up any unoccupied moments, without, even on these occasions, wasting your time in deliberating as to what your next employment shall be.



Page 87

You understand me, therefore, to recommend that those hours of the system which you are to impose upon yourself to employ in a certain manner are not to exceed the number you can ordinarily secure without interruption on every day of the week, exclusive of visitors, &c. &c. Every advantage pertaining to the system I recommend is much enhanced by the uniformity of its observance: indeed, it is on rigid attention to this point that its efficacy principally depends. I will now enter into the details of the system of study which, however modified by your own mind and habits, will, I hope, in some form or other, be adopted by you. The first arrangement of your time ought to be the laying apart of a certain period every day for the deepest thinking you can compel yourself to, either on or off book.

Having said so much on this point in my last letter, I should run the risk of repetition if I dwelt longer upon it here. I only mention it at all to give it again the most prominent position in your studies, and to recommend its invariably occupying a daily place in them. For every other pursuit, two or three times a week might answer as well, perhaps better, as it would be too great an interruption to devote to each only so short a period of time as could be allotted to it in a daily distribution. It may be desirable, before I take leave of the subject of your deeper studies, to mention here some of the books which will give you the most effectual aid in the formation of your mind.

Butler's Analogy will be perhaps the very best to begin with: you must not, however, flatter yourself that you in any degree understand this or other books of the same nature until you penetrate into their extreme difficulty,—until, in short, you find out that you can *not* thoroughly understand them yet. Queen Caroline, George II.'s wife, in the hope of proving to Bishop Horsley how fully she appreciated the value of the work I have just mentioned, told him that she had it constantly beside her at her breakfast-table, to read a page or two in it whenever she had an idle moment. The Bishop's reply was scarcely intended for a compliment. He said *he* could never open the book without a headache; and really a headache is in general no bad test of our having thought over a book sufficiently to enter in some degree into its real meaning: only remember, that when the headache begins the reading or the thinking must stop. As you value the long and unimpaired preservation of your powers of mind, guard carefully against any over-exertion of them.

To return to the "Analogy." It is a book of which you cannot too soon begin the study,—providing you, as it will do, at once with materials for the deepest thought, and laying a safe foundation for all future ethical studies; it is at the same time so clearly expressed, that you will have no perplexity in puzzling out the mere external form of the idea, instead of fixing all your attention on solving the



Page 88

difficulties of the thoughts and arguments themselves. Locke on the Human Understanding is a work that has probably been often recommended to you. Perhaps, if you keep steadily in view the danger of his materialistic, unpoetic, and therefore untrue philosophy, the book may do you more good than harm; it will furnish you with useful exercise for your thinking powers; and you will see it so often quoted as authority, on one side as truth, on the other as falsehood, that it may be as well you should form your own judgment of it. You should previously, however, become guarded against any dangers that might result from your study of Locke, by acquiring a thorough-knowledge of the philosophy of Coleridge. This will so approve itself to your conscience, your intellect, and your imagination, that there can be no risk of its being ever supplanted in a mind like yours by "plebeian"[79] systems of philosophy. Few have now any difficulty in perceiving the infidel tendencies of that of Locke, especially with the assistance of his French philosophic followers, (with whose writings, for the charms of style and thought, you will probably become acquainted in future years.) They have declared what the real meaning of his system is by the developments which they have proved to be its necessary consequences. Let Coleridge, then, be your previous study, and the philosophic system detailed in his various writings may serve as a nucleus, round which all other philosophy may safely enfold itself. The writings of Coleridge form an era in the history of the mind; and their progress in altering the whole character of thought, not only in this but in foreign nations, if it has been slow, (which is one of the necessary conditions of permanence,) has been already astonishingly extensive. Even those who have never heard of the name of Coleridge find their habits of thought moulded, and their perceptions of truth cleared and deepened, by the powerful influence of his master-mind,—powerful still, though it has probably only reached them through three or four interposing mediums. The proud boast of one of his descendants is amply verified: "He has given the power of vision:" and in ages yet to come, many who may unfortunately be ignorant of the very name of their benefactor will still be profiting daily, more and more, by the mental telescopes he has provided. Thus it is that many have rejoiced in having the distant brought near to them, and the confused made clear, without knowing that Jansen was the name of him who had conferred such benefits upon mankind. The immediate artist, the latest moulder of an original design, is the one whose skill is extolled and depended upon; and so it is even already in the case of Coleridge. It is those only who are intimately acquainted with him who can plainly see, that it is by the power of vision he has conferred that the really philosophic writers of the present day are enabled to give views so clear and deep on the many subjects



Page 89

that now interest the human mind. All those among modern authors who combine deep learning with an enlarged wisdom, a vivid and poetical imagination with an acute perception of the practical and the true, have evidently educated themselves in the school of Coleridge. He well deserves the name of the Christian Plato, erecting as he does, upon the ancient and long-tried foundation of that philosopher's beautiful system of intuitive truths, the various details of minor but still valuable knowledge with which the accumulated studies of four thousand intervening years have furnished us, at the same time harmonizing the whole by the all-pervading spirit of Christianity.

Coleridge is truly a Christian philosopher: at the same time, however, though it may seem a paradox, I must warn you against taking him for your guide and instructor in theology. A Socinian during all the years in which vivid and never-to-be-obliterated impressions are received, he could not entirely free himself from those rationalistic tendencies which had insensibly incorporated themselves with all his religious opinions. He afterwards became the powerful and successful defender of the saving truths which he had long denied; but it was only in cases where Arianism was openly displayed, and was to be directly opposed. He seems to have been entirely unconscious that its subtle evil tendencies, its exaltation of the understanding above the reason, its questioning, disobedient spirit, might all in his own case have insinuated themselves into his judgments on theological and ecclesiastical questions. The prejudices which are in early youth wrought into the very essence of our being are likely to be unsuspected in exact proportion to the degree of intimacy with which they are assimilated with the forms of our mind. However this may be, you will not fail to observe that, in all branches of philosophy that do not directly refer to religion, Coleridge's system of teaching is opposed to the general character of his own theological views, and that he has himself furnished the opponents of these peculiar views with the most powerful arms that can be wielded against them.

Every one of Coleridge's writings should be carefully perused more than once, more than twice; in fact, they cannot be read too often; and the only danger of such continued study would be, that in the enjoyment of finding every important subject so beautifully thought out for you, natural indolence might deter you from the comparatively laborious exercise of thinking them out for yourself. The three volumes of his "Friend," his "Church and State," his "Lay Sermons," and "Statesman's Manual," will each of them furnish you with most important present information and with inexhaustible materials for future thought.

Reid's "Inquiry into the Human Mind," and Dugald Stewart's "Philosophy of the Mind," are also books that you must carefully study. Brown's "Lectures on Philosophy" are feelingly and gracefully written; but unless you find a peculiar charm and interest in the style, there will not be sufficient compensation for the sacrifice of time so voluminous a work would involve. Those early chapters which give an account of the leading systems

of Philosophy, and some very ingenious chapters on Memory, are perhaps as much of the book as will be necessary for you to study carefully.



Page 90

The works of the German philosopher Kant will, some time hence, serve as a useful exercise of thought; and you will find it interesting as well as useful to trace the resemblances and differences between the great English and the great German philosophers, Kant and Coleridge. Locke's small work on Education contains many valuable suggestions, and Watts on the Mind is also well worthy your attention. It is quite necessary that Watts' Logic should form a part of your studies; it is written professedly for women, and with ingenious simplicity. A knowledge of the forms of Logic is useful even to women, for the purpose of sharpening and disciplining the reasoning powers.

Do not be startled when I further recommend to you Blackstone's "Commentaries" and Burlamaqui's "Treatise on Natural Law." These are books which, besides affording admirable opportunities for the exercise of both concentrated and comprehensive thought, will fill your mind with valuable ideas, and furnish it with very important information. Finally, I recommend to your unceasing and most respectful study the works of that "Prince of modern philosophers," Lord Bacon. In his great mind were united the characteristics of the two ancient, but nevertheless universal, schools of philosophy, the Aristotelic and the Platonic. It is, I believe, the only instance known of such a difficult combination. His "Essays," his "Advancement of Learning," his "Wisdom of the Ancients," you might understand and profit by, even now. Through all the course of an education, which I hope will only end with your life, you cannot do better than to keep him as your constant companion and intellectual guide.

The foregoing list of works seems almost too voluminous for any woman to make herself mistress of; but you may trust to one who has had extensive experience for herself and others, that the principle of "Nulla dies sine linea" is as useful in the case of reading as in that of painting: the smallest quantity of work daily performed will accomplish in a year's time that which at the beginning of the year would have seemed to the inexperienced a hopeless task.

As yet, I have only spoken of philosophy; there is, however, another branch of knowledge, *viz.* science, which also requires great concentration of thought, and which ought to receive some degree of attention, or you will appear, and, what would be still worse, feel, very stupid and ignorant with respect to many of the practical details of ordinary life. You are continually hearing of the powers of the lever, the screw, the wedge, of the laws of motion, &c. &c., and they are often brought forward as illustrations even on simply literary subjects. An acquaintance with these matters is also necessary to enter with any degree of interest into the wonderful exhibitions of mechanical powers which are among the prominent objects of attention in the present day. You cannot even make intelligent inquiries, and betray a graceful, because unwilling ignorance, without some degree of general knowledge of science.

Page 91

Among the numerous elementary works which make the task of self-instruction pleasant and easy, none can excel, if any have equalled, the “Scientific Dialogues” of Joyce. In these six little volumes, you will find a compendium of all preliminary knowledge; even these, however, easy as they are, require to be carefully studied. The comparison of the text with the plates, the testing for yourself the truth of each experiment, (I do not mean that you should practically test it, except in a few easy cases, for your mind has not a sufficient taste for science to compensate for the trouble,) will furnish you with very important lessons in the art of fixing your attention.

“Conversations on Natural Philosophy,” in one volume, by a lady, is nearly as simple and clear as the “Scientific Dialogues;” it will serve usefully as a successor to them. It is a great assistance to the memory to read a different work on the same subject while the first is still fresh in your mind. The sameness of the facts gives the additional force of a double impression; and the variation in the mode of stating them, always more striking when the books are the respective works of a man and of a woman, adds the force of a trebled impression, stronger than the two others, because there is in it more of the exercise of the intellect, that is, on the supposition that, in accordance with the foregoing rules, you should think over each respective statement until you have reconciled them together by ascertaining the cause of the variation.

I shall now proceed to those lighter branches of literature which are equally necessary with the preceding, and which will supply you with the current coin of the day,—very necessary for ordinary intercourse, though, in point of real value, far inferior to the bank-stock of philosophic and scientific knowledge which it is to be your chief object to acquire. History is the branch of lighter literature to which your attention should be specially directed; it provides you with illustrations for all philosophy, with excitements to heroism and elevation of character, stronger perhaps than any mere theory can ever afford. The simplest story, the most objective style of narrative, will be that best fitted to answer these purposes. Your own philosophic deductions will be much more beneficial to your intellect than any one else’s, supposing always that you are willing to make, history a really intellectual study.

Tytler’s “Elements of History” is a most valuable book, and not an unnecessary word throughout the whole. If you do not find getting by heart an insuperable difficulty, you will do well to commit every line to memory. Half a page a day of the small edition would soon lay up for you such an extent of historic learning as would serve for a foundation to all future attainments in this branch of study. Such outlines of history are a great assistance in forming the comprehensive views which are necessary on the subject of contemporaneous



Page 92

history: a glance at a chart of history, or at La Voisne's invaluable Atlas, may be allowed from time to time; but the principal arrangement ought to take place within your own mind, for the sake of both your memory and your intellect. Such outlines of history will, however, be very deficient in the interest and excitement this study ought to afford you, unless you combine with them minute details of particular periods, first, perhaps, of particular countries.

Thus I would have Rollings Ancient History succeed the cold and dry outlines of Tytler. Hume's History of England will serve the same purpose relatively to the modern portion; and for the History of France, that of Eyre Evans Crowe imparts a brilliancy to perhaps the most uninteresting of all historic records. If that is not within your reach, Millet's History of France, in four volumes, though dull enough, is a safe and useful school-room book, and may be read with profit afterwards: this, too, would possess the advantage of helping you on at the same time, or at least keeping up your knowledge of the French language.

It is desirable that all books from which you only want to acquire objective information should be read in a foreign language: you thus insensibly render yourself more permanently, and as it were habitually, acquainted with the language in question, and carry on two studies at the same time. If, however, you are not sufficiently acquainted with the language to prevent any danger of a division of attention by your being obliged to puzzle over the mere words instead of applying yourself to the meaning of the author, you must not venture upon the attempt of deriving a double species of knowledge from the same subject-matter: the effect of the history as a story or picture impressed on the mind or memory would be lost by any confusion with another object.

Sir Walter Scott's "Tales of a Grandfather" are the best history of Scotland you could read: Robertson's may come afterwards, when you have time.

Of Ireland and Wales you will learn enough from their constant connection with the affairs of England. Sismondi's History of the Italian Republics, in the Cabinet Cyclopaedia, the History of the Ottoman Empire, in Constable's Miscellany, the rapid sketches of the histories of Germany, Austria, and Prussia, in Voltaire's Universal History, will be perhaps quite sufficient for this second class of histories.

The third must enter into more particular details, and thus confer a still livelier interest upon bygone days. For instance, with reference to ancient history, you should read some of the more remarkable of Plutarch's Lives, those of Alexander, Caesar, Theseus, Themistocles, &c.; the Travels of Anacharsis, the worthy results of thirty years' hard labour of an eminent scholar:[80] the Travels of Cyrus, Telemachus, Belisarius, and Numa Pompilius, are also, though in very different degrees, useful and interesting. The plays of Corneille and Racine, Alfieri, and Metastasio, on historical subjects, will make a

double impression on your memory by the excitement of your imagination. All ought to be read about the same time that you are studying those periods of history to which they refer. This is of much importance.

Page 93

The same plan is to be pursued with reference to modern history. The brilliant detached histories of Voltaire, Louis XIV. and XV., Charles XII., and Peter the Great, ought to be read while the outlines of the general history of the same period are freshly impressed on your memory. The vivid historical pictures of De Barante are to be made the same use of: he stands perhaps unrivalled as an objective historian.

Shakspeare's historical plays are the best accompaniment to Hume's History of England. Our modern novels, too, will supply you with rich and varied information, as to the manners and characters of former times. They are a very important part of our literature, and ought to be considered essential to the completion of your circle of study. That they also may be rendered as useful as possible, they should be read at the same time with the entirely true history of the period to which they refer.

From history, I have insensibly glided into the subject of works of fiction, one which perhaps previously requires a few words of apology; for the strong recommendations with which I have pressed their study upon you may sound strangely to the ears of many worthy people. In your own enlightened and liberal mind, I do not indeed suspect the indwelling of any such exclusive prejudices as those which forbid altogether the perusal of works of fiction: such prejudices belong, perhaps, to more remote periods, to those distant times when title-pages were seen announcing "Paradise Lost, translated into prose for the benefit of those pious souls whose consciences would not permit them to read poetry." [81] This latter prejudice—that against poetry—seems, as far as my observation extends, to be entirely forgotten. Fiction in this form is now considered universally allowable; and some conscientious persons, who would not allow themselves or others the relaxation of a novel of any kind, will indulge unhesitatingly in the same sort of love-stories, rendered still more exciting through the medium of poetry. Most women, unfortunately, are incapable of carrying out the argument from one course of action into another, or even of clearly comprehending, when it is suggested to them, that whatever is wrong in prose cannot be right in poetry. In a general way you will be able to form your own judgment on this subject, by observing how much safer prose-fiction is for yourself at times, when your feelings are excited, and your mind unsettled and exhausted. A novel, even the most trifling novel of fashionable life, if it has only cleverness sufficient to engage your thoughts, would be, perhaps, a very desirable manner of spending your time at the very period that poetry would be decidedly injurious to you. Indeed, at all times, those who have vivid imaginations and strong feelings should carefully guard and sparingly indulge themselves in the perusal of poetic fictions.



Page 94

If it were possible, as some say, to study poetry artistically alone, contemplating it as a work of art, and not allowing it to excite the affections or the passions, there is no kind of poetry that might not be enjoyed with safety in any state of mind: it is doubtful, however, whether any work of art ought to be so contemplated. Its excellence can only be estimated by the degree of emotion it produces; how then can an unimpassioned examination ever form a true estimate of its merit? When such an inspection of any work of art can be carried through, there is generally some fault either in the thing criticized or in the critic; for the distinctive characteristic of art is, that it is addressed to our *human* nature, and excites its emotions. In the words of the great German poet:—

Science, O man, thou sharest with higher spirits;
But art thou hast alone.

Pure science must be the same to all orders of created beings, but, as far as our knowledge extends, the physical organization of humanity is required for a perception of the beauties of art: therefore physical excitement must be united with mental, in proportion as the work of art is successful. Do not then hope ever to be able to study poetry without a quickened pulse and a flushing cheek; you may as well leave it alone altogether, if it produces no emotion. It must be either rhyme and no poetry, or to you poetry can be nothing but rhyme.

Think not, however, that I do wish you to leave it alone altogether; nothing could be farther from my purpose.

There is some old saying about fire being a good servant, but a bad master. Now this is what I would say of the faculty of imagination, as cultivated and excited by works of fiction in general, including, of course, poetic fictions. As long as you can keep your imagination, even though thus quickened and excited, under the strict control of religious feeling—as long as you are able to prevent its rousing your temper to an uncontrollable degree of susceptibility—as long as you can return from an ideal world to the lowly duties of every-day life with a steady purpose and unflinching determination, there can be no danger for you in reading poetry. Perhaps you will, on the contrary, tell me that all this is impossible, and, coward-like, you may prefer resigning the pleasure to encountering the difficulties of struggling against its consequences: but this is not the way either to strengthen your character or to form your mind. All cultivation requires watchfulness and additional precautions, either more or less: you must not, for the sake of a few superable difficulties, resign the otherwise unattainable refinement effected by poetry. Besides, its exalting and ennobling influence, if properly understood and employed, will help you incalculably over the rugged paths of your daily life; it will shed softening and hallowing gleams over many things that you would otherwise find difficult to

Page 95

endure, many duties otherwise too hard to fulfil; for there is poetry in every thing that is really good and true. Happy those practical students of its beauties who have learned to track the ore beneath the most unpromising surfaces! Poetry, I look upon, in fact, as the most essential, the most vital part of the cultivation of your mind, as from its spirit your character will receive the most beneficial influence: you must learn the double lesson of extracting it from every thing, and of throwing it around every thing; and, for the better attainment of this object, you must study it in itself, that you may become deeply imbued with its spirit.

Along with the poetry of every age and of every nation, I would have you diligently study the criticisms of the masters of the art. It is true that the intimate knowledge of all that has been written on this hackneyed subject will never supply the want of natural poetic taste, of that union of mental and moral refinement which produces the only infallible touchstone of the beautiful; still such criticisms will tend to refine and sharpen a natural taste, where it does exist; and without bringing its technical rules practically to bear upon the objects of your delighted admiration,[82] they will insensibly improve, refine, and subtilize the natural delicacy of your perceptions.

No criticisms can perhaps equal the masterly ones of Frederick Schlegel, or those of the less powerful but not less rich mind of Augustus William Schlegel,—those two wonderful brothers,” as a modern litterateur has justly called them. Leigh Hunt, with perhaps more poetic originality, but with less accuracy of aesthetical perception, will be a useful guide to you in English poetry. Burke’s “Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful” will give you the most correct general ideas on the subject of taste. These are always best and most influential after they have been for some time assimilated with the forms of the mind. It is a far more useful exercise to apply them yourself to individual cases than merely to lend your attention, though carefully and fixedly, to the applications made for you by the writer. Alison’s “Essay on Taste,” though interesting and improving, saves too much trouble to the reader in this way.

Your enjoyment and appreciation of poetry will be much heightened by having it read aloud,—by yourself to yourself, if you should have no other sympathizing reader or listener.

The sound of the metre is essential to the full *sense* of the meaning and of the beauty of all poetry. Even the rhymeless flow of blank verse is absolutely necessary to an accurate and entire perception of the effect the author intends to produce: it is in both cases as the colouring to a picture. It may be, indeed, that part of the composition which appeals most directly to the senses; but all the works of art must be imperfect which do not make this appeal; for, as I said before, all works of art are intended to affect our *human* nature.



Page 96

A well-practised eye will, it is true, detect in a moment either the faults or the excellence of the rhyme or the flow; but the effect on the mind cannot be the same as when the impression is received through the *ear*.

Nor is the fuller appreciation of the poetry you read aloud the only advantage to be derived from the practice I recommend. Few accomplishments are more rare, though few more desirable, than that of reading aloud with ease and grace. Great are the sufferings inflicted on a sensitive ear by listening to one's favourite passages, touching in pathos, or glorious in sublimity, travestied into twaddle by the false taste or the want of practice of the reader. For it is not always from false taste that the species of reading above complained of proceeds; on the contrary, there may be a very correct perception of the writer's meaning and object, while from want of practice, from mere mechanical inexpertness, there may be an incapability of giving effect to that meaning: hence arises false emphasis, and a thousand other disagreeables.

In this art, this important art of reading aloud, simplicity ought to be the grand object of attainment, at the same time that it is the last that can be attained. It is a point to reach after long efforts; not to start from, as those of uncultivated or artificial taste would imagine. I must repeat, that it cannot be acquired without persevering practice. The best time to set vigorously about such practice would be when you have but just listened with dismay to the injuries inflicted on some favourite poet by the laboured or tasteless reading of an unpractised performer.

From reading aloud, I pass on to a still more important subject,—that of writing: both are intimately connected branches of the main one—cultivation of the mind. When this latter is attained in the first place, a slight individual direction of previously acquired powers will enable you to succeed in both the former. In your own case, however, as in that of all those who have not the active organisation which involves great facilities for mechanical efforts, it will be quite necessary to give a special direction to your studies for the attainment of any degree of excellence in both those arts. Those, on the contrary, whose organization is more lively and vigorous, and whose nature and habits fit them more for action than thought, will find little difficulty in making any degree of cultivation of mind an immediate stepping-stone to the other attainments: such persons can read at once with force and truth as soon as education has given them accurate perceptions; they will also write with ease, rapidity, and energy, as soon as the mind is furnished with suitable materials. This is a kind of superiority which you may often be inclined to envy, at least until experience has taught you, in the first place, that the law of compensation is universal, and in the second, that every thing is



Page 97

doubly valuable which is acquired through hard labour and many struggles. For the first, you may observe that such persons as possess naturally the mechanical facilities of which I have spoken will never attain to an equal degree of excellence with those whose naturally soft and inactive organization obliges them to labour over every step of their onward way. They can, I repeat, never attain to the same degree of excellence, either in feeling or expression, because they do not possess the same refined delicacy of perceptions, the same deep thoughtfulness and intuitive wisdom, as those who owe these advantages to the very organization from which they otherwise suffer. This is another illustration of the universal law—that action is always in inverse proportion to power. For the second, you will find that there is a pleasure in overcoming difficulties, compared with which all easily attained or naturally possessed advantages appear tame and vapid:[83] and besides the difference in the pleasurable excitement of the contest, you are to consider the advantage to the character that is derived from a battle and a victory.

When I speak to you of writing, and of your attaining to excellence in this art, I have nothing in view but the improvement of your private letters. It can seldom be desirable for a woman to challenge public criticism by appearing before the world as an author. “My wife does not write poetry, she lives it,” was the reply of Richter, when his highly-gifted Caroline was applied to for literary contributions to her sister’s publications. He described in these words the real nature of a woman’s duties. Any degree of avoidable publicity must lessen her peace and happiness; and few circumstances can make it prudent for a woman to give up retirement and retired duties, and subject herself to public criticism, and probably public blame.

The writing, then, in which I have advised you to accomplish yourself, is the epistolary style alone, at once a means of communicating pleasure to your friends, and of conferring extensive and permanent benefits upon them. How useful has the kind, judicious, well-timed letter of a Christian friend often proved, even when the spoken word of the same friend might, during circumstances of excitement, have only increased imprudence or irritation!

Few printed books have effected more good than the private correspondence of pious, well-educated, and strong-minded persons. Indeed, the influence exercised by letters and conversation is so much the peculiar and appropriate sphere of a woman’s usefulness, that all her studies should be pursued with an especial view to the attainment of these accomplishments. The same qualities are to be desired in both. The utmost simplicity—for nothing can be worse than speaking as if you were repeating a sentence out of a book, except writing a friendly letter as if you were writing out of a book,—a great abundance and readiness of information for the purpose



Page 98

of supplying a variety of illustrations, an intelligent perception of, and a cautious attention to, that which you are called upon to answer, a conciseness of expression, that is perfectly consistent with those minute details, which, gracefully managed, as women only can, form the chief charm of their conversation and writing,—with all these you should be careful to give free play to the peculiarities of your own individual mind: this will always, even where there is little or no talent, produce a pleasing degree of originality.

Before every thing else, however, let unstudied ease, I could almost add carelessness, be the marked characteristics of both your conversation and your writing. Refined taste will indeed insensibly produce the former, without any effort of your own, far better than the strictest rules could do.

The praises of nonsense have been often written and often spoken; nor can it ever be praised more than it deserves. However “within its magic circle none dare walk”[84] but those who have naturally quick and refined perceptions, assisted by careful cultivation. Narrow indeed is the boundary which divides unfeminine flippancy from the graceful nonsense which good authority and our own feelings pronounce to be “exquisite.”[85] The unsuccessful attempt at its imitation always reminds me of Pilpay’s fable of the Donkey and the Lapdog:—The poor donkey, who had been going on very usefully in its own drudging way, began to envy the lap-dog the caresses it received, and fancied that it would receive the same if it jumped upon its master as the lap-dog did: how awkwardly and unnaturally its attempts at playfulness were executed, how unwelcome they proved, I need not tell you. Nothing is more difficult than playfulness or even vivacity of manner—nothing is so sure a test of good breeding and high cultivation of mind; either may carry you safely through, but their union alone can render playfulness and vivacity entirely fascinating.

After all that I have written, I must again repeat what I began with,—that you are to try each different mode of study for yourself, and that the advice of others will be of use to you only when you have assimilated it with your own mind, testing it by your own practice, and giving it the fair trial of *patient* perseverance.

I ought perhaps, before I close this letter, to make some apology for recommending, as a part of your course of study, either Rollin or Hume, one because he is “*trop bon homme*,”[86] the other because he is not “*bon*” in any sense of the word. My apology, or rather my reason, will, however, be only a repetition of that which I have said before, *viz.* that I should wish you to read history strictly, and merely, as a story, and to form your *own* philosophic and religious opinions previously, and from other sources.



Page 99

So many valuable and important histories, so many necessary books on every subject, have been written by the professed infidel, as well as by the practical forgetter of God, that you must prepare yourself for a constant state of intellectual watchfulness, as to all the various opinions suggested by the different authors you study. It is not their opinions you want, but their facts. Most standard histories, even Hume and Voltaire, tell truth as to all leading facts: after half-a-century or so of filtration, truth becomes purified from contemporary passions and prejudices, and can be easily got at without any importantly injurious mixture.

It was to mark my often-repeated wish that you should *philosophize* for yourself, that I have omitted the names of Guizot and Hallam in the list of authors recommended for your perusal. With the tastes which I suppose you to possess and to acquire, you will not be likely to leave them out of your own list. The histories of Arnold and Niebuhr also belong to a distinct class of writings. I should prefer your being intimately acquainted with the so-called poetical histories which have been so long received and loved, before you interest yourself in these modern discoveries.

The lectures of Dr. Arnold upon Modern History contain, however, such a treasure of brilliant philosophy, of deep thought and forcible writing, that the sooner you begin them, and the more intimately you study them, the better pleased I should be. With respect to his singular views on religion and politics, you must always keep carefully in mind that his peculiar mental organization incapacitated him from forming correct opinions on any subject connected with imagination or metaphysics. You will soon be able to trace the manner in which the absence of these two powers affected all his reasonings, and closed up his mind against the most important species of evidence. I carry on the supposition that you have formed, or will form, all your views on religion and politics from your own judgment, assisted by the experience of those whose mind you know to be qualified by their many-sidedness to judge clearly and impartially—upon universal, not *partial* data. Remember, at the same time, however, that you belong to a church which professedly protests against popes of every description, against the unscriptural practice of calling any man “Father upon earth.” May you attend diligently, and in a child-like spirit of submission, to the teaching of that Holy and Apostolic Church, and there will then be no danger of your being led astray either by the infidel Hume or the sainted Arnold.



Page 100

Finally, I would again refer to that subject which ought to be the beginning and end, the foundation and crowning-point of all our studies. Let "whatever you do be done to the glory of God." [87] Earthly motives, if pure and amiable ones, may hold a subordinate place; but unless the mainspring of your actions be the desire "to glorify your Father which is in heaven," you will find no real peace in life, no blessedness in death. As one likely means of keeping this primary object of your life constantly before you, I should strongly recommend your making the cultivation and improvement of your mental powers the subject of special prayer at all the appointed seasons of prayer; at the same time, your studies themselves should never be entered upon without prayer,—prayer, that the evil mingled with all earthly things may fall powerless on your sanctified heart, —prayer, that any improvement you obtain may make you a more useful servant of the Lord your God—more persuasive and influential in that great work which in different ways is appropriated to all in their several spheres of action, viz. the high and holy office of winning souls to Christ. [88]

FOOTNOTES:

[77] Coleridge.

[78] Assembly's Catechism.

[79] Plebeii videntur appellandi omnes philosophi qui a Platone et Socrate et ab ea familia dissident.—CICERO, *Tuscul.* 1, 2, 3.

[80] L'Abbe Barthelemi.

[81] Quarterly Review.

[82] The critic who suffers his philosophy to reason away his pleasure is not much wiser than a child who cuts open his drum to see what is within it that causes the music.—*Edinburgh Review.*

[83] Ce n'est pas la victoire, c'est le combat qui fait le bonheur des nobles coeurs.—*Montalembert.*

Si le Tout-puissant tenait dans une main la verite, et dans l'autre la recherche de la verite, c'est la recherche que je lui demanderais. —*Lessing.*

[84] Dryden, of Shakspeare.

[85] Miss Ferrier. Mrs. H.E.

[86] Napoleon's remark on Rollin's History.



[87] 1 Cor. x. 31.

[88] 1 Pet. iii. 1.

LETTER X.

AMUSEMENTS.

In addressing the following observations to you, I keep in mind the peculiarity of your position,—a position which has made you, while scarcely more than a child, independent of external control, and forced you into the responsibilities of deciding thus early on a course of conduct that may seriously affect your temporal and eternal interests. More happy are those placed under the authority of strict parents, who have already chosen and marked out for themselves a path to which they expect their children strictly to adhere. The difficulties that may still perplex the children of such parents are comparatively few: even if the strictness of the authority over them



Page 101

be inexpedient and over strained, it affords them a safeguard and a support for which they cannot be too grateful; it preserves them from the responsibility of acting for themselves at a time when their age and inexperience alike unfit them for a decision on any important practical point; it keeps them disengaged, as it were, from being pledged to any peculiar course of conduct until they have formed and matured their opinion as to the habits of social intercourse most expedient for them to adopt. Thus, when the time for independent action comes, they are quite free to pursue any new course of life without being shackled by former professions, or exposing themselves to the reproach (and consequent probable loss of influence) of having altered their former opinions and views.

Those, then, who are early guarded from any intercourse with the world ought, instead of murmuring at the unnecessary strictness of their seclusion, to reflect with gratitude on the advantages it affords them. Faith ought, even now, to teach them the lesson that experience is sure to impress on every thoughtful mind, that it is a special mercy to be preserved from the duties of responsibility until we are, comparatively speaking, fitted to enter upon them.

This is not, however, the case with you. Ignorant and inexperienced as you are, you must now select, from among all the modes of life placed within your reach, those which you consider the best suited to secure your welfare for time and for eternity. Your decision now, even in very trifling particulars, must have some effect upon your state in both existences. The most unimportant event of this life carries forward a pulsation into eternity, and acquires a solemn importance from the reaction. Every feeling which we indulge or act upon becomes a part of ourselves, and is a preparation, by our own hand, of a scourge or a blessing for us throughout countless ages.

It may seem a matter of comparative unimportance, of trifling influence over your future fate, whether you attend Lady A.'s ball to-night, or Lady H.'s to-morrow. You may argue to yourself that even those who now think balls entirely sinful have attended hundreds of them in their time, and have nevertheless become afterwards more religious and more useful than others who have never entered a ball-room. You might add, that there could be more positive sin in passing two or three hours with two or three people in Lady A's house in the morning than in passing the same number of hours with two or three hundred people in the same house in the evening. This is indeed true; but are you not deceiving yourself by referring to the mere overt act? That is, as you imply, past and over when the evening is past; but it is not so with the feelings which *may* make the ball either delightful or disagreeable to you; feelings, which may be then for the first time excited, never to be stilled again,—feelings which, when they once exist, will remain with you



Page 102

throughout eternity; for even if by the grace of God they are finally subdued, they will still remain with you in the memory of the painful conflicts, the severe discipline of inward and outward trials, required for their subjugation. Do not, however, suppose that I mean to attribute exclusive or universally injurious effects to the atmosphere of a ball-room. In the innocent smiles and unclouded brow of many a fair girl, the experienced eye truly reads their freedom from any taint of envy, malice, or coquetry; while, on the other hand, unmistakable and unconcealed exhibitions of all these evil feelings may often be witnessed at a so-called "religious party."

This remark, however, is not to my purpose; it is only made *par parenthese*, to obviate any pretence for mistaking my meaning, and for supposing that I attribute positive sin to that which I only object to as the possible, or rather the probable occasion of sin. I always think this latter distinction a very important one to attend to in discussing, in a more general point of view, the subject of amusements of every kind: it is, however, enough merely to notice it here, while we pass on to the question which I urge upon you to apply personally to yourself, namely, whether the ball-room be not a more favourable atmosphere for the first excitement and after-cultivation of many feminine failings than the quieter and more confined scenes of other social intercourse.

It is by tracing the effect produced on our own mind that we can alone form a safe estimate of the expediency of doubtful occupations. This is the primary point of view in which to consider the subject, though by no means the only one; for every Christian ought to exhibit a readiness in his own small sphere to emulate the unselfishness of the great apostle: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." [89] The fear of the awful threatenings against those who "offend," *i.e.* lead into sin, any of "God's little ones," [90] should combine with love for those for whom the Saviour died, to induce us freely to sacrifice things which would be personally harmless, on the ground of their being injurious to others.

This part of the subject is, however, of less importance for our present consideration, as from your youth and inexperience your example cannot yet exercise much influence on those around you.

Let us therefore return to the more personal part of the subject, namely, the effect produced on your own mind. I have spoken of feminine "failings:" I should, however, be inclined to apply a stronger term to the first that I am about to notice—the love of admiration, considering how closely it must ever be connected with the fatal vice of envy. She who has an earnest craving for general admiration for herself, is exposed to a strong temptation to regret the bestowal of any admiration on another. She has an instinctive exactness in her account of



Page 103

receipt and expenditure; she calculates almost unconsciously that the time and attention and interest excited by the attractive powers of others is so much homage subtracted from her own. That beautiful aphorism, "The human heart is like heaven—the more angels the more room for them," is to such persons as unintelligible in its loving spirit as in its wonderful philosophic truth. Their craving is insatiable, once it has become habitual, and their appetite is increased and stimulated, instead of being appeased, by the anxiously-sought-for nourishment.

These observations can only strictly apply to the fatal desire for general admiration. As long as the approbation only of the wise and good is our object, it is not so much that there are fewer opportunities of exciting the feeling of envy at this approbation being granted to others; there is, further, an instinctive feeling of its incompatibility with the very object we are aiming at. The case is altogether different when we seek to attract those whose admiration may be won by qualities quite different from any connected with moral excellence. There is here no restraint on our evil feelings: and when we cannot equal the accomplishments, the beauty, and the graces of another, we may possibly be tempted to envy, and, still further, to depreciate, those of the hated rival—perhaps, worse than all, may be tempted to seek to attract attention by means less simple and less obvious. If the receiving of admiration be injurious to the mind, what must the seeking for it be! "The flirt of many seasons" loses all mental perceptions of refinement by long practice in hardihood, as the hackneyed practitioner unconsciously deepens the rouge upon her cheek, until, unperceived by her blunted visual organs, it loses all appearance of truth and beauty. Some instances of the kind I allude to have come before even your inexperienced eyes; and from the shrinking surprise with which you now contemplate them, I have no doubt that you would wish to shun even the first step in the same career. Indeed, it is probable that you, under any circumstances, would never go so far in coquetry as those to whom your memory readily recurs. Your innate delicacy, your feminine high-mindedness may, at any future time, as well as at present, preserve you from the bad taste of challenging those attentions which your very vanity would reject as worthless if they were not voluntarily offered.

Nevertheless, even in you, habits of dissipation may produce an effect which to your inmost being may be almost equally injurious. You may possess an antidote to prevent any external manifestations of the poisonous effects of an indulged craving for excitement; but general admiration, however spontaneously offered and modestly received, has nevertheless a tendency to create a necessity for mental stimulants. This, among other ill-effects, will, worst of all, incapacitate you from the appreciative enjoyment of healthy food.



Page 104

The heart that with its luscious cates
The world has fed so long,
Could never taste the simple food
That gives fresh virtue to the good,
Fresh vigour to the strong.[91]

The pure and innocent pleasures which the hand of Providence diffuses plentifully around us will, too probably, become tasteless and insipid to one whose habits of excitement have destroyed the fresh and simple tastes of her mind. Stronger doses, as in the case of the opium-eater, will each day be required to produce an exhilarating effect, without which there is now no enjoyment, without which, in course of time, there will not be even freedom from suffering.

There is an analogy throughout between the mental and the physical intoxication; and it continues most strikingly, even when we consider both in their most favourable points of view, by supposing the victim to self-indulgence at last willing to retrace her steps. This fearful advantage is granted to our spiritual enemy by wilful indulgence in sin; that it is only when trying to adopt or resume a life of sobriety and self-denial that we become exposed to the severest temporal punishments of self-indulgence. As long as a course of this self-indulgence is continued, if external things should prosper with us, comparative peace and happiness may be enjoyed—(if indeed the loftier pleasures of devotion to God, self-control, and active usefulness can be forgotten,—supposing them to have been once experienced.) It is only when the grace of repentance is granted that the returning child of God becomes at the same time alive to the sinfulness of those pleasures which she has cultivated the habit of enjoying, and to the mournful fact of having lost all taste for those simple pleasures which are the only safe ones, because they alone leave the mind free for the exercise of devotion, and the affections warm and fresh for the contemplation of “the things that belong to our peace.”

Sad and dreary is the path the penitent worldling has to traverse; often, despairing at the difficulties her former habits have brought upon her, she looks back, longingly and lingeringly, upon the broad and easy path she has lately left. Alas! how many of those thus tempted to “look back” have turned away entirely, and never more set their faces Zion-ward.

From the dangers and sorrows just described you have still the power of preserving yourself. You have as yet acquired no factitious tastes; you still retain the power of enjoying the simple pleasures of innocent childhood. It now depends upon your manner of spending the intervening years, whether, in the trying period of middle-age, simple and natural pleasures will still awaken emotions of joyousness and thankfulness in your heart.

I have spoken of thankfulness,—for one of the best tests of the innocence and safety of our pleasures is, the being able to thank God for them. While we thus look upon them

as coming to us from his hand, we may safely bask in the sunshine of even earthly pleasures:—



Page 105

The colouring may be of this earth,
The lustre comes of heavenly birth.[92]

Can you feel this with respect to the emotions of pleasurable excitement with which you left Lady M.'s ball? I am no fanatic, nor ascetic; and I can imagine it possible (though not probable) that among the visitors there some simple-minded and simple-hearted people, amused with the crowds, the dresses, the music, and the flowers, may have felt, even in this scene of feverish and dangerous excitement, something of "a child's pure delight in little things." [93] Without profaneness, and in all sincerity, they might have thanked God for the, to them, harmless recreation.

This I suppose possible in the case of some, but for you it is not so. The keen susceptibilities of your excitable nature will prevent your resting contented without sharing in the more exciting pleasures of the ball-room; and your powers of adaptation will easily tempt you forward to make use of at least some of those means of attracting general admiration which seem to succeed so well with others.

"Wherever there is life there is danger;" and the danger is probably in proportion to the degree of life. The more energy, the more feeling, the more genius possessed by an individual, the greater also are the temptations to which that individual is exposed. The path which is safe and harmless for the dull and inexcitable—the mere animals of the human race—is beset with dangers for the ardent, the enthusiastic, the intellectual. These must pay a heavy penalty for their superiority; but is it therefore a superiority they would resign? Besides, the very trials and temptations to which their superior vitality subjects them are not alone its necessary accompaniment, but also the necessary means for forming a superior character into eminent excellence.

Self-will, love of pleasure, quick excitability, and consequent irritability, are the marked ingredients in every strong character; its strength must be employed against itself to produce any high moral superiority.

There is an analogy between the metaphysical truths above spoken of and that fact in the physical history of the world, that coal-mines are generally placed in the neighbourhood of iron-mines. This is a provision involved in the nature of the thing itself; and we know that, without the furnaces thus placed within reach, the natural capabilities of the useful ore would never be developed.

In the same way, we know that an accompanying furnace of affliction and temptation is necessarily involved in that very strength of character which we admire; and also, that, without this fiery furnace, the vast capabilities of their nature, both moral and mental, could never be fully developed.

Suffering, sorrow, and temptations are the invariable conditions of a life of progress; and suffering, sorrow, and temptations are all of them always in proportion to the energies and capabilities of the character.



Page 106

There is another analogy in animated nature, illustrative of the case of those who, without injury to themselves, (the injury to our neighbour is, as I said before, a different part of the subject,) may attend the ball-room, the theatre, and the race-course. Those animals lowest in the scale of creation, those who scarcely manifest one of the energies of vitality, are also those which are the least susceptible of suffering from external causes. The medusae are supposed to feel no pain even in being devoured, and the human zoophyte is, in like manner, comparatively out of the reach of every suffering but death. Have you not seen some beings endowed with humanity nearly as destitute of a nervous system as the medusae, nearly as insusceptible of any sensation from the accidents of life. Some of these, too, may possess virtue and piety as well as the animal qualities of patience and sweetness of temper, which are the mere results of their physical organization. No degree of effort or discipline, however, (indeed they bear within themselves no capabilities for either,) could enable such persons to become eminently useful, eminently respected, or eminently loved. They have doubtless some work appointed them to do, and that a necessary work in God's earthly kingdom; but theirs are inferior duties, very different from those which you, and such as you, are called on to fulfil.

Have I in any degree succeeded in reconciling you to the unvaryingly-accompanying penalties necessary to qualify the glad consciousness of possessing intellectual powers, a warm heart, and a strong mind? Your high position will indeed afford you far less happiness than that which may belong to the lower ranks in the scale of humanity; but the noble mind will soon be disciplined into dispensing with happiness;—it will find instead—blessedness.

If yours be a more difficult path than that of others, it is also a more honourable one: in proportion to the temptations endured will be the brightness of that "crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." [94]

But there is, perhaps, less necessity for trying to impress upon your mind a sense of your superiority than for urging upon you its accompanying responsibility, and the severe circumspection it calls upon you to exercise. Thus, from what I have above written, it necessarily follows that you cannot evade the question I am now pressing upon you by observing the effect of dissipation upon others, by bringing forward the example of many excellent women who have passed through the ordeal of dissipation untainted, and, still themselves possessing loving hearts and simple minds, are fearlessly preparing their daughters for the same dangerous course. Remember that those from whom you would shrink from a supposed equality on other points cannot be safely taken as examples for your own course of life. Your own concern is to ascertain the effect produced upon your own mind by different kinds of society, and to examine whether you yourself have the same healthy taste for simple pleasures and unexciting pursuits as before you engaged, even as slightly as you have already done, in the dissipation of a London season.



Page 107

I once heard a young lady exclaim, when asked to accompany her family on a boating excursion, "Can any thing be more tiresome than a family party?" Young as she was, she had already lost all taste for the simple pleasures of domestic life. As she was intellectual and accomplished, she could still enjoy solitude; but her only ideas of pleasure as connected with a party were those of admiration and excitement. We may trace the same feelings in the complaints perpetually heard of the stupidity of parties,—complaints generally proceeding from those who are too much accustomed to attention and admiration to be contented with the unexciting pleasures of rational conversation, the exercise of kindly feelings, and the indulgence of social habits—all in their way productive of contentment to those who have preserved their mind in a state of freshness and simplicity. Any greater excitement than that produced by the above means cannot surely be profitable to those who only seek in society for so much pleasure as will afford them *relaxation*; those who engage in an arduous conflict with ever-watchful enemies both within and without ought carefully to avoid having their weapons of defence *unstrung*. I know that at present you would shrink from the idea of making pleasure your professed pursuit, from the idea of engaging in it for any other purpose but the one above stated—that of necessary relaxation; I should not otherwise have addressed you as I do now. Your only danger at present is, that you may, I should hope indeed unconsciously, *acquire* the habit of requiring excitement during your hours of relaxation.

In opposition to all that I have said, you will probably be often told that excitement, instead of being prejudicial, is favourable to the health of both mind and body; and this in some respects is true: the whole mental and physical constitution benefit by, and acquire new energy from, nay, they seem to develop hidden forces on occasions of natural excitement; but natural it ought to be, coming in the providential course of the events of life, and neither considered as an essential part of daily food, nor inspiring distaste for simple, ordinary nourishment. I fear much, on the other hand, any excitement that we choose for ourselves; that only is quite safe which is dispensed to us by the hand of the Great Physician of souls: he alone knows the exact state of our moral constitution, and the exact species of discipline it requires from hour to hour.

You will wonder, perhaps, that throughout the foregoing remonstrance I have never recommended to you the test so common among many good people of our acquaintance, *viz.* whether you are able to pray as devoutly on returning from a ball as after an evening spent at home? My reason for this silence was, that I have found the test an ineffectual one. The advanced Christian, if obedience to those who are set in authority over her should lead her into scenes

Page 108

of dissipation, will not find her mind disturbed by being an unwilling actor in the uninteresting amusements. She, on the other hand, who is just beginning a spiritual life, must be an incompetent judge of the variations in the devotional spirit of her mind,—anxious, besides, as one should be to discourage any of that minute attention to variations of religious feeling which only disturbs and harasses the mind, and hinders it from concentrating its efforts upon obedience. Lastly, she who has never been mindful of her baptismal vows of renunciation of the world, the flesh, and the devil, will “say her prayers” quite as satisfactorily to herself after a day spent in one manner as in another. The test of a distaste for former simple pursuits, and want of interest in them, is a much safer one, more universally applicable, and not so easily evaded. It is equally effectual, too, as a religious safeguard; for the natural and impressible state in which the mind is kept by the absence of habitual stimulants is surely the state in which it is best qualified for the exercise of devotion,—for self-denial, for penitence and prayer.

Let us return now to a further examination of the nature of the dangers to which you may be exposed by a life of gayety—an examination that must be carried on in your own mind with careful and anxious inquiry. I have before spoken of the duty of ascertaining what effects different kinds of society produce upon you: it is only by thus qualifying yourself to pass your *own* judgment on this important subject that you can avoid being dangerously influenced by those assertions that you hear made by others. You will probably, for instance, be told that a love of admiration often manifests itself as glaringly in the quiet drawing-room as in the crowded ball-room; and I readily admit that the feelings cherished into existence, or at least into vigour, by the exciting atmosphere of the latter cannot be readily laid aside with the ball-dress. There will, indeed, be less opportunity for their display, less temptation to the often accompanying feelings of envy and discontent, but the mental process will probably still be carried on—of distilling from even the most innocent pleasures but one species of dangerous excitement: I cannot, however, admit, that to the unsophisticated mind there will be any danger of the same nature in the one case as in the other. Society, when entered into with a simple, prayerful spirit, may be considered one of the most improving as well as one of the most innocent pleasures allotted to us. Still further, I believe that the exercise of patience, benevolence, and self-denial which it involves, is a most important part of the disciplining process by which we are being brought into a state of preparation for the society of glorified spirits, of “just men made perfect.”



Page 109

I advise you earnestly, therefore, against any system of conduct, or indulgence of feeling, that would involve your seclusion from society—not only on the grounds of such seclusion obliging you to unnecessary self-denial, but on the still stronger grounds of the loss to our moral being which would result from the absence of the peculiar species of discipline that social intercourse affords. My object in addressing you is to point out the dangers to you of peculiar kinds of society, not by any means to seek to persuade you to avoid it altogether.

Let us, then, consider carefully the respective tendencies of different kinds of society to cherish or create the feelings of “envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness,” by exciting a craving for general admiration, and a desire to secure the largest portion for yourself.

You have already been a few weeks out in the world; you have been at small social parties and crowded balls: they must have given you sufficient experience to understand the remarks I make.

Have you not, then, felt at the quiet parties of which I have spoken (as contrasted with dissipated ones) that it was pleasure enough for you to spend your whole evening talking with persons of your own sex and age over the simple occupations of your daily-life, or the studies which engage the interest of your already cultivated mind? Lady L. may have collected a circle of admirers around her, and Miss M.’s music may have been extolled as worthy of an artist, but upon all this you looked merely as a spectator; without either wish or idea of sharing in their publicity or their renown, you probably did not form a thought, certainly not a wish, of the kind. In the ball-room, however, the case is altogether different; the most simple and fresh-minded woman cannot escape from feelings of pain or regret at being neglected or unobserved here. She goes for the professed purpose of dancing; and when few or no opportunities are afforded her of sharing in that which is the amusement of the rest of the room, should she feel neither mortification at her own position, nor envy, however disguised and modified, at the different position of others, she can possess none of that sensitiveness which is your distinctive quality. It is true, indeed, that the experienced chaperon is well aware that the girl who commands the greatest number of partners is not the one most likely to have the greatest number of proposals—at the end of the season, nor the one who will finally make the most successful *parti*. This reconciles the prudential looker-on to the occasional and partial appearance of neglect. Not so the young and inexperienced aspirant to admiration: *her* worldliness is now in an earlier phase; and she thinks that her fame rises or falls among her companions according as she can compete with them in the number of her partners, or their exclusive devotion to her, which after a season or two is discovered



Page 110

to be a still safer test of successful coquetry. Thus may the young innocent heart be gradually led on to depend for its enjoyment on the factitious passing admiration of a light and thoughtless hour; and still worse, if possessed of keen susceptibilities and powers of quick adaptation, the lesson is often too easily learned of practising the arts likely to attract notice, thus losing for ever the simplicity and modest freshness of a woman's nature. That may be a fatal evening to you on which you will first attract sufficient notice to have it said of you that you were more admired than Lucy D. or Ellen M.; this may be a moment for a poisonous plant to spring up in your heart, which will spread around its baleful influence until your dying day. It is a disputed point among ethical metaphysicians, whether the seeds of every vice are equally planted in each human bosom, and only prevented from germinating by opposing circumstances, and by the grace of God assisting self-control. If this be true, how carefully ought we to avoid every circumstance that may favour the commencing existence of before unknown sins and temptations. The grain that has been destitute of vitality for a score of centuries is wakened into unceasing, because continually renewed existence, by the fostering influences of light and air and a suitable soil. Evil tendencies may be slumbering in your bosom, as destitute of life, as incapable of growth, as the oats in the foldings of the mummy's envelope. Be careful lest, by going into the way of temptation, you may involuntarily foster them into the very existence which they would otherwise never possess.

When once the craving for excitement has become a part of our nature, there is of course no safety in the quietest, or, under other circumstances, most innocent kind of society. The same amusements will be sought for in it as those which have been enjoyed in the ball-room, and every company will be considered insufferably wearisome which does not furnish the now necessary stimulant of exclusive attention and general admiration.

I write the more strongly to you on the subject of worldly amusements, because I see with regret a tendency in the writings and conversation of the religious world, as it is called, to extol every other species of self-denial, but to observe a studied silence respecting this one.

A reaction seems to have taken place in the public mind. Instead of the puritanic strictness that condemned the meeting of a few friends for any purposes besides those of reading the Scriptures and praying extempore, practices are now introduced, and favoured, and considered harmless, almost as strongly contrasted with the former ones as was the promulgation of the Book of Sports with the strict observances that preceded it. We see some, of whose piety and excellence no doubt can be entertained, mingling unhesitatingly in the most worldly amusements of those who are by profession as well as practice "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."



Page 111

How cruelly are the minds of the simple and the timid perplexed by the persons who thus act, as well as by those popular writings which countenance in professedly religious persons these worldly and self-indulgent habits of life. The hearts and the consciences of the “weak brethren” re-echo the warnings given them by the average opinions of the wise and good in all ages of the world, namely, that, with respect to worldly amusements, they must “come out and be separate.” How else can they be sons and daughters of Him, to whom they vowed, as the necessary condition of entering into that high relationship, that they would “renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world?” If the question of pomps should be perplexing to some by the different requirements of different stations in life, there is surely less difficulty of the same kind in relation to its vanities. But while the “weak in faith” are hesitating and trembling at the thought of all the opposition and sacrifices a self-denying course of conduct must, under any circumstances, involve, they are still further discouraged by finding that some whom they are accustomed to respect and admire have in appearance gone over to the enemy’s camp.

It is only, indeed, in their hours of relaxation that they select as their favourite companions those who are professedly engaged in a different service from their own—those whom they know to be devoted heart and soul to the love and service of that “world which lieth in wickedness.”^[95] Are not, however, their hours of relaxation also their hours of danger—those in which they are more likely to be surprised and overcome by temptation than in hours of study or of business? All this is surely very perplexing to the young and inexperienced, however personally safe and prudent it may be for those from whom a better example might have been justly expected. It is deeply to be regretted that there is not more unity of action and opinion among those who “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” more especially in cases where such unity of action is only interfered with by dislike to the important and eminent Christian duty of self-denial.

I am inclined to apply terms of stronger and more general condemnation than any I have hitherto used to those amusements which are more especially termed “public.”

You should carefully examine, with prayer to be guided aright, whether a voluntary attendance at the theatre or the race-course is not in a degree exposed to the solemn denunciation uttered by the Saviour against those who cause others to offend.^[96] Can that relaxation be a part of the education to fit us for our eternal home which is regardless of danger to the spiritual interests of others, and acts upon the spirit of the haughty remonstrance of Cain—“Am I my brother’s keeper?”^[97] For all the details of this argument, I refer you to Wilberforce’s “Practical View of Christianity.” Many other writers besides have treated this subject



Page 112

ably and convincingly; but none other has ever been so satisfactory to my own mind: I think it will be so to yours. I am aware that much may be said in defence of the expediency of the amusements to which I refer; and as there is a certainty that both of them, or others of a similar nature, will meet with general support until "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ,"[98] it is a compensatory satisfaction that they are neither of them without their advantages to the general welfare of the country; that good is mixed with their evil, as well as brought out of their evil. This does not, however, serve as an excuse for those who, having their mind and judgment enlightened to see the dangers to others and the temptations to themselves of attending such amusements, should still disfigure lives, it may be, in other respects, of excellence and usefulness, by giving their time, their money, and their example to countenance and support them. Wo to those who venture to lay their sinful human hands upon the complicated machinery of God's providence, by countenancing the slightest shade of moral evil, because there may be some accompanying good! We cannot look forward to a certain result from any action: the most virtuous one may produce effects entirely different from those which we had anticipated; and we can then only fearlessly leave the consequences in the hands of God, when we are sure that we have acted in strict accordance with His will. Does it become the servant of God voluntarily to expose herself to hear contempt and blasphemy attached to the Holy Name and the holy things which she loves; to see on the stage an awful mockery of prayer itself, on the race-course the despair of the ruined gambler and the debasement of the drunkard? The choice of the scenes you frequent now, of the company you keep now, is of an importance involved in the very nature of things, and not dependent alone on the expressed will of God. It is only the pure in heart who can see God.[99] It is only those who have here acquired a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light[100] who can enjoy its possession.

It is almost entirely in this point of view that I have urged upon you the close consideration of the permanent influences of every present action. At your age, and with your inexperience, I know that there is an especial aptness to deceive one's-self by considering the case of those who, after leading a gay life for many years, have afterwards become the most zealous and devoted servants of God. That such cases are to be met with, is to the glory of the free grace of God: but what reason have you to hope that you should be among this small number? Having once wilfully chosen the pleasures of this life as your portion, on what promise do you depend ever again to be awakened to a sense of the awful alternative of fulfilling your baptismal vows, by renouncing the pomps and vanities of the world, or becoming a withered branch of the vine into which you were once grafted—a branch whose end is to be burned?



Page 113

Without urging further upon you this hackneyed, though still awful warning, let me return once more to the peculiar point of view in which I have, all along, considered the subject; namely, that each present act and feeling, however momentary may be its indulgence, is an inevitable preparation for eternity, by becoming a part of our never-dying moral nature. You must deeply feel how much this consideration adds to the improbability of your having any desires whatever to become the servant of God some years hence, and how much it must increase in future every difficulty and every unwillingness which you at present experience.

Let us, however, suppose that God will still be merciful to you at the last; that, after having devoted to the world during the years of your youth that love, those energies, and those powers of mind which had been previously vowed to his holier and happier service, he will still in future years send you the grace of repentance; that he will effect such a change in your heart and mind, that the world does not only become unsatisfactory to you,—which is a very small way towards real religion,—but that to love and serve God becomes to you the one thing desirable above all others. Alas! it is even then, in the very hour of redeeming mercy, of renewing grace, that your severest trials will begin. Then first will you thoroughly experience how truly it is “an evil thing and bitter, to forsake the Lord your God.”[101] Then you will find that every late effort at self-denial, simplicity of mind and purpose, abstinence from worldly excitements, &c., is met, not only by the evil instincts which belong to our nature, but by the superinduced difficulty of opposing confirmed habits.

Smoothly and tranquilly flows on the stream of habit, and we are unaware of its growing strength until we try to erect an obstacle in its course, and see this obstacle swept away by the long-accumulating power of the current.

In truth, all those who have wilfully added the power of evil habits to the evil tendencies of their fallen nature must expect “to go mourning all the days of their life.” It is only to those who have served the Lord from their youth that “wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.” To others, though by the grace of God they may be finally saved, there is but a dreary prospect until the end come. They must ever henceforth consult their safety by denying themselves many pleasant things which the well-regulated mind of the habitually pious may find not only safe but profitable. At the same time they sorrowfully discover that they have lost all taste for those entirely simple pleasures with which the path of God’s obedient children is abundantly strewn. Their path, on the contrary, is rugged, and their flowers are few: their sun seldom shines; for they themselves have formed clouds out of the vapours of earth, to intercept its warming and invigorating radiance: what wonder, then, if some among them should turn it back into the bright and sunny land of self-indulgence, now looking brighter and more alluring than ever from its contrast with the surrounding gloom?



Page 114

Let not this dangerous risk be yours. While yet young—young in habits, in energies, in affections, devote all to the service of the best of masters. “The work of righteousness,” even now, through difficulties, self-denial, and anxieties, will be “peace, and the effect thereof quietness and assurance for ever.”[102]

FOOTNOTES:

[89] 1 Cor. viii. 13.

[90] Matt. xviii. 6, 7.

[91] Milnes.

[92] Keble.

[93] French.

[94] James i. 12.

[95] 1 John v. 19.

[96] Matt. xviii. 6, 7.

[97] Gen. iv. 9.

[98] Rev. xi. 15.

[99] Matt. v. 8.

[100] Col. i. 12.

[101] Jer. ii. 19.

[102] Isa. xxxii. 19.

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN ON SOCIETY.[103]

“Whatever may be the customs and laws of a country, women always give the tone to morals. Whether slaves or free, they reign, because their empire is that of the affections. This influence, however, is more or less salutary, according to the degree of esteem in which they are held:—they make men what they are. It seems as though Nature had made man’s intellect depend upon their dignity, as she has made his happiness depend upon their virtue. This, then, is the law of eternal justice,—man cannot degrade woman without himself falling into degradation: he cannot elevate her



without at the same time elevating himself. Let us cast our eyes over the globe! Let us observe those two great divisions of the human race, the East and the West. Half the old world remains in a state of inanity, under the oppression of a rude civilization: the women there are slaves; the other advances in equalization and intelligence: the women there are free and honoured.

“If we wish, then, to know the political and moral condition of a state, we must ask what rank women hold in it. Their influence embraces the whole life. A wife,—a mother,—two magical words, comprising the sweetest sources of man’s felicity. Theirs is the reign of beauty, of love, of reason. Always a reign! A man takes counsel with his wife; he obeys his mother; he obeys her long after she has ceased to live, and the ideas which he has received from her become principles stronger even than his passions.

“The reality of the power is not disputed; but it may be objected that it is confined in its operation to the family circle: as if the aggregate of families did not constitute the nation! The man carries with him to the forum the notions which the woman has discussed with him by the domestic hearth. His strength there realizes what her gentle insinuations inspired. It is sometimes urged as matter of complaint that the business of women is confined to the domestic arrangements of the household: and it is not recollected that from the household of every citizen issue forth the errors and prejudices which govern the world!



Page 115

"If, then, there be an incontestable fact, it is the influence of women: an influence extended, with various modifications, through the whole of life. Such being the case, the question arises, by what inconceivable negligence a power of universal operation has been overlooked by moralists, who, in their various plans for the amelioration of mankind, have scarcely deigned to mention this potent agent. Yet evidence, historical and parallel, proves that such negligence has lost to mankind the most influential of all agencies. The fact of its existence cannot be disputed; it is, therefore, of the greatest importance that its nature should be rightly understood, and that it be directed to right objects." [104]

It would not be uninteresting to trace the action and reaction by which women have degraded and been degraded—alternately the source and the victims of mistaken social principles; but it would be foreign to the design and compass of this work to do so. The subject, indeed, would afford matter for a philosophical treatise of deep interest, rather than for a chapter of a small work. A rapid historical sketch, and a few deductions which seem to bear upon the main point, are all that can be here attempted.

The gospel announced on this, as on every other subject, a grand comprehensive principle, which it was to be the work of ages (perhaps of eternity) to develop. The rescue of this degraded half of the human race was henceforth the ascertained will of the Almighty. But a long series of years were to elapse before this will worked out its issues. Its decrees, with the noble doctrines of which it formed a part, lay buried beneath the ruins of human intellect. But they were only buried, not destroyed; and rose, like wildflowers on a ruined edifice, to adorn the irregularity which they could not conceal. The fantastic institutions of chivalry which it is now the fashion to deride (how unjustly!) were among the first scions of this plant of heavenly origin. They bore the impress of heaven, faint and distorted indeed, but not to be mistaken! Devotion to an ideal good,—self-sacrifice,—subjugation of selfish and sensual feelings; wherever these principles are found, disguised, disfigured though they be, they are not of the earth,—earthly. They, like the fabled amaranth, are plants which are not indigenous here below! The seeds must come from above, from the source of all that is pure, of all that is good! Of these principles the gospel was the remote source: women were the disseminators. "Shut up in their castellated towers, they civilized the warriors who despised their weakness, and rendered less barbarous the passions and prejudices which themselves shared." [105] It was they who directed the savage passions and brute force of men to an unselfish aim, the defence of the weak, and added to courage the only virtue then recognised—humanity. "Thus chivalry prepared the way for law, and civilization had its source in gallantry." [106]



Page 116

At this epoch, the influence of women was decidedly beneficial; happy for them and for society if it had continued to be so! If we attempt to trace the source of this influence, we shall find it in the intellectual equality of the two sexes; equally ignorant of what we call knowledge, the respect due by men to virtue and beauty was not checked by any disdain of real or fancied superiority on their part.

The intellectual exercises (chiefly imaginative) of the time, so far from forming a barrier between the two sexes, were a bond of union. The song of the minstrel was devoted to the praise of beauty, and paid by her smile. The spirit of the age, as imbodyed in these effusions, is the best proof of the beneficial influence exercised over that age by our sex. In them, the name of woman is not associated in the degrading catalogue of man's pleasures, with his bottle and his horse, but is coupled with all that is fair and pure in nature,—the fields, the birds, the flowers; or high in virtue or sentiment,—with honour, glory, self-sacrifice.

To the age of chivalry succeeded the revival of letters; and (strange to say!) this revival was any thing but advantageous to the cause of women. Men found other paths to glory than the exercise of valour afforded, and paths into which women were forbidden to follow them. Into these newly-discovered regions, women were not allowed to penetrate, and men returned thence with real or affected contempt for their unintellectual companions, without having attained true wisdom enough to know how much they would gain by their enlightenment.

The advance of intelligence in men not being met by a corresponding advance in women, the latter lost their equilibrium in the social balance. Honour, glory, were no longer attached to the smile of beauty. The dethroned sovereigns, from being imperious, became abject, and sought, by paltry arts, to perpetuate the empire which was no longer conceded as a right. Influence they still possessed, but an influence debased in its character, and changed in its mode of operation. Instead of being the objects of devotion of heart,—fantastic, indeed, but high-minded,—they became the mere playthings of the imagination, or worse, the mere objects of sensual passion. Respect is the only sure foundation of influence. Women had ceased to be respected: they therefore ceased to be beneficially influential. That they retained another and a worse kind of influence, may be inferred from the spirit, as imbodyed in the literature, of the period. Fiction no longer sought its heroes among the lofty in mind and pure in morals—its heroines in spotless virgins and faithful wives. The reckless voluptuary, the faithless and successful adulteress,—these were the noble beings whose deeds filled the pages which formed the delight of the wise and the fair. The ultimate issues of these grievous errors were most strikingly developed in the respective courts of Louis XIV. and Charles



Page 117

II., where they reached their climax. The vicious influence of which we have spoken was then at its height, and the degradation of women had brought on its inevitable consequence, the degradation of men. With some few exceptions, (such exceptions, indeed, prove rules!) we trace this evil influence in the contempt of virtue, public and private; in the base passions, the narrow and selfish views peculiar to degraded women, and reflected on the equally degraded men whom such women could have power to charm.[107]

A change of opinions and of social arrangements has long been operating, which ought entirely to have abrogated these evils. That they have not done so is owing to a grand mistake. Women having recovered their rights, moral and intellectual, have resumed their importance in the eye of reason: they have long been the ornaments of society, which from them derives its tone, and it has become too much the main object of their education to cultivate the accomplishments which may make them such. A twofold injury has arisen from this mistaken aim; it has blinded women as to the true nature and end of their existence, and has excited a spirit of worldly ambition opposed to the devoted unselfishness necessary for its accomplishment. This is the error of the unthinking—the reflecting have fallen into another, but not less serious one. The coarse, but expressive satire of Luther, “That the human mind is like an intoxicated man on horseback,—if he is set up on one side, he falls off on the other,” was never more fully justified than on this subject. Because it is perceived that women have a dignity and value greater than society or themselves have discovered,—because their talents and virtues place them on a footing of equality with men, it is maintained that their present sphere of action is too contracted a one, and that they ought to share in the public functions of the other sex. Equality, mental and *physical*, is proclaimed! This is matter too ludicrous to be treated anywhere but in a professed satire; in sober earnest, it may be asked, upon what grounds so extraordinary a doctrine is built up! Were women allowed to act out these principles, it would soon appear that one great range of duty had been left unprovided for in the schemes of Providence; such an omission would be without parallel. Two principal points only can here be brought forward, which oppose this plan at the very outset; they are—

1st. Placing the two sexes in the position of rivals, instead of coadjutors, entailing the diminution of female influence.

2d. Leaving the important duties of woman only in the hands of that part of the sex least able to perform them efficiently.



Page 118

The principle of divided labour seems to be a maxim of the Divine government, as regards the creature. It is only by a concentration of powers to one point, that so feeble a being as man can achieve great results. Why should we wish to set aside this salutary law, and disturb the beautiful simplicity of arrangement which has given to man the power, and to woman the influence, to second the plans of Almighty goodness? They are formed to be co-operators, not rivals, in this great work; and rivals they would undoubtedly become, if the same career of public ambition and the same rewards of success were open to both. Woman, at present, is the regulating power of the great social machine, retaining, through the very exclusion complained of, the power to judge of questions by the abstract rules of right and wrong—a power seldom possessed by those whose spirits are chafed by opposition and heated by personal contest.

The second resulting evil is a grave one, though, in treating of it, also, it is difficult to steer clear of ludicrous associations. The political career being open to women, it is natural to suppose that all the most gifted of the sex would press forward to confer upon their country the benefit of their services, and to reap for themselves the distinction which such services would obtain; the duties hitherto considered peculiar to the sex would sink to a still lower position in public estimation than they now hold, and would be abandoned to those least able conscientiously to fulfil them. The combination of legislative and maternal duties would indeed be a difficult task, and, of course, the least ostentatious would be sacrificed.

Yet women have a mission! ay, even a political mission of immense importance! which they will best fulfil by moving in the sphere assigned them by Providence: not comet-like, wandering in irregular orbits, dazzling indeed by their brilliancy, but terrifying by their eccentric movements and doubtful utility. That the sphere in which they are required to move is no mean one, and that its apparent contraction arises only from a defect of intellectual vision, it is the object of the succeeding chapters to prove.

FOOTNOTES:

[103] We have come to the close of the Letters. The following pages are quoted from writers of eminence, and bear directly upon the main subject of "Female Education." The first quotations are from the anonymous author of "Woman's Mission." They are of inestimable value. EDITOR.

[104] Aime Martin.

[105] Aime Martin.

[106] Ibid.

[107] See the Memoirs of Pepys, Evelyn, De Grammont, &c.

THE SPHERE OF WOMAN'S INFLUENCE.

“The fact of this influence being proved, it is of the utmost importance that it be impressed upon the mind of women, and that they be enlightened as to its true nature and extent.”



Page 119

The task is as difficult as it is important, for it demands some exercise of sober judgment to view it with requisite impartiality; it requires, too, some courage to encounter the charge of inconsistency which a faithful discharge of it entails. For it is an apparent inconsistency to recommend at the same time expansion of views and contraction of operation; to awaken the sense of power, and to require that the exercise of it be limited; to apply at once the spur and the rein. That intellect is to be invigorated only to enlighten conscience—that conscience is to be enlightened only to act on details—that accomplishments and graces are to be cultivated only, or chiefly, to adorn obscurity;—a list of somewhat paradoxical propositions indeed, and hard to be received; yet, upon their favourable reception depends, in my opinion, the usefulness of our influence, the destinies of our race; and it is my intention to direct all my observations to this point.

It is astonishing and humiliating to perceive how frequently human wisdom, especially argumentative wisdom, is at fault as to results, while accident, prejudices, or common sense seem to light upon truths which reason feels after without finding. It appears as though *a priori* reasoning, human nature being the subject, is like a skilful piece of mechanism, carefully and scientifically put together, but which some perverse and occult trifle will not permit to act. This is eminently true of many questions regarding education, and precisely the state of the argument concerning the position and duties of women. The facts of moral and intellectual equality being established, it seems somewhat irrational to condemn women to obscurity and detail for their field of exertion, while men usurp the extended one of public usefulness. And a good case may be made out on this very point. Yet the conclusions are false and pernicious, and the prejudices which we now smile at as obsolete are truths of nature's own imparting, only wanting the agency of comprehensive intelligence to make them valuable, by adapting them to the present state of society. For, as one atom of falsehood in first principles nullifies a whole theory, so one principle, fundamentally true, suffices to obviate many minor errors. This fundamentally true principle, I am prepared to show, exists in the established opinions concerning the true sphere of women, and that, whether originally dictated by reason, or derived from a sort of intuition, they are right, and for this cause: the one quality on which woman's value and influence depend is the renunciation of self; and the old prejudices respecting her inculcated self-renunciation. Educated in obscurity, trained to consider the fulfilment of domestic duties as the aim and end of her existence, there was little to feed the appetite for fame, or the indulgence of self-idolatry. Now, here the principle fundamentally bears upon the very qualities most desirable to be cultivated, and those most desirable



Page 120

to be avoided. A return to the practical part of the system is by no means to be recommended, for, with increasing intellectual advantages, it is not to be supposed that the perfection of the conjugal character is to consult a husband's palate and submit to his ill-humour—or of the maternal, to administer in due alternation the sponge and the rod. All that is contended for is, that the fundamental principle is right—"that women were to live for others;" and, therefore, all that we have to do is to carry out this fundamentally right principle into wider application. It may easily be done, if the cultivation of intellectual powers be carried on with the same views and motives as were formerly the knowledge of domestic duties, for the benefit of immediate relations, and for the fulfilment of appointed duties. If society at large be benefited by such cultivation, so much the better; but it ought to be no part of the training of women to consider, with any personal views, what effect they shall produce in or on society at large. The greatest benefit which they can confer upon society is to be what they ought to be in all their domestic relations; that is, to be what they ought to be, in all the comprehensiveness of the term, as adapted to the present state of society. Let no woman fancy that she can, by any exertion or services, compensate for the neglect of her own peculiar duties as such. It is by no means my intention to assert that women should be passive and indifferent spectators of the great political questions which affect the well-being of community; neither can I repeat the old adage, that "women have nothing to do with politics." They have, and ought to have much to do with politics. But in what way? It has been maintained that their public participation in them would be fatal to the best interests of society. How, then, are women to interfere in politics? As moral agents; as representatives of the moral principle; as champions of the right in preference to the expedient; by their endeavours to instil into their relatives of the other sex the uncompromising sense of duty and self-devotion, which ought to be *their* ruling principles! The immense influence which women possess will be most beneficial, if allowed to flow in its natural channels, *viz.* domestic ones,—because it is of the utmost importance to the existence of influence, that purity of motive be unquestioned. It is by no means affirmed that women's political feelings are always guided by the abstract principles of right and wrong; but they are surely more likely to be so, if they themselves are restrained from the public expression of them. Participation in scenes of popular emotion has a natural tendency to warp conscience and overcome charity. Now, conscience and charity (or love) are the very essence of woman's beneficial influence; therefore every thing tending to blunt the one and sour the other is sedulously to be avoided by her. It is of the utmost importance to men



Page 121

to feel, in consulting a wife, a mother, or a sister, that they are appealing *from* their passions and prejudices, and not *to* them, as imbodyed in a second self: nothing tends to give opinions such weight as the certainty that the utterer of them is free from all petty or personal motives. The beneficial influence of woman is nullified if once her motives, or her personal character, come to be the subject of attack; and this fact alone ought to induce her patiently to acquiesce in the plan of seclusion from public affairs.

It supposes, indeed, some magnanimity in the possessors of great powers and widely extended influence, to be willing to exercise them with silent, unostentatious vigilance. There must be a deeper principle than usually lies at the root of female education, to induce women to acquiesce in the plan, which, assigning to them the responsibility, has denied them the *eclat* of being reformers of society. Yet it is, probably, exactly in proportion to their reception of this truth, and their adoption of it into their hearts, that they will fulfil their own high and lofty mission; precisely because the manifestation of such a spirit is the one thing needful for the regeneration of society. It is from her being the depository and disseminator of such a spirit, that woman's influence is principally derived. It appears to be for this end that Providence has so lavishly endowed her with moral qualities, and, above all, with that of love,—the antagonist spirit of selfish worldliness, that spirit which, as it is vanquished or victorious, bears with it the moral destinies of the world! Now, it is proverbially as well as scripturally true, that love “seeketh not its own” interest, but the good of others, and finds its highest honour, its highest happiness, in so doing. This is precisely the spirit which can never be too much cultivated by women, because it is the spirit by which their highest triumphs are to be achieved: it is they who are called upon to show forth its beauty, and to prove its power; every thing in their education should tend to develop self-devotion and self-renunciation. How far existing systems contribute to this object, it must be our next step to inquire.

EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

“The education of women is more important than that of men, since that of men is always their work.”[108]

We are now to consider how far the present systems of female education tend to the great end here mentioned—the truth of which, reflection and experience combine to prove. Great is the boast of the progress of education; great would be the indignation excited by a doubt as to the fact of this progress. “A simple question will express this doubt more forcibly, and place this subject in a stronger light: ‘Are women qualified to educate men?’ If they are not, no available progress has been made. In the very heart of civilized Europe, are women what



Page 122

they ought to be? and does not their education prove how little we know the consequences of neglecting it?"[109] Is it possible to believe, that upon their training depends the happiness of families—the well-being of nations? The selfishness, political and social; the forgetfulness of patriotism; the unregulated tempers and low ambition of the one sex, testify but too clearly how little has been done by the vaunted education of the other. For education is useless, or at least neutral, if it do not bear upon duty, as well as upon cultivation, if it do not expand the soul, while it enlightens the intellect.

How far expansion of soul, or enlightenment of intellect, is to be expected from the present systems of female education, we have seen in effects,—let us now go back to causes.

It is unnecessary to start from the prejudice of ignorance; it is now universally acknowledged that women have a right to education, and that they must be educated. We smile with condescending pity at the blinded state of our respected grandmothers, and thank God that we are not as they, with a thanksgiving as uncalled for as that of the proud Pharisee. On abstract ground, their education was better than ours; it was a preparation for their future duties. It does not affect the question, that their notion of these duties was entirely confined to the physical comfort of husbands and children. The defect of the scheme, as has been argued, was not in rationality, but in comprehensiveness,—a fundamentally right principle being the basis, it is easy to extend the application of it indefinitely.

Indiscriminate blame, however, is as invidious as it is useless; if the fault-finder be not also the fault-mender, the exercise of his powers is, at best, but a negative benefit. Let us, therefore, enter into a calm examination of the two principal ramifications, into which education has insensibly divided itself, as far as the young women of our own country are concerned; bearing in mind that women can only exercise their true influence, inasmuch as they are free from worldly-mindedness and egotism, and that, therefore, no system of education can be good which does not tend to subdue the selfish and bring out the unselfish principle. The systems alluded to are these:—

1st. The education of accomplishments for shining in society.

2d. Intellectual education, or that of the mental powers.

What are the objects of either? To prepare the young for life; its subsequent trials; its weighty duties; its inevitable termination? We will examine the principles on which both these educations are made to work, and see whether, or how far, they have any relation to those most called for, by the future and presumed duties of the educated. The worldly and the intellectual, alternately objects of contempt to each other, are equally

objects of pity to the wise, as mistaken in their end, and deceived as to the means of attaining that end.



Page 123

The education of accomplishments, (especially as conducted in this country,) would be a risible, if it were not a painful subject of contemplation. Intense labour; immense sums of money; hours, nay, days of valuable time! What a list of sacrifices! Now for results. Of the many who thus sacrifice time, health, and property, how few attain even a moderate proficiency. The love of beauty, the power of self-amusement (if obtained) might, in some degree, justify these sacrifices; they are valuable ends in themselves, still more valuable from contingent advantages. There is a deep influence hidden under these beautiful arts,—an influence far deeper than the world in its thoughtlessness, or the worldly student in his vanity, ever can know,—an influence refining, consoling, elevating: they afford a channel into which the lofty aspirings, the unsatisfied yearnings of the pure and elevated in soul may pour themselves. The perception of the beautiful is, next to the love of our fellow-creatures, the most purely unselfish of all our natural emotions, and is, therefore, a most powerful engine in the hands of those who regard selfishness as the giant passion, whose castle must be stormed before any other conquest can be begun, and in vanquishing whom all lawful and innocent weapons should, by turns, be employed.

Let us consider how we employ this mighty ally of virtue and loftiness of soul. Into the cultivation of the arts, disguised under the hackneyed name of accomplishments, does one particle of intellectuality creep? Would not many of their ablest professors and most diligent practitioners stare, with unfeigned wonder, at the supposition, that the five hours per diem devoted to the piano and the easel had any other object than to accomplish the fingers? The idea of their influencing the head would be ridiculous! of their improving the heart, preposterous! Yet if both head and heart do not combine in these pursuits, how can the cultivators justify to themselves the devotion of time and labour to their acquisition: time and labour, in many cases, abstracted from the performance of present, or preparation for future duties,—this is especially applicable to the middle classes of society.

Let us now turn to the issues of this education! The accomplishments acquired at such cost must be displayed. To whom? the possessor has no delight in them,—her immediate relatives, perhaps, no taste for them;—to strangers, therefore. It is not necessary to make many strictures on this subject; the rage for universal exhibition has been written and talked down: in fact, there are great hopes for the world in this particular; it has descended so low in the scale of society, that we trust it will soon be exploded altogether. The fashion, therefore, need not be here treated of, but the spirit which it has engendered, and which will survive its parent. This, as influencing the female character—especially the maternal—bears greatly upon the point



Page 124

in view;—to live for the applause of the foolish *many*, instead of the approbation of the well-judging *few*; to rule duty, conscience, morals, by a low worldly standard; to view worldly admiration as the aim, and worldly aggrandizement as the end of life; these are a few,—a very few, indications of this spirit, and these have infected every rank, from the highest to the middle and lower classes of society. To every thing gentle or refined, to every thing lofty or dignified in the female character, this spirit is utterly opposed. Refinement would teach to shun the vulgar applause which almost insults its object,—dignity would shrink from displaying before heartless crowds those emotions of the soul, without which all art is vulgar,—and how can women, who have neither refinement nor dignity, retail that influence which, rightly used, is to be so great an engine in the regeneration of society? How can the vain and selfish exhibitor of paltry acquirements ever mature into the mother of the Gracchi, the tutelary guardian of the rising virtues of the commonwealth? It is in vain to hope it.

Before making any strictures on intellectual education, it is necessary to enter into a short explanation; for it is not denied that rightly-cultivated mental power is a great good. The kind of cultivation which is here decried is open to the same objections as the last mentioned. It is the cultivation of power, with a view, not to the happiness of the individual, but to her fame; not to her usefulness, but to her brilliancy. We have only to look round society, and see that intellect has its vanity as well as beauty or accomplishments, and that its effects are more mischievous. It has a hardening, deadening kind of influence; the more so, that the so-called mental cultivation frequently consists only of a pedantic heaping up of information, valuable indeed in itself, but wanting the principle of combination to make it useful. Stones and bricks are valuable things, very valuable; but they are not beautiful or useful till the hand of the architect has given them a form, and the cement of the bricklayer has knit them together. It is a fine expression of Miss Edgeworth, in speaking of the mind of one of her heroines, “that the stream of literature had passed over it was apparent only from its fertility.” Intellectual cultivation was too long considered as education, properly so called. The mischief which this error has produced, is exactly in proportion to the increase of power thereby communicated to wrong principles.

What, then, is the true object of female education? The best answer to this question is, a statement of future duties; for it must never be forgotten, that if education be not a training for future duties, it is nothing. The ordinary lot of woman is to marry. Has any thing in these educations prepared her to make a wise choice in marriage? To be a mother! Have the duties of maternity,—the nature of moral influence,—been pointed out to



Page 125

her? Has she ever been enlightened as to the consequent unspeakable importance of personal character as the source of influence? In a word, have any means, direct or indirect, prepared her for her duties? No! but she is a linguist, a pianist, graceful, admired. What is that to the purpose? The grand evil of such an education is the mistaking means for ends; a common error, and the source of half the moral confusion existing in the world. It is the substitution of the part for a whole. The time when young women enter upon life, is the one point to which all plans of education tend, and at which they all terminate: and to prepare them for that point is the object of their training. Is it not cruel to lay up for them a store of future wretchedness, by an education which has no period in view but one; a very short one, and the most unimportant and irresponsible of the whole of life? Who that had the power of choice would choose to buy the admiration of the world for a few short years with the happiness of a whole life? the temporary power to dazzle and to charm, with the growing sense of duties undertaken only to be neglected, and responsibilities the existence of which is discovered perhaps simultaneously with that of an utter inability to meet them? Even if the mischief stopped here, it would be sufficiently great; but the craving appetite for applause once roused, is not so easily lulled again. The moral energies, pampered by unwholesome nourishment,—like the body when disordered by luxurious dainties,—refuse to perform their healthy functions, and thus is occasioned a perpetual strife and warfare of internal principles; the selfish principle still seeking the accustomed gratification, the conjugal and maternal prompting to the performance of duty. But duty is a cold word; and people, in order to find pleasure in duty, must have been trained to consider their duties as pleasures. This is a truth at which no one arrives by inspiration! And in this moral struggle, which, like all other struggles, produces lassitude and distaste of all things, the happiness of the individual is lost, her usefulness destroyed, her influence most pernicious. For nothing has so injurious an effect on temper and manners, and consequently on moral influence, as the want of that internal quiet which can only arise from the accordance of duty with inclination. Another most pernicious effect is, the deadening within the heart of the feeling of love, which is the root of all influence; for it is an extraordinary fact, that vanity acts as a sort of refrigerator on all men—on the possessor of it, and on the observer.



Page 126

Now, if conscientiousness and unselfishness be the two main supports of women's beneficial influence, how can any education be good which has not the cultivation of these qualities for its first and principal object? The grand objects, then, in the education of women, ought to be, the conscience, the heart, and the affections; the development of those moral qualities which Providence has so liberally bestowed upon them, doubtless with a wise and beneficent purpose. Originators of conscientiousness, how can they implant what they have never cultivated, nor brought to maturity in themselves? Sovereigns of the affections, how can they direct the kingdom whose laws they have not studied, the springs of whose government are concealed from them? The conscience and the affections being primarily enlightened, all other cultivation, as secondary, is most valuable. Intelligence, accomplishments, even external elegance, become objects of importance, as assisting the influence which women have, and exert too often for unworthy ends, but which in this case could not fail to be beneficial. Let the light of intellect and the charm of accomplishments be the willing handmaids of cultivated and enlightened conscience. Cultivate the intellect with reference to the conscience, that views of duty may be comprehensive, as well as just; cultivate the imagination still with reference to the conscience, that those inward aspirations which all indulge, more or less, may be turned from the gauds of an idle and vain imagination, and shed over daily life and daily duty the halo of a poetic influence; cultivate the manners, that the qualities of heart and head may have an additional auxiliary in obtaining that influence by which a mighty regeneration is to be worked. The issues of such an education will justify the claims made for women in these pages; then the spirit of vanity will yield to the spirit of self-devotion: that spirit confessedly natural to Women, and only perverted by wrong education. Content with the sphere of usefulness assigned her by Nature and Nature's God, viewing that sphere with the piercing eye of intellect, and gilding it with the beautiful colours of the imagination, she will cease the vain and almost impious attempt to wander from it. She will see and acknowledge the beauty, the harmony of the arrangement which has made her physical inferiority (the only inferiority which we acknowledge) the very root from which spring her virtues and their attendant influences. Removed from the actual collision of political contests, and screened from the passions which such engender, she brings party questions to the test of the unalterable principles of reason and religion; she is, so to speak, the guardian angel of man's political integrity, liable at the best to be warped by passion or prejudice, and excited by the rude clashing of opinions and interests. This is the true secret of woman's political influence, the true object of her political enlightenment.



Page 127

Governments will never be perfect till all distinction between private and public virtue, private and public honour, be done away! Who so fit an agent for the operation of this change as enlightened, unselfish woman? Who so fit, in her twofold capacity of companion and early instructor, to teach men to prefer honour to gain, duty to ease, public to private interests, and God's work to man's inventions? And shall it be said that women have no political existence, no political influence, when the very germs of political regeneration may spring from them alone, when the fate of nations yet unborn may depend upon the use which they make of the mighty influences committed to their care? The blindness which sees not how these influences would be lessened by taking her out of the sphere assigned by Providence, if voluntary, is wicked—if real, is pitiable. As well might we desire the earth's beautiful satellite to give place to a second sun, thereby producing the intolerable and glaring continuity of perpetual day. Those who would be the agents of Providence must observe the workings of Providence, and be content to work also in that way, and by those means, which Almighty wisdom appoints. There is infinite littleness in despising small things. It seems paradoxical to say that there are no small things; our littleness and our aspiration make things appear small. There are, morally speaking, no small duties. Nothing that influences human virtue and happiness can be really trifling,—and what more influences them than the despised, because limited, duties assigned to woman? It is true, her reward (her task being done) is not of this world, nor will she wish it to be—enough for her to be one of the most active and efficient agents in her heavenly Father's work of man's regeneration,—enough for her that generations yet unborn shall rise up and call her blessed.

FOOTNOTES:

[108] Aime Martin.

[109] Ibid.

LOVE—MARRIAGE.

The conventual and monastic origin of all systems of education has had a very injurious influence, on that of women especially, because the conventual spirit has been longer retained in it.

If no education be good which does not bear upon the future duties of the educated, it follows that the systematic exclusion of any one subject connected with, or bearing upon, future duties, must be an evil. The wisdom of employing those who had renounced the world to form the minds of those who were to mix in it, to be exposed in all its allurements, to share in all its duties, was doubtful indeed; and the danger was



enhanced by the fact, that the majority of recluses were any thing but indifferent to the world which they had renounced. The convent was too often the refuge of disappointed worldliness, the grave of blasted hopes, or the prison of involuntary victims; a withering atmosphere this in which to place warm

Page 128

young hearts, and expect them to expand and flourish. The evil effects would be varied according to the different characters submitted to its influence. The sensitive entered upon life oppressed with fears and terrors; with a conscience morbid, not enlightened; bewildered by the impossibility of reconciling principles and duties. The ardent and sanguine, longing to escape from restraint, pictured to themselves, in these unknown and untried regions, delights infinite and unvaried; and, seeing the incompatibility of inculcated principles and worldly pleasures, discarded principle altogether. It is needless to pursue this subject further, because a universal assent will (in this country, at least,) await the remarks here made; their applicability to what follows may not at first be so apparent. The conventual spirit has survived conventual institutions,—in the department of female education especially.

In the first place, the instructors of female youth are considered respectable and trustworthy only in proportion as they cease to be young, or at least in proportion as they appear to forget that they ever were so. Any touch of sympathy for the follies of childhood, or the indiscretions of youth, would blast the prospects of a candidate for that honourable office, and, in the opinion of many, render her unfit for its fulfilment. The unfitness is attached to the opposite disposition; for the very fact of its existence is as effectual an obstacle to her being a good trainer of youth, as if she had taken a vow never to see the world but through an iron grating. Experience can never benefit youth, except when combined with indulgence. The instructor who, from the heights of past temptations and subdued passion, looks down with cool watchfulness on the struggles of his youthful pupil, will see him lie floundering in the mire, or perishing in the deep water. He must retrace his own steps, take him by the hand, and sustain him, till he is passed the dangerous and slippery paths of youth. He must become as a little child to the young and frail being committed to his care, and whose welfare and safety depend (in great measure) upon him. A cold and unloving admiration never will produce imitation: it is like the hopeless love of poor Helena:—

'Twere all as one as I should love a bright particular star!

Here, then, the conventual spirit has been in injurious operation;—no less so on other points.

This conventual prejudice has banished from our school-rooms the name of love, and presented to their youthful inmates fragments instead of books, cramped and puny publications instead of the works of master-spirits, lest the mind should be contaminated by any allusion to that passion contained in them. The wisdom of such a proceeding is much upon a par with that which devoted the feet to stocks and the shoulders to backboards, in order to make them elegant, and denied them heaven's air and active exercise through



Page 129

care for their health. The result, in the one case as in the other, is disease and distortion. Nature will assert her rights over the beings she has made; and she avenges, by the production of deformity, all attempts to force or shackle her operations. The golden globe could not check the expansive force of water; equally useless is it to attempt any check on the expansive force of mind,—it will ooze out! We ought long ago to have been convinced that the only power allowed to us is the power of direction. If one-half the amount of effort expended to useless endeavours to cramp and check, had been turned towards this channel, how different would be the results! It is true that it is easier to check than to guide,—to fetter than to restrain; and that to attempt to remove evil by the first-occurring remedy is a natural impulse. But a pause should be made, lest in applying the remedy a worse evil be not engendered. Distorted spines and “pale consumptions,” the result of the one mistake, are trifling evils, when compared with the moral evils resulting from the other. For if, as is affirmed, no education can be good which does not bear upon future duties, how can that be wise which keeps love and its temptations, maternity and its responsibilities, out of view? Who would believe that this love, so denounced, so guarded against, so carefully banished from the minds of young women, is the one principle on which their future happiness may be founded or wrecked? It is sure to seek them, (most of them, at least,) like death in the fable, to find them unprepared,—too often to leave them wretched.

Meanwhile, these exaggerated precautions in the education of one sex have been met by equally fatal negligence in the education of the other; and while to girls have been denied the very thoughts of love,—even in its noblest and purest form,—the most effeminate and corrupt productions of the heathen writers have been unhesitatingly laid open to boys; so that the two sexes, on whose respective notions of the passion depends the ennobling or the degrading of their race, meet on these terms:—the men know nothing of love but what they have imbibed from an impure and polluted source; the women, nothing at all, or nothing but what they have clandestinely gathered from sources almost equally corrupt. The deterioration of any feeling must follow from such injudicious training, more especially a feeling so susceptible as love of assuming such differing aspects.

Let no sober-minded person be startled at the deductions hence drawn, that it is foolish to banish all thoughts of love from the minds of the young. Since it is certain that girls will think, though they may not read or speak, of love; and that no early care can preserve them from being exposed, at a later period, to its temptations, might it not be well to use here the directing, not the repressing power? Since women will love, might it not be as well to teach them to love wisely? Where is the wisdom of letting the combatant go unarmed into the field, in order to spare him the prospect of a combat? Are not women made to love, and to be loved: and does not their future destiny too often depend upon this passion? And yet the conventual prejudice which banishes its name subsists still.



Page 130

“Mothers forget, in presence of their children, all the dangers with which this prejudice has surrounded themselves; the illusions which arise from that ignorance, and the weakness which springs from those illusions. To open the minds of the young to the nature of true love, is to arm them against the frivolous passions which usurp its name, for in exalting the faculties of the soul, we annihilate, in a great degree, the delusions of the senses.”[110]

Examine the first choice of a young girl. Of all the qualities which please her in a lover, there is, perhaps, not one which is valuable in a husband. Is not this the most complete condemnation of all our systems of education? From the fear of too much agitating the heart, we hide from women all that is worthy of love, all the depth and dignity of that passion when felt for a worthy object;—their eye is captivated, the exterior pleases, the heart and mind are not known, and, after six months union, they are surprised to find the beau ideal metamorphosed into a fool or a coxcomb. This is the issue of what are ordinarily called love-matches, because they are considered as such. “Cupid is indeed often blamed for deeds in which he has no share.” In the opinion of the wise, the mischief is occasioned by the action of vivid imaginations upon minds unprepared by previous reflection on the subject; that is, by the entire banishment of all thoughts of love from education. We should endeavour, then, to engrave on the soul a model of virtue and excellence, and teach young women to regulate their affections by an approximation to this model; the result would not be an increased facility in giving the affections, but a greater difficulty in so doing; for women, whose blindness and ignorance now make them the victims of fancied perfections, would be able to make a clear-sighted appreciation of all that is excellent, and have an invincible repugnance to an union not founded upon that basis. Love, in the common acceptance of the term, is a folly,—love, in its purity, its loftiness, its unselfishness, is not only a consequence, but a proof of our moral excellence,—the sensibility to moral beauty, the forgetfulness of self in the admiration engendered by it, all prove its claim to be a high moral influence; it is the triumph of the unselfish over the selfish part of our nature.[111]

What is meant by educating young women to love wisely is simply this, that they be taught to distinguish true love from the false spirit which usurps its name and garb; that they be taught to abstract from it the worldliness, vanity, and folly, with which it has been mixed up. They should be taught that it is not to be the amusement of an idle hour; the indulgence of a capricious and greedy vanity; the ladder, by the assistance of which they may climb a few steps higher in the grades of society; in short, that except it owe its origin to the noble qualities of heart and mind, it is nothing but a contemptible weakness, to be pitied perhaps, but not to be indulged or admired.



Page 131

When the might influence of this passion is considered, the important relations and weighty responsibilities to which it gives rise, we have reason to be astonished at the levity with which the subject is treated by the world at large, and the unconsciousness and indifference with which those responsibilities are assumed. It is like the madman who flings about firebrands and calls it sport. The remedy for this evil must begin with the sex who have in their hands that powerful influence, the liberty of rejection. Let them not complain that liberty of choice is not theirs; it would only increase their responsibilities without adding to their happiness or to their usefulness. The liberty which they do possess is amply sufficient to insure for them the power of being benefactors of mankind. As soon as the noble and elevated of our sex shall refuse to unite on any but moral and intellectual grounds with the other, so soon will a mighty regeneration begin to be effected: and this end will, perhaps, be better served by the simple liberty of rejection than by liberty of choice. Rejection is never inflicted without pain; it is never received without humiliation, however unfounded, (for simply to want the power of pleasing can be no disgrace;) but in the existence of this conventional feeling we find the source of a deep influence. If women would, as by one common league and covenant, agree to use this powerful engine in defence of morals, what a change might they not effect in the tone of society! Is it not a subject that ought to crimson every woman's cheek with shame, that the want of moral qualifications is generally the very last cause of rejection? If the worldly find the wealth, and the intellectual the intelligence, which they seek in a companion, there are few who will not shut their eyes in wilful and convenient blindness to the want of such qualifications. It is a fatal error which has bound up the cause of affection so intimately with worldly considerations; and it is a growing evil. The increasing demands of luxury in a highly civilized community operate most injuriously on the cause of disinterested affections, and particularly so in the case of women, who are generally precluded from maintaining or advancing their place in society by any other schemes than matrimonial ones. I might say something here on the cruelty of that conventional prejudice which shackles the independence of women, by attaching the loss of caste to almost all, nay, all, of the very few sources of pecuniary emolument open to them. It requires great strength of principle to disregard this prejudice; and while urged by duty to inveigh against mercenary unions, I feel some compunction at the thoughts of the numerous class who are in a manner forced by this prejudice into forming them. But there are too many who have no such excuse, and to them the remaining observations are addressed. The sacred nature of the conjugal relation is entirely merged in the worldly aspect of it. That union



Page 132

sacred, indissoluble, fraught with all that earth has to bestow of happiness or misery, is entered upon much of the plan and principle of a partnership account in mercantile affairs—each bringing his or her quantum of worldly possessions—and often with even less inquiry as to moral qualities than persons so situated would make; God's ordinances are not to be so mocked, and such violations of his laws are severely visited upon offenders against them. It would be laughable, if it were not too melancholy, to see beings bound by the holiest ties, who ought to be the sharers in the most sacred duties—united, perhaps, but in one aim, and *that* to secure from a world which cares not for them, a few atoms more of external observance and attention: to this noble aim sacrificing their own ease and comfort, and the future prospects of those dependent on them. If half the sacrifice thus made to the imperious demands of fashion, (and which is received with the indifference it deserves,) were exerted in a good cause, what benefits might it not produce?

While women are thus content to sacrifice delicacy, affection, principle, to the desire of worldly establishment or aggrandizement, how is the regeneration of society to be expected from them? Formerly, too, this spirit was confined to the old, hackneyed in the ways of the world, and who, having worn out the trifling affections which they ever had, would subject those of their children to the maxims of worldly prudence. This we learn from fiction and the drama, where the worldly wisdom of age is always represented as opposed to the generous but imprudent passions of youth. But now, in these our better and more enlightened days, those mercenary maxims which were odious even in age, are found in the mouths of the young and the fair,—or at least, if not in their mouths, in their actions. To sacrifice affection to interest is a praiseworthy thing. It is fearful to hear the withering sneer with which that folly, love, is spoken of by young and innocent lips—a sneer of conscious superiority, too! It is a superiority not to be envied, and which makes them objects of greater pity than those whom they affect to despise. There is no subject so sacred that it has not a side open to ridicule, and all the most pure and noble attributes of our nature may be converted into subjects for a jest, by minds in which no lofty idea can find an echo. All notions of unworldly and unselfish attachment are branded with the name of romantic follies, unworthy of sensible persons; and the idealities of love, like all other idealities, are fast disappearing beneath the leaden mantle of expediency.



Page 133

The reform must begin here, as in all great moral questions, with the arbiters of morals—those from whom morals take their tone—women. That we have no right to expect it to begin with the other sex, may be proved even by a vulgar aphorism. It is often triumphantly said, that “a man may marry when he will—a woman must marry when she can.” How keen a satire upon both sexes is couched in this homely proverb! and how long will they consent not only patiently to acquiesce in its truth, but to prove it by their actions? That women may be able thus to reform society, it is of importance that conscience be educated on this subject as on every other; educated, too, before the tinsel of false romance deceive the eye, or the frost of worldly-mindedness congeal the heart of youth. It seems to me that this object would best be effected, not by avoiding the subject of love, but by treating it, when it arises, with seriousness and simplicity, as a feeling which the young may one day be called upon to excite and to return, but which can have no existence in the lofty in soul and pure in heart, except when called forth by corresponding qualities in another. Such training as this would be a far more effectual preventive of foolish passions, than cramping the intellect in narrow ignorance, and excluding all knowledge of what life is—in order to prepare people for entering upon it: a plan about as wise in itself, and as successful as to results, as the bolts, bars, and duennas of a Spanish play. Outward, substituted for inward, restraints are sure to act upon man mentally, as actual bonds do physically; he only wants to get free from them. Noble and virtuous principles in the heart will not fail to direct the conduct aright, and it is to transfer these things from matters of decorum or expediency, to matters of conscience, that we should use our most earnest endeavours. Above all, it is incumbent upon those who have the training of the young—of women especially—so to imbue their souls with lofty and conscientious principles of action, that they may be alike unwilling to deceive, or liable to be deceived; that they may not be led as fools or as victims into those responsible relations, for the consequences of which, (how momentous!) to themselves, to others, and to society at large, they are answerable to a God of infinite wisdom and justice.

FOOTNOTES:

[110] Aime Martin.

[111] It is Coleridge who speaks of the “unselfishness of love,” in one of the volumes of his “Remains.”

LITERARY CAPABILITIES OF WOMEN.

BY LORD JEFFREY.



Page 134

Women, we fear, cannot do every thing; nor every thing they attempt. But what they can do, they do, for the most part, excellently—and much more frequently with an absolute and perfect success, than the aspirants of our rougher and ambitious sex. They cannot, we think, represent naturally the fierce and sullen passions of men—nor their coarser vices—nor even scenes of actual business or contention—nor the mixed motives, and strong and faulty characters, by which affairs of moment are usually conducted on the great theatre of the world. For much of this they are disqualified by the delicacy of their training and habits, and the still more disabling delicacy which pervades their conceptions and feelings; and from much they are excluded by their necessary inexperience of the realities they might wish to describe—by their substantial and incurable ignorance of business—of the way in which serious affairs are actually managed—and the true nature of the agents and impulses that give movement and direction to the stronger currents of ordinary life. Perhaps they are also incapable of long moral or political investigations, where many complex and indeterminate elements are to be taken into account, and a variety of opposite probabilities to be weighed before coming to a conclusion. They are generally too impatient to get at the ultimate results, to go well through with such discussions; and either stop short at some imperfect view of the truth, or turn aside to repose in the shade of some plausible error. This, however, we are persuaded, arises entirely from their being seldom set on such tedious tasks. Their proper and natural business is the practical regulation of private life, in all its bearings, affections, and concerns; and the questions with which they have to deal in that most important department, though often of the utmost difficulty and nicety, involve, for the most part, but few elements; and may generally be better described as delicate than intricate;—requiring for their solution rather a quick tact and fine perception, than a patient or laborious examination. For the same reason, they rarely succeed in long works, even on subjects the best suited to their genius; their natural training rendering them equally averse to long doubt and long labour.

For all other intellectual efforts, however, either of the understanding or the fancy, and requiring a thorough knowledge either of man's strength or his weakness, we apprehend them to be, in all respects, as well qualified as their perceptions of grace, propriety, ridicule—their power of detecting artifice, hypocrisy, and affectation—the force and promptitude of their sympathy, and their capacity of noble and devoted attachment, and of the efforts and sacrifices it may require, they are, beyond all doubt, our superiors.

Page 135

Their business being, as we have said, with actual or social life, and the colours it receives from the conduct and dispositions of individuals, they unconsciously acquire, at a very early age, the finest perception of character and manners, and are almost as soon instinctively schooled in the deep and more dangerous learning of feeling and emotion; while the very minuteness with which they make and meditate on these interesting observations, and the finer shades and variations of sentiment which are thus treasured and recorded, train their whole faculties to a nicety and precision of operation, which often discloses itself to advantage in their application to studies of a different character. When women, accordingly, have turned their minds—as they have done but too seldom—to the exposition or arrangement of any branch of knowledge, they have commonly exhibited, we think, a more beautiful accuracy, and a more uniform and complete justness of thinking, than their less discriminating brethren. There is a finish and completeness, in short, about every thing they put out of their hands, which indicates not only an inherent taste for elegance and neatness, but a habit of nice observation, and singular exactness of judgement.

It has been so little the fashion, at any time, to encourage women to write for publication, that it is more difficult than it should be, to prove these truths by examples. Yet there are enough, within the reach of a very careless and superficial glance over the open field of literature, to enable us to explain, at least, and illustrate, if not entirely to verify, our assertions. No *man*, we will venture to say, could have written the Letters of Madame de Sevigne, or the Novels of Miss Austin, or the Hymns and Early Lessons of Mrs. Barbauld, or the Conversations of Mrs. Marcet. Those performance, too, are not only essentially and intensely feminine; but they are, in our judgment, decidedly more perfect than any masculine productions with which they can be brought into comparison. They accomplish more completely all the ends at which they aim; and are worked out with a gracefulness and felicity of execution which excludes all idea of failure, and entirely satisfies the expectations they may have raised. We might easily have added to these instances. There are many parts of Miss Edgeworth's earlier stories, and of Miss Mitford's sketches and descriptions, and not a little of Mrs. Opie's, that exhibit the same fine and penetrating spirit of observations, the same softness and delicacy of hand, and unerring truth of delineation, to which we have alluded as characterizing the purer specimens of female art. The same distinguishing traits of woman's spirit are visible through the grief and piety of Lady Russel, and the gayety, the spite, and the venturesomeness of Lady Mary Wortley. We have not as yet much female poetry; but there is a truly feminine tenderness, purity, and elegance in the Psyche of Mrs. Tighe,



Page 136

and in some of the smaller pieces of Lady Craven. On some of the works of Madame de Stael—her *Corinne* especially—there is a still deeper stamp of the genius of her sex. Her pictures of its boundless devotedness—its depth and capacity of suffering—its high aspirations—its painful irritability, and inextinguishable thirst for emotion, are powerful specimens of that morbid anatomy of the heart, which no hand but that of a woman's was fine enough to have laid open, or skilful enough to have recommended to our sympathy and love. There is the same exquisite and inimitable delicacy, if not the same power, in many of the happier passages of Madame de Souza and Madame Cottin—to say nothing of the more lively and yet melancholy records of Madame de Stael, during her long penance in the court of the Duchesse de Maine.

We think the poetry of Mrs. Hemans a fine exemplification of Female Poetry—and we think it has much of the perfection which we have ventured to ascribe to the happier productions of female genius.

It may not be the best imaginable poetry, and may not indicate the very highest or most commanding genius; but it embraces a great deal of that which gives the very best poetry its chief power of pleasing; and would strike us, perhaps, as more impassioned and exalted, if it were not regulated and harmonized by the most beautiful taste. It is singularly sweet, elegant, and tender—touching, perhaps, and contemplative, rather than vehement and overpowering; and not only finished throughout with an exquisite delicacy, and even severity of execution, but infused with a purity and loftiness of feeling, and a certain sober and humble tone of indulgence and piety, which must satisfy all judgments, and allay the apprehensions of those who are most afraid of the passionate exaggerations of poetry. The diction is always beautiful, harmonious, and free—and the themes, though of great variety, uniformly treated with a grace, originality, and judgment, which mark the same master hand. These themes she has occasionally borrowed, with the peculiar imagery that belongs to them, from the legends of different nations, and the most opposite states of society; and has contrived to retain much of what is interesting and peculiar in each of them, without adopting, along with it, any of the revolting or extravagant excesses which may characterize the taste or manners of the people or the age from which it has been derived. She has transfused into her German or Scandinavian legends the imaginative and daring tone of the originals, without the mystical exaggerations of the one, or the painful fierceness and coarseness of the other—she has preserved the clearness and elegance of the French, without their coldness or affectation—and the tenderness and simplicity of the early Italians, without their diffuseness or languor. Though occasionally expatiating, somewhat fondly and at large, among the sweets of her own planting, there is, on the whole, a great condensation and brevity in most of her pieces, and, almost without exception, a most judicious and vigorous conclusion. The great merit, however, of her poetry, is undoubtedly in its tenderness and its beautiful imagery. The first requires no

explanation; but we must be allowed to add a word as to the peculiar charm and character of the latter.



Page 137

It has always been our opinion, that the very essence of poetry—apart from the pathos, the wit, or the brilliant description which may be imbodyed in it, but may exist equally in prose—consists in the fine perception and vivid expression of the subtle and mysterious analogy which exists between the physical and the moral world—which makes outward things and qualities the natural types and emblems of inward gifts and emotions, or leads us to ascribe life and sentiment to every thing that interests us in the aspects of external nature. The feeling of this analogy, obscure and inexplicable as the theory of it may be, is so deep and universal in our nature, that it has stamped itself on the ordinary language of men of every kindred and speech: that to such an extent, that one-half of the epithets by which we familiarly designate moral and physical qualities, are in reality so many metaphors, borrowed reciprocally, upon this analogy, from those opposite forms of expression. The very familiarity, however, of the expression, in these instances, takes away its political effect—and indeed, in substance, its metaphorical character. The original sense of the word is entirely forgotten in the derivative one to which it has succeeded; and it requires some etymological recollection to convince us that it was originally nothing else than a typical or analogical illustration. Thus we talk of a sparkling wit, and a furious blast—a weighty argument, and a gentle stream—without being at all aware that we are speaking in the language of poetry, and transferring qualities from one extremity of the sphere of being to another. In these cases, accordingly, the metaphor, by ceasing to be felt, in reality ceases to exist, and the analogy being no longer intimated, of course can produce no effect. But whenever it is intimated, it does produce an effect; and that effect we think is poetry.

It has substantially two functions, and operates in two directions. In the *first* place, when material qualities are ascribed to mind, it strikes vividly out, and brings at once before us, the conception of an inward feeling or emotion, which it might otherwise have been difficult to convey, by the presentiment of some bodily form or quality, which is instantly felt to be its true representative, and enables us to fix and comprehend it with a force and clearness not otherwise attainable; and, in the *second* place, it vivifies dead and inanimate matter with the attributes of living and sentient mind, and fills the whole visible universe around us with objects of interest and sympathy, by tinting them with the hues of life, and associating them with our own passions and affections. This magical operation the poet too performs, for the most part, in one of two ways—either by the direct agency of similies and metaphors, more or less condensed or developed, or by the mere graceful presentment of such visible objects on the scene of his passionate dialogues or adventures, as partake



Page 138

of the character of the emotion he wishes to excite, and thus form an appropriate accompaniment or preparation for its direct indulgence or display. The former of those methods has perhaps been most frequently employed, and certainly has most attracted attention. But the latter, though less obtrusive, and perhaps less frequently resorted to of set purpose, is, we are inclined to think, the most natural and efficacious of the two; and it is often adopted, we believe unconsciously, by poets of the highest order;—the predominant emotion of their minds overflowing spontaneously on all the objects which present themselves to their fancy, and calling out from them, and colouring with their own hues, those that are naturally emblematic of its character, and in accordance with its general expression. It would be easy to show how habitually this is done, by Shakspeare and Milton especially, and how much many of their finest passages are indebted, both for force and richness of effect, to this general and diffusive harmony of the external character of their scenes with the passions of their living agents—this harmonizing and appropriate glow with which they kindle the whole surrounding atmosphere, and bring all that strikes the sense into unison with all the touches the heart.

But it is more to our present purpose to say, that we think the fair writer before us is eminently a mistress of this poetical secret; and, in truth, it was solely for the purpose of illustrating this great charm and excellence in her imagery, that we have ventured upon this little dissertation. Almost all her poems are rich with fine descriptions, and studded over with images of visible beauty. But these are never idle ornaments; all her pomps have a meaning; and her flowers and her gems are arranged, as they are said to be among Eastern lovers, so as to speak the language of truth and of passion. This is peculiarly remarkable in some little pieces, which seem at first sight to be purely descriptive—but are soon found to tell upon the heart, with a deep moral and pathetic impression. But it is, in truth, nearly as conspicuous in the greater part of her productions; where we scarcely meet with any striking sentiment that is not ushered in by some such symphony of external nature—and scarcely a lovely picture that does not serve as an appropriate foreground to some deep or lofty emotion. We may illustrate this proposition, we think, by the following exquisite lines, on a palm-tree in an English garden.

It waved not through an Eastern sky,
Beside a fount of Araby
It was not fanned by southern breeze
In some green isle of Indian seas,
Nor did its graceful shadows sleep
O'er stream of Africa, lone and deep.

But far the exiled Palm-tree grew
Midst foliage of no kindred hue;



Through the laburnum's dropping gold
Rose the light shaft of orient mould,
And Europe's violets, faintly sweet,
Purpled the moss-beds at his feet.



Page 139

There came an eve of festal hours—
Rich music filled that garden's bowers:
Lamps, that from flowering branches hung,
On sparks of dew soft colours flung,
And bright forms glanced—a fairy show—
Under the blossoms, to and fro.

But one, a lone one, midst the throng,
Seemed reckless all of dance or song:
He was a youth of dusky mien,
Whereon the Indian sun had been—
Of crested brow, and long black hair—
A stranger, like the Palm-tree, there!

And slowly, sadly moved his plumes,
Glittering athwart the leafy glooms:
He passed the pale green olives by,
Nor won the chestnut-flowers his eye;
But, when to that sole Palm he came,
Then shot a rapture through his frame!

To him, to him its rustling spoke:
The silence of his soul it broke!
It whispered of his own bright isle,
That lit the ocean with a smile;
Ay, to his ear that native tone
Had something of the sea-wave's moan!

His mother's cabin home, that lay
Where feathery cocoas fringed the bay;
The dashing of his brethren's oar;
The conch-note heard along the shore;—
All through his wakening bosom swept;
He clasped his country's Tree—and wept!

Oh! scorn him not! The strength whereby
The patriot girds himself to die,
The unconquerable power, which fills
The freeman battling on his hills—
These have one fountain deep and clear—
The same whence gushed that child-like tear!



ENNUI, AND THE DESIRE TO BE FASHIONABLE.

BY LORD JEFFREY.

There are two great sources of unhappiness to those whom fortune and nature seem to have placed above the reach of ordinary miseries. The one is *ennui*—that stagnation of life and feeling which results from the absence of all motives to exertion; and by which the justice of Providence has so fully compensated the partiality of fortune, that it may be fairly doubted whether, upon the whole, the race of beggars is not happier than the race of lords; and whether those vulgar wants that are sometimes so importunate, are not, in this world, the chief ministers of enjoyment. This is a plague that infects all indolent persons who can live on in the rank in which they were born, without the necessity of working; but, in a free country, it rarely occurs in any great degree of virulence, except among those who are already at the summit of human felicity. Below this, there is room for ambition, and envy, and emulation, and all the feverish movements of aspiring vanity and unresting selfishness, which act as prophylactics against this more dark and deadly distemper. It is the canker which corrodes the full-blown flower of human felicity—the pestilence which smites at the bright hour of noon.



Page 140

The other curse of the happy, has a range more wide and indiscriminate. It, too, tortures only the comparatively rich and fortunate; but is most active among the least distinguished; and abates in malignity as we ascend to the lofty regions of pure *ennui*. This is the desire of being fashionable;—the restless and insatiable passion to pass for creatures a little more distinguished than we really are—with the mortification of frequent failure, and the humiliating consciousness of being perpetually exposed to it. Among those who are secure of “meat, clothes, and fire,” and are thus above the chief physical evils of existence, we do believe that this is a more prolific source of unhappiness, than guilt, disease, or wounded affection; and that more positive misery is created, and more true enjoyment excluded, by the eternal fretting and straining of this pitiful ambition, than by all the ravages of passion, the desolations of war, or the accidents or mortality. This may appear a strong statement; but we make it deliberately; and are deeply convinced of its truth. The wretchedness which it produces may not be so intense; but it is of much longer duration, and spreads over a far wider circle. It is quite dreadful, indeed, to think what a sweep of this pest has taken among the comforts or our prosperous population. To be though fashionable—that is, to be thought more opulent and tasteful, and on a footing of intimacy with a greater number of distinguished persons than they really are, is the great and laborious pursuit of four families out of five, the members of which are exempted from the necessity of daily industry. In this pursuit, their time, spirits, and talents are wasted; their tempers soured; their affections palsied; and their natural manners and dispositions altogether sophisticated and lost.

These are the great twin scourges of the prosperous: But there are other maladies, of no slight malignity, to which they are peculiarly liable. One of these, arising mainly from want of more worthy occupation, is that perpetual use of stratagem and contrivance—that little, artful diplomacy of private life, by which the simplest and most natural transactions are rendered complicated and difficult, and the common business of existence made to depend on the success of plots and counterplots. By the incessant practice of this petty policy, a habit of duplicity and anxiety is infallibly generated, which is equally fatal to integrity and enjoyment. We gradually come to look on others with the distrust which we are conscious of deserving; and are insensibly formed to sentiments of the most unamiable selfishness and suspicion. It is needless to say, that all these elaborate artifices are worse than useless to the person who employs them; and that the ingenious plotter is almost always baffled and exposed by the downright honesty of some undesigning competitor. Miss Edgeworth, in her tale of “Manoeuvring,” has given a very complete and most entertaining representation



Page 141

of “the by-paths and indirect crooked ways,” by which these artful and inefficient people generally make their way to disappointment. In the tale, entitled “Madame de Fleury,” she has given some useful examples of the ways in which the rich may most effectually do good to the poor—an operation which, we really believe, fails more frequently from want of skill than of inclination: And, in “The Dun,” she has drawn a touching and most impressive picture of the wretchedness which the poor so frequently suffer, from the unfeeling thoughtlessness which withholds from them the scanty earnings of their labour.

THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTER.

The immense importance of personal character is a subject which does not enough draw the attention of individuals or society, yet it is to the power of gaining influence, what the root is to the tree,—the soul to the body. It is doubtful if any of us can be acquainted with the infinitely minute ramifications into which this all-pervading influence extends. A slight survey of society will enable us, in some degree, to judge of it. There are individuals who, by the sole force of personal character, seem to render wise, better, more elevated, all with whom they come in contact. Others, again, stand in the midst of the society in which they are placed, a moral upas, poisoning the atmosphere around them, so that no virtue can come within their shadow and live. Family virtues descend with family estates, and hereditary vices are hardly compensated for by hereditary possessions. The characters of the junior members of a family are often only reflections or modifications of those of the elder. Families retain for generations peculiarities of temper and character. The Catos were all stern, upright, inflexible; the Guises proud and haughty at the heart, though irresistibly popular and fascinating in manner. We see the influence which men, exalted and powerful, exert on their age, and on society; it is difficult to believe that a similar influence is exerted by every individual man and woman, however limited his or her sphere of life: the force of the torrent is easily calculated,—that of the under-current is hidden, yet its existence and power are no less actual.

This truth opens to the conscientious a field of duty not enough cultivated. The improvement of individual character has been too much regarded as a matter of personal concern, a duty to ourselves,—to our immediate relations perhaps, but to no others,—a matter affecting out individual happiness here, and our individual safety hereafter! This is taking a very narrow view of a very extended subject. The work of individual self-formation is a duty, not only to ourselves and our families, but to our fellow-creatures at large; it is the best and most certainly beneficial exercise of philanthropy. It is not, it is true, very flattering to self-love to be told, that instead of mending the world, (the mania of the present day,) the best service which we can do that world is to mend ourselves. “If each mends one, all will be mended,” says the old English adage, with the deep wisdom of those popular sayings,—a wisdom amply

corroborated by the unsettled principles and defective practice of too many of the self-elected reformers of society.



Page 142

It is peculiarly desirable, at this particular juncture of time, that this subject be insisted upon. Man, naturally a social and gregarious animal, becomes every day more so. The vast undertakings, the mighty movements of the present day, which can only be carried into operation by the combined energy of many wills, tend to destroy individuality of thought and action, and the consciousness of individual responsibility. The dramatist complains of this fact, as it affects his art, the representation of surface,—the moralist has greater cause to complain of it, as affecting the foundation of character. If it be true that we must not follow a multitude to do evil, it is equally true that we must not follow a multitude even to do good, if it involve the neglect of our own peculiar duties. Our first, most peremptory, and most urgent duty, is, the improvement of our own character; so that public beneficence may not be neutralized by private selfishness,—public energy by private remissness,—that the applause of the world may not be bought at the expense of private and domestic wretchedness. So frequent and so lamentable are the proofs of human weakness in this respect, that we are sometimes tempted to believe the opinion of the cold and sneering skeptic,[112] that the two ruling passions of men are the love of pleasure and the love of action; and that all their seemingly good deeds proceed from these principles. It is not so: it is a libel on human nature: men,—even erring men,—have better motives, and higher aims: but they mistake the nature of their duties and invert their order; what should be “first is last, and the last first.”

It may be wisely urged, that if men waited for the perfecting of individual character, before they joined their fellow men in those great undertakings which are to insure benefit to the race, nothing would ever be accomplished, and society would languish in a state of passive inertness. It is far from necessarily following that attention to private should interfere with attention to public interests; and public interests are more advanced or retarded than it is possible to believe, by the personal characters of their agitators. It is difficult to get the worldly and the selfish to see this, but it is, nevertheless, true; and there is no wisdom, political or moral, in the phrase, “Measures, not men.” Measures, wise and just in themselves, are received with distrust and suspicion, because the characters of their originators are liable to distrust and suspicion. Lord Chesterfield, the great master of deception, was forced to pay truth the compliment of declaring, that “the most successful diplomatist would be a man perfectly honest and upright, who should, at all times, and in all circumstances, say the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” So the rulers of nations ought to be perfectly honest and upright; not because such men would be free from error, but because the faith of the governed in their honour would obviate



Page 143

the consequences of many errors. It is the want of unselfishness and truth on the part of rulers, and the consequent want of faith in the ruled, that has reduced the politics of nations to a complicated science. If we could once get men to act out the gospel precept, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you," nations might burn their codes, and lawyers their statute-books. These are the hundred cords with which the Lilliputians bound Gulliver, and he escaped. If they had possessed it, or could have managed it, one cable would have been worth them all. Much has been said,—much written,—on the art of governing. Why has the simple truth been overlooked or suppressed, that the moral character of the rulers of nations is of first-rate importance? Except the Lord build the city, vain is the labour of them who build it; except religion and virtue guide the state, vain are the talents and the acts of legislators. Is it possible that motives of paltry personal advancement, or of pecuniary gain, can induce men to assume responsibilities affecting the welfare of millions? The voice of those millions replies in the affirmative, and their reproachful glances turn on *you*, mothers of our legislators! It might have been yours, to stamp on their infant minds the dispassionate and unselfish devotedness which belongs to your own sex,—the scorn of meanness; the contempt of self, in comparison with others, peculiar to woman. How have you fulfilled your lofty mission? Charity itself can only allow us to suppose that its existence is as unknown as its spirit.

The important fact, then, of the great influence of personal character, can never be too much impressed upon all; but it is peculiarly needful that women be impressed with it, because their personal character must necessarily influence that of their children, and be the source of their personal character. For, if the active performance of the duties of a citizen interfere, and it undoubtedly does so, with the duty of self-education, of what importance is it that men enter upon them with such a personal character as may insure us confidence while it secures us from temptation? The formation of such a character depends mainly on mothers, and especially on their personal character and principles. The character of the mother influences the children more than that of the father, because it is more exposed to their daily, hourly observation. It is difficult for these young, though acute observers, to comprehend the principles which regulate their father's political opinions; his vote in the senate; his conduct in political or commercial relations; but they can see,—yes! and they can estimate and imitate, the moral principles of the mother in her management of themselves, her treatment of her domestics, and the thousand petty details of the interior. These principles, whether lax or strict, low or high in moral tone, become, by an insensible and imperceptible adoption,



Page 144

their principles, and are carried out by them into the duties and avocations of future life. It would be startling to many to know with what intelligence and accuracy motives are penetrated, inconsistencies remarked, and treasured up with retributive or imitative projects, as may best suit the purpose of the moment. Nothing but a more extensive knowledge of children than is usually possessed on entering life, can awaken parents to the perception of this truth; and awakened perception may, perhaps, be only awakened misery. How important is it, then, that every thing in the education of women should tend to enlighten conscience, that she may enter on her arduous task with principles requiring only watchfulness, not reformation; and such a personal character as may exercise none by healthy influences on her children!

FOOTNOTES:

[112] Gibbon.

ON THE MEANS OF SECURING PERSONAL INFLUENCE.

The qualities which seem more especially needful in a character which is to influence others, are, consistency, simplicity, and benevolence, or love.

By consistency of character, I mean consistency of action with principle, of manner with thought, of *self* with *self*. The want of this quality is a failing with which our sex is often charged, and justly; but are we to blame? Our hearts are warm, our nerves irritable, and we have seen how little there is, in existing systems of female education, calculated to give wide, lofty, self-devoted principles of action. Without such principles, there can be no consistency of conduct; and without consistency of conduct, there can be no available moral influence.

The peculiar evil arising from want of consistency, is the want of trust or faith which it engenders. This is felt in the common intercourse with the world. In our relations with inconsistent persons, we are like mariners at sea without a compass. On the other hand, intercourse with consistent persons gives to the mind a sort of tranquillity, peculiarly favourable to happiness and to virtue. It is like the effect produced by the perception of an immutable truth, which, from the very force of contrast, is peculiarly grateful to the inhabitants of so changeable a world as this. It is moral repose.

This sort of moral repose is most peculiarly advantageous to children, because it allows ample scope for the development of their mental and moral faculties; banishing from their minds all that chaotic bewilderment into which dependence on inconsistent



persons throws them. It is advantageous to them in another, and more important way, —it prepares them for a belief in virtue; a trust in others, which it is easy to train up into a veneration for the source of all virtue; a trust in the origin of all truth. There can be no clearness of moral perception in the governed, where there is



Page 145

no manifestation of a moral rule of right in the governor. In speaking of moral perception, I do not mean to say that children have, properly speaking, a moral perception of inconsistency; but it affects their comfort and well-being, nevertheless. There is, in the nature of man, as great a perception of moral, as of physical order and proportion; and the absence of the moral produces pain and disgust to the soul, as the absence of the physical does to the senses. This state of pain and disgust is felt, though it can never be expressed, by children, who are under the management of inconsistent persons,—that is, persons whose conduct is guided solely by feeling, (good or bad,) by caprice, or impulse; and how injurious it is to them, we may easily conceive. If, however, their present comfort only were endangered by it, the evil would be of comparatively small magnitude; but it affects their character for life. They cease to trust, and they cease to venerate; now, trust is the root of faith, and veneration of piety:—and when the root is destroyed, how can the plant flourish? Perhaps we may remark that the effect here produced upon children is the same as that which long intercourse with the world produces in men: only that the effect differs in proportion to their differing intellectual faculties. The child is annoyed, and knows not the cause of annoyance; the man is annoyed, and endeavours to lose the sense of discomfort in a universal skepticism as to human virtue, and a resolving of all actions into one principle, self-interest. He thus seeks to create a principle possessing the stability which he desires, but seeks in vain to find; for, be it remembered, our love of moral stability is precisely as great as our love of physical change;—another of the mysteries of our being. The effects on the man are the same as on the child,—he ceases to believe, and he ceases to venerate; and the end is the most degrading of all conditions,—the abnegation of all abstract virtue, generosity, or love. Now, into this state children are brought by the inconsistency of parents,—that is, these young and innocent creatures are placed in a condition, moral and intellectual, which we consider an evil, even when produced by long contact with a selfish and unkind world. And thus they enter upon life, prepared for vice in all its forms,—and skepticism, in all its heart-withering tendencies. How can parents bear this responsibility? There is something so touching in the simple faith of childhood,—its utter dependence,—its willingness to believe in the perfection of those to whom it looks for protection—that to betray that faith, to shake that dependence, seems almost akin to irreligion.

The value of principle, then, in itself so precious, is enhanced tenfold by constancy in its manifestations, and therefore consistency, as a source of influence, can never be too much insisted upon.



Page 146

Consistency of principle is brought to the test in every daily, hourly occurrence of woman's life, and if she have been brought up without an abiding sense of duty and responsibility, she is of all beings most unfortunate; influences the most potent are committed to her care, and from her they issue like the simoom of the desert, breathing moral blight and death. I have endeavoured, in some degree, to enforce the power of indirect influences on the minds of *children*: they are very powerful in the other relations of life; in the conjugal, the truth is too well known and attested by tale and song to need additional corroboration here—and this book is principally, though not wholly, dedicated to woman in her maternal character.

The extreme importance of the manifestation of consistency in mothers may be argued from this fact, that it is of infinite importance to children to see the daily operation of an immutable and consistent rule of right, in matters sufficiently small to come within the sphere of childish observation, and, therefore, if called upon to give a definition of the peculiar mission of woman, and the peculiar source of her influence, I should say it is the application of large principles to small duties,—the agency of comprehensive intelligence on details. That largeness of mental vision, which, while it can comprehend the vast, is too keen to overlook the little, is especially to be cultivated by women. It is a great mistake to suppose the two qualities are incompatible; and the supposition that they are so, has done much mischief; the error arises not from the extent, but from the narrowness of our capacity, *To aspire* is our privilege, and a privilege which we are by no means slack to use, without considering that the operations of infinitude are even more incomprehensible in their minuteness than in their magnitude, and that, therefore, to be always looking from the minute towards the vast, is only a proof of the finite nature of our present capacity. The loftiest intellect may, without abasement, be employed on the minutest domestic detail, and in all probability will perform it better than an inferior one: it is the motive and end of an action which makes it either dignified or mean. In the homely words of old Herbert

All may of thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which, with this tincture, *for thy sake*
Will not grow bright and clean.

It is then in the minutiae of daily life and conduct that this consistency has its most beneficial operation, and it must derive its power from the personal character for this reason, that no virtues but indigenous ones are capable of the sort of moral transfusion here mentioned. It is rare to see a parent, eminently distinguished by any moral virtue, unsuccessful in the transmitting that virtue to children, simply because, being an integral part of character, it is consistent in its mode of operation; so virtues originating in effort, or practised for the sake of example, are seldom transferable; the same consistency cannot be expected in the exercise of them, and this may explain the small success of pattern mothers, *par excellence* so called, and whose good intentions and sacrifices

ought not to be objects of derision; the very appearance of effort mars the effect of all effort.



Page 147

The world is sometimes surprised to see extraordinary proofs of moral influence exercised by persons who never planned, never aimed, to obtain such influence,—nay, whose conduct is never regulated by any fixed aim for its attainment; the fact is, that those characters are composed of truth and love;—truth, which prevents the assumption even of virtues which are not natural, thereby adding to the influence of such as are; love, the most contagious of all moral contagions, the regenerating principle of the world!

The virtue which mainly contributes to the support of consistency—without which, in fact, consistency cannot exist—is simplicity: consistency of conduct can never be maintained by characters in any degree double or sophisticated, for it is not of simplicity as opposed to craft, but of simplicity as opposed to sophistication, that I would here speak, and rather as the Christian virtue, single-mindedness; the desire to *be*, opposed to the wish to *appear*. We have seen how rarely influence can be gained where no faith can be yielded; now an unsimple character can never inspire faith or trust. People do not always analyze mental phenomena sufficiently to know the reason of this fact, but no one will dispute the fact itself. It is true there are persons who have the power of conciliating confidence of which they are unworthy, but it is only because (like Castruccio Castrucciani) they are such exquisite dissemblers, that their affection of simplicity has temporarily the effect of simplicity itself. This power of successful assumption is, fortunately, confined to very few, and the pretenders to unreal virtues and the utterer of assumed sentiments are only ill-paid labourers, working hard to reap no harvest-fruits.

An objection slightly advanced before, may here naturally occur again, and may be answered more fully, *viz.* the opposition of the conventional forms of society to entire simplicity of thought and action, and consequently to influence. The influence which conventionalism has over principle is to be utterly disclaimed, but its having an injurious influence over manner is far more easily obviated; so easily, indeed, that it may be doubted whether there be not more simplicity in compliance than in opposition. Originality, either of thought or behaviour, is most uncommon, and only found in minds above, or in minds below, the ordinary standard; neither is this peculiar feature of society in itself a blame-worthy one: it arises out of the constitution of man, naturally imitative, gregarious, and desirous of approbation. Nothing would be gained by the abolition of these forms, for they are representatives of a good spirit; the spirit, it is true, is too often not there, but it would be better to call it back than to abolish the form. We have an opportunity of judging how far it would be convenient or agreeable to do so, in the conduct of some *soi-disant* contemners of forms; we perceive that such contempt is equally the offspring of selfishness with slavish regard: it is only the exchange of the selfishness of vanity for the selfishness of indolence and pride, and the world is the loser by the exchange. Hypocrisy has been said to be the homage which vice pays to virtue. Conventional forms may, with justice, be called the homage which selfishness pays to benevolence.



Page 148

How then is simplicity of character to be preserved without violating conventionalism, to which it seems so much at variance, and yet, which it ought not to oppose? By the cultivation of that spirit of which conventional forms are only the symbol, by training children in the early exercise of the kind the benevolent affections, and by exacting in the domestic circle all those observances which are the signs of good-will in society, so that they may be the emanations of a benevolent heart, instead of the gloss of artificial politeness. Conventionalism will never injure the simplicity of such characters as these, nay, it may greatly add to their influence, and secure for their virtues and talents the reception that they deserve; it is a part of benevolence to cultivate the graces that may persuade or allure men to the imitation of what is right. "Stand off, I am holier than thou," is not more foreign to true piety, than "Stand off, I am wiser than thou," is to true benevolence, as relates to those "things indifferent," in which we are told that we may be all things to all men.

The cultivation of domestic politeness is a subject not nearly enough attended to, yet it is the sign, and ought to be the manifestation, of many beautiful virtues—affection, self-denial, elegance, are all called into play by it; and it has a potent recommendation in its being an excellent preservative against affectation, which generally arises from a great desire to please, joined to an ignorance of the means of pleasing successfully. It is to be hoped that these remarks will not be deemed trifling or irrelevant in a chapter on the means of securing personal influence. Powers of pleasing are a very great source of that influence, and there is no telling how great might be the benefit to society, if all on whom they are bestowed (and how lavishly they are bestowed on woman!) would be persuaded to use them, not as a means of selfish gratification, but as an engine for the promotion of good.[113] Such powers are as sacred a trust from the Creator as any other gift, and ought to be equally used for his glory and the advancement of moral good. Virtue, indeed, in itself is venerable, but it must be attractive in order to be influential. And how attractive it might be, if the powers of pleasing, which can cover and even recommend the deformity of vice, were conscientiously excited in its behalf! This is the peculiar province of women, and they are peculiarly fitted for it by Nature. Their personal loveliness, their versatile powers, and lively fancy, qualify them in an eminent degree to adorn, and by adorning to recommend, virtue and religion.

Così all' egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soare licor gli orli del vaso.

FOOTNOTES:

[113] It was a beautiful idea in the mythology of the ancients, which identified the Graces with the Charities of social life.