Discourses in America

by Matthew Arnold

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DISCOURSES IN AMERICA

BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

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PREFACE.

Of the three discourses in this volume, the second was originally given as the Rede Lecture at Cambridge, was recast for delivery in America, and is reprinted here as so recast. The first discourse, that on ‘Numbers,’ was originally given in New York. It was afterwards published in the Nineteenth Century, and I have to thank Mr. Knowles for kindly permitting me to reprint it now. The third discourse, that on ‘Emerson,’ was originally given in Emerson’s ‘own delightful town,’ Boston.

I am glad of every opportunity of thanking my American audiences for the unfailing attention and kindness with which they listened to a speaker who did not flatter them, who would have flattered them ill, but who yet felt, and in fact expressed, more esteem and admiration than his words were sometimes, at a hasty first hearing, supposed to convey. I cannot think that what I have said of Emerson will finally be accounted scant praise, although praise universal and unmixed it certainly is not. What high esteem I feel for the suitableness and easy play of American institutions I have had occasion, since my return home, to say publicly and emphatically. But nothing in the discourse on ‘Numbers’ was at variance with this high esteem, although a caution, certainly, was suggested. But then some caution or other, to be drawn from the inexhaustibly fruitful truth that moral causes govern the standing and the falling of States, who is there that can be said not to need?

All need it, we in this country need it, as indeed in the discourse on ‘Numbers’ I have by an express instance shown. Yet as regards us in this country at the present moment, I am tempted, I confess, to resort to the great truth in question, not for caution so much as for consolation. Our politics are ‘battles of the kites and the crows,’ of the Barbarians and the Philistines; each combatant striving to affirm himself still, while all the vital needs and instincts of our national growth demand,

not that either of the combatants should be enabled to affirm himself, but that each should be transformed. Our aristocratical class, the Barbarians, have no perception of the real wants of the community at home. Our middle classes, the great Philistine power, have no perception of our real relations to the world abroad, no clue, apparently, for guidance, where-ever that attractive and ever-victorious rhetorician, who is the Minister of their choice, may take them, except the formula of that submissive animal which carried the prophet Balaam. Our affairs are in the condition which, from such parties to our politics, might be expected. Yet amid all the difficulties and mortifications which beset us, with the Barbarians impossible, with the Philistines determining our present course, with our rising politicians seeking only that the mind of the Populace, when the Populace arrives at power, may be found in harmony with the mind of Mr. Carvell Williams, which they flatter themselves they have fathomed; with the House of Lords a danger, and the House of Commons a scandal, and the general direction of affairs infelicitous as we see it,—one consolation remains to us, and that no slight or unworthy one. Infelicitous the general direction of our affairs may be; but the individual Englishman, whenever and wherever called upon to do his duty, does it almost invariably with the old energy, courage, virtue. And this is what we gain by having had, as a people, in the ground of our being, a firm faith in conduct; by having believed, more steadfastly and fervently than most, this great law that moral causes govern the standing and the falling of men and nations. The law gradually widens, indeed, so as to include light as well as honesty and energy; to make light, also, a moral cause. Unless we are transformed we cannot finally stand, and without more light we cannot be transformed. But in the trying hours through which before our transformation we have to pass, it may well console us to rest our thoughts upon our life’s law even as we have hitherto known it, and upon all which even in our present imperfect acception of it it has done for us.

CONTENTS.

PAGE Numbers; or, The Majority and the Remnant 1 Literature and Science 72 Emerson 138

NUMBERS; OR, THE MAJORITY AND THE REMNANT.

There is a characteristic saying of Dr. Johnson: ‘Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.’ The saying is cynical, many will even call it brutal; yet it has in it something of plain, robust sense and truth. We do often see men passing themselves off as patriots who are in truth scoundrels; we meet with talk and proceedings laying claim to patriotism, which are these gentlemen’s last refuge. We may all of us agree in praying to be delivered from patriots and patriotism of this sort. Short of such, there is undoubtedly, sheltering itself under the fine name of patriotism, a good deal of self-flattery and self-delusion which is mischievous. ‘Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?’ In that uncompromising sentence of Bishop Butler’s is surely the right and salutary maxim for both individuals and nations.

Yet there is an honourable patriotism which we should satisfy if we can, and should seek to have on our side. At home I have said so much of the characters of our society and the prospects of our civilisation, that I can hardly escape the like topic elsewhere. Speaking in America, I cannot well avoid saying something about the prospects of society in the United States. It is a topic where one is apt to touch people’s patriotic feelings. No one will accuse me of having flattered the patriotism of that great country of English people on the other side of the Atlantic, amongst whom I was born. Here, so many miles from home, I begin to reflect with tender contrition, that perhaps I have not,—I will not say flattered the patriotism of my own

countrymen enough, but regarded it enough. Perhaps that is one reason why I have produced so very little effect upon them. It was a fault of youth and inexperience. But it would be unpardonable to come in advanced life and repeat the same error here. You will not expect impossibilities of me. You will not expect me to say that things are not what, in my judgment, they are, and that the consequences of them will not be what they will be. I should make nothing of it; I should be a too palpable failure. But I confess that I should be glad if in what I say here I could engage American patriotism on my side, instead of rousing it against me. And it so happens that the paramount thoughts which your great country raises in my mind are really and truly of a kind to please, I think, any true American patriot, rather than to offend him.

The vast scale of things here, the extent of your country, your numbers, the rapidity of your increase, strike the imagination, and are a common topic for admiring remark. Our great orator, Mr. Bright, is never weary of telling us how many acres of land you have at your disposal, how many bushels of grain you produce, how many millions you are, how many more millions you will be presently, and what a capital thing this is for you. Now, though I do not always agree with Mr. Bright, I find myself agreeing with him here. I think your numbers afford a very real and important ground for satisfaction.

Not that your great numbers, or indeed great numbers of men anywhere, are likely to be all good, or even to have the majority good. ‘The majority are bad,’ said one of the wise men of Greece; but he was a pagan. Much to the same effect, however, is the famous sentence of the New Testament: ‘Many are called, few chosen,’ This appears a hard saying; frequent are the endeavours to elude it, to attenuate its severity. But turn it how you will, manipulate it as you will, the few, as Cardinal Newman well says, can never mean the many. Perhaps you will say that the majority is, sometimes, good; that its impulses are good generally, and its action is good occasionally. Yes, but it lacks principle, it lacks persistence; if to-day its good

impulses prevail, they succumb to-morrow; sometimes it goes right, but it is very apt to go wrong. Even a popular orator, or a popular journalist, will hardly say that the multitude may be trusted to have its judgment generally just, and its action generally virtuous. It may be better, it is better, that the body of the people, with all its faults, should act for itself, and control its own affairs, than that it should be set aside as ignorant and incapable, and have its affairs managed for it by a so-called superior class, possessing property and intelligence. Property and intelligence cannot be trusted to show a sound majority themselves; the exercise of power by the people tends to educate the people. But still, the world being what it is, we must surely expect the aims and doings of the majority of men to be at present very faulty, and this in a numerous community no less than in a small one. So much we must certainly, I think, concede to the sages and to the saints.

Sages and saints are apt to be severe, it is true; apt to take a gloomy view of the society in which they live, and to prognosticate evil to it. But then it must be added that their prognostications are very apt to turn out right. Plato's account of the most gifted and brilliant community of the ancient world, of that Athens of his to which we all owe so much, is despondent enough. 'There is but a very small remnant,' he says, 'of honest followers of wisdom, and they who are of these few, and who have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession is wisdom, and who can fully see, moreover, the madness of the multitude, and that there is no one, we may say, whose action in public matters is sound, and no ally for whosoever would help the just, what,' asks Plato, 'are they to do? They may be compared,' says Plato, 'to a man who has fallen among wild beasts; he will not be one of them, but he is too unaided to make head against them; and before he can do any good to society or his friends, he will be overwhelmed and perish uselessly. When he considers this, he will resolve to keep still, and to mind his own business; as it were standing aside under a wall in a storm of dust and hurricane of driving wind; and he will endure to behold the rest filled with iniquity, if only he himself may live his life clear of injustice and

of impiety, and depart, when his time comes, in mild and gracious mood, with fair hope.'

Plato's picture here of democratic Athens is certainly gloomy enough. We may be sure the mass of his contemporaries would have pronounced it to be monstrously overcharged. We ourselves, if we had been living then, should most of us have by no means seen things as Plato saw them. No, if we had seen Athens even nearer its end than when Plato wrote the strong words which I have been quoting, Athens in the very last days of Plato's life, we should most of us probably have considered that things were not going badly with Athens. There is a long sixteen years' administration,—the administration of Eubulus,—which fills the last years of Plato's life, and the middle years of the fourth century before Christ. A temperate German historian thus describes Athens during this ministry of Eubulus: 'The grandeur and loftiness of Attic democracy had vanished, while all the pernicious germs contained in it were fully developed. A life of comfort and a craving for amusement were encouraged in every way, and the interest of the citizens was withdrawn from serious things. Conversation became more and more superficial and frivolous. Famous courtesans formed the chief topic of talk; the new inventions of Thearion, the leading pastry-cook in Athens, were hailed with loud applause; and the witty sayings which had been uttered in gay circles were repeated about town as matters of prime importance.'

No doubt, if we had been living then to witness this, we should from time to time have shaken our heads gravely, and said how sad it all was. But most of us would not, I think, have been very seriously disquieted by it. On the other hand, we should have found many things in the Athens of Eubulus to gratify us. 'The democrats,' says the same historian whom I have just quoted, 'saw in Eubulus one of their own set at the head of affairs;' and I suppose no good democrat would see that without pleasure. Moreover, Eubulus was of popular character. In one respect he seems to have resembled your own 'heathen Chinee;' he had 'guileless ways,' says our

historian, ‘in which the citizens took pleasure.’ He was also a good speaker, a thorough man of business; and, above all, he was very skilful in matters of finance. His administration was both popular and prosperous. We should certainly have said, most of us, if we had encountered somebody announcing his resolve to stand aside under a wall during such an administration, that he was a goose for his pains; and if he had called it ‘a falling among wild beasts’ to have to live with his fellow-citizens who had confidence in Eubulus, their country, and themselves, we should have esteemed him very impertinent.

Yes;—and yet at the close of that administration of Eubulus came the collapse, and the end of Athens as an independent State. And it was to the fault of Athens herself that the collapse was owing. Plato was right after all; the majority were bad, and the remnant were impotent.

So fared it with that famous Athenian State, with the brilliant people of art and intellect. Now let us turn to the people of religion. We have heard Plato speaking of the very small remnant which honestly sought wisdom. The remnant!—it is the word of the Hebrew prophets also, and especially is it the word of the greatest of them all, Isaiah. Not used with the despondency of Plato, used with far other power informing it, and with a far other future awaiting it, filled with fire, filled with hope, filled with faith, filled with joy, this term itself, the remnant, is yet Isaiah’s term as well as Plato’s. The texts are familiar to all Christendom. ‘Though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them shall return.’ Even this remnant, a tenth of the whole, if so it may be, shall have to come back into the purging fire, and be again cleared and further reduced there. But nevertheless, ‘as a terebinth tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, though they be cut down, so the stock of that burned tenth shall be a holy seed.’

Yes, the small remnant should be a holy seed; but the great majority, as in democratic Athens, so in the kingdoms of the Hebrew nation, were unsound, and

their State was doomed. This was Isaiah's point. The actual commonwealth of the 'drunkards' and the 'blind,' as he calls them, in Israel and Judah, of the dissolute grandees and gross and foolish common people, of the great majority, must perish; its perishing was the necessary stage towards a happier future. And Isaiah was right, as Plato was right. No doubt to most of us, if we had been there to see it, the kingdom of Ephraim or of Judah, the society of Samaria and Jerusalem, would have seemed to contain a great deal else besides dissolute grandees and foolish common people. No doubt we should have thought parts of their policy serious, and some of their alliances promising. No doubt, when we read the Hebrew prophets now, with the larger and more patient temper of a different race and an augmented experience, we often feel the blame and invective to be too absolute. Nevertheless, as to his grand point, Isaiah, I say, was right. The majority in the Jewish State, whatever they might think or say, whatever their guides and flatterers might think or say, the majority were unsound, and their unsoundness must be their ruin.

Isaiah, however, does not make his remnant confine itself, like Plato's, to standing aside under a wall during this life and then departing in mild temper and good hope when the time for departure comes; Isaiah's remnant saves the State. Undoubtedly he means to represent it as doing so. Undoubtedly he imagines his Prince of the house of David who is to be born within a year's time, his royal and victorious Immanuel, he imagines him witnessing as a child the chastisement of Ephraim and the extirpation of the bad majority there; then witnessing as a youth the chastisement of Judah and the extirpation of the bad majority there also; but finally, in mature life, reigning over a State renewed, preserved, and enlarged, a greater and happier kingdom of the chosen people.

Undoubtedly Isaiah conceives his remnant in this wise; undoubtedly he imagined for it a part which, in strict truth, it did not play, and could not play. So manifest was the non-fulfilment of his prophecy, taken strictly, that ardent souls feeding upon his words had to wrest them from their natural meaning, and to say that Isaiah directly

meant something which he did not directly mean. Isaiah, like Plato, with inspired insight foresaw that the world before his eyes, the world of actual life, the State and city of the unsound majority, could not stand. Unlike Plato, Isaiah announced with faith and joy a leader and a remnant certain to supersede them. But he put the leader's coming, and he put the success of the leader's and the remnant's work, far, far too soon; and his conception, in this respect, is fantastic. Plato betook himself for the bringing in of righteousness to a visionary republic in the clouds; Isaiah,—and it is the immortal glory of him and of his race to have done so,—brought it in upon earth. But Immanuel and his reign, for the eighth century before Christ, were fantastic. For the kingdom of Judah they were fantastic. Immanuel and the remnant could not come to reign under the conditions there and then offered to them; the thing was impossible.

The reason of the impossibility is quite simple. The scale of things, in petty States like Judah and Athens, is too small; the numbers are too scanty. Admit that for the world, as we hitherto know it, what the philosophers and prophets say is true: that the majority are unsound. Even in communities with exceptional gifts, even in the Jewish State, the Athenian State, the majority are unsound. But there is 'the remnant.' Now the important thing, as regards States such as Judah and Athens, is not that the remnant bears but a small proportion to the majority; the remnant always bears a small proportion to the majority. The grave things for States like Judah and Athens is, that the remnant must in positive bulk be so small, and therefore so powerless for reform. To be a voice outside the State, speaking to mankind or to the future, perhaps shaking the actual State to pieces in doing so, one man will suffice. But to reform the State in order to save it, to preserve it by changing it, a body of workers is needed as well as a leader;—a considerable body of workers, placed at many points, and operating in many directions. This considerable body of workers for good is what is wanting in petty States such as were Athens and Judah. It is said that the Athenian State had in all but 350,000 inhabitants. It is calculated that the

population of the kingdom of Judah did not exceed a million and a quarter. The scale of things, I say, is here too small, the numbers are too scanty, to give us a remnant capable of saving and perpetuating the community. The remnant, in these cases, may influence the world and the future, may transcend the State and survive it; but it cannot possibly transform the State and perpetuate the State: for such a work it is numerically too feeble.

Plato saw the impossibility. Isaiah refused to accept it, but facts were too strong for him. The Jewish State could not be renewed and saved, and he was wrong in thinking that it could. And therefore I call his grand point this other, where he was altogether right: that the actual world of the unsound majority, though it fancied itself solid, and though most men might call it solid, could not stand. Let us read him again and again, until we fix in our minds this true conviction of his, to edify us whenever we see such a world existing: his indestructible conviction that such a world, with its prosperities, idolatries, oppression, luxury, pleasures, drunkards, careless women, governing classes, systems of policy, strong alliances, shall come to nought and pass away; that nothing can save it. Let us do homage, also, to his indestructible conviction that States are saved by their righteous remnant, however clearly we may at the same time recognise that his own building on this conviction was premature.

That, however, matters to us little. For how different is the scale of things in the modern States to which we belong, how far greater are the numbers! It is impossible to overrate the importance of the new element introduced into our calculations by increasing the size of the remnant. And in our great modern States, where the scale of things is so large, it does seem as if the remnant might be so increased as to become an actual power, even though the majority be unsound. Then the lover of wisdom may come out from under his wall, the lover of goodness will not be alone among the wild beasts. To enable the remnant to succeed, a large strengthening of its numbers is everything.

Here is good hope for us, not only, as for Plato's recluse, in departing this life, but while we live and work in it. Only, before we dwell too much on this hope, it is advisable to make sure that we have earned the right to entertain it. We have earned the right to entertain it, only when we are at one with the philosophers and prophets in their conviction respecting the world which now is, the world of the unsound majority; when we feel what they mean, and when we go thoroughly along with them in it. Most of us, as I have said already, would by no means have been with them when they were here in life, and most of us are not really with them now. What is saving? Our institutions, says an American; the British Constitution, says an Englishman; the civilising mission of France, says a Frenchman. But Plato and the sages, when they are asked what is saving, answer: 'To love righteousness, and to be convinced of the unprofitableness of iniquity.' And Isaiah and the prophets, when they are asked the same question, answer to just the same effect: that what is saving is to 'order one's conversation right'; to 'cease to do evil'; to 'delight in the law of the Eternal'; and to 'make one's study in it all day long.'

The worst of it is, that this loving of righteousness and this delighting in the law of the Eternal sound rather vague to us. Not that they are vague really; indeed, they are less vague than American institutions, or the British Constitution, or the civilising mission of France. But the phrases sound vague because of the quantity of matters they cover. The thing is to have a brief but adequate enumeration of these matters. The New Testament tells us how righteousness is composed. In England and America we have been brought up in familiarity with the New Testament. And so, before Mr. Bradlaugh on our side of the water, and the Congress of American Freethinkers on yours, banish it from our education and memory, let us take from the New Testament a text showing what it is that both Plato and the prophets mean when they tell us that we ought to love righteousness and to make our study in the law of the Eternal, but that the unsound majority do nothing of the kind. A score of texts offer themselves in a moment. Here is one which will serve very well:

‘Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are elevated, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise; have these in your mind, let your thoughts run upon these.’[1] That is what both Plato and the prophets mean by loving righteousness, and making one’s study in the law of the Eternal.

Now the matters just enumerated do not come much into the heads of most of us, I suppose, when we are thinking of politics. But the philosophers and prophets maintain that these matters, and not those of which the heads of politicians are full, do really govern politics and save or destroy States. They save or destroy them by a silent, inexorable fatality; while the politicians are making believe, plausibly and noisily, with their American institutions, British Constitution, and civilising mission of France. And because these matters are what do really govern politics and save or destroy States, Socrates maintained that in his time he and a few philosophers, who alone kept insisting on the good of righteousness and the unprofitableness of iniquity, were the only real politicians then living.

I say, if we are to derive comfort from the doctrine of the remnant (and there is great comfort to be derived from it), we must also hold fast to the austere but true doctrine as to what really governs politics, overrides with an inexorable fatality the combinations of the so-called politicians, and saves or destroys States. Having in mind things true, things elevated, things just, things pure, things amiable, things of good report; having these in mind, studying and loving these, is what saves States.

There is nothing like positive instances to illustrate general propositions of this kind, and to make them believed. I hesitate to take an instance from America. Possibly there are some people who think that already, on a former occasion, I have said enough about America without duly seeing and knowing it. So I will take my instances from England, and from England’s neighbour and old co-mate in history,

France. The instance from England I will take first. I will take it from the grave topic of England's relations with Ireland. I am not going to reproach either England or Ireland. To reproach Ireland here would probably be indiscreet. As to England, anything I may have to say against my own countrymen I prefer to say at home; America is the last place where I should care to say it. However, I have no wish or intention now to reproach either the English or the Irish. But I want to show you from England's relations with Ireland how right the philosophers and prophets are. Every one knows that there has been conquest and confiscation in Ireland. So there has elsewhere. Every one knows that the conquest and the confiscation have been attended with cupidity, oppression, and ill-usage. So they have elsewhere. 'Whatsoever things are just' are not exactly the study, so far as I know, of conquerors and confiscators anywhere; certainly they were not the study of the English conquerors of Ireland. A failure in justice is a source of danger to States. But it may be made up for and got over; it has been made up for and got over in many communities. England's confiscations in Ireland are a thing of the past; the penal laws against Catholics are a thing of the past; much has been done to make up for the old failure in justice; Englishmen generally think that it has been pretty well made up for, and that Irishmen ought to think so too. And politicians invent Land Acts for curing the last results of the old failure in justice, for insuring the contentment of the Irish with us, and for consolidating the Union: and are surprised and plaintive if it is not consolidated. But now see how much more serious people are the philosophers and prophets than the politicians. Whatsoever things are amiable!—the failure in amiability, too, is a source of danger and insecurity to States, as well as the failure in justice. And we English are not amiable, or at any rate, what in this case comes to the same thing, do not appear so. The politicians never thought of that! Quite outside their combinations lies this hindrance, tending to make their most elaborate combinations ineffectual. Thus the joint operation of two moral causes together,—the sort of causes which politicians do not seriously

regard,—tells against the designs of the politicians with what seems to be an almost inexorable fatality. If there were not the failure in amiability, perhaps the original failure in justice might by this time have been got over; if there had not been the failure in justice, perhaps the failure in amiability might not have mattered much. The two failures together create a difficulty almost insurmountable. Public men in England keep saying that it will be got over. I hope that it will be got over, and that the union between England and Ireland may become as solid as that between England and Scotland. But it will not become solid by means of the contrivances of the mere politician, or without the intervention of moral causes of concord to heal the mischief wrought by moral causes of division. Everything, in this case, depends upon the 'remnant,' its numbers, and its powers of action.

My second instance is even more important. It is so important, and its reach is so wide, that I must go into it with some little fulness. The instance is taken from France. To France I have always felt myself powerfully drawn. People in England often accuse me of liking France and things French far too well. At all events I have paid special regard to them, and am always glad to confess how much I owe to them. M. Sainte-Beuve wrote to me in the last years of his life: 'You have passed through our life and literature by a deep inner line, which confers initiation, and which you will never lose.' Vous avez traversé notre vie et notre littérature par une ligne intérieure, profonde, qui fait les initiés, et que vous ne perdrez jamais. I wish I could think that this friendly testimony of that accomplished and charming man, one of my chief benefactors, were fully deserved. But I have pride and pleasure in quoting it; and I quote it to bear me out in saying, that whatever opinion I may express about France, I have at least been a not inattentive observer of that great country, and anything but a hostile one.

The question was once asked by the town clerk of Ephesus: 'What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana?' Now really, when one looks at the popular literature of the French at this

moment,—their popular novels, popular stage-plays, popular newspapers,—and at the life of which this literature of theirs is the index, one is tempted to make a goddess out of a word of their own, and then, like the town clerk of Ephesus, to ask: 'What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the French is a worshipper of the great goddess Lubricity?' Or rather, as Greek is the classic and euphonious language for names of gods and goddesses, let us take her name from the Greek Testament, and call her the goddess Aselgeia. That goddess has always been a sufficient power amongst mankind, and her worship was generally supposed to need restraining rather than encouraging. But here is now a whole popular literature, nay, and art too, in France at her service! stimulations and suggestions by her and to her meet one in it at every turn. She is becoming the great recognised power there; never was anything like it. M. Renan himself seems half inclined to apologise for not having paid her more attention. 'Nature cares nothing for chastity,' says he; Les frivoles ont peut-être raison; 'The gay people are perhaps in the right,' Men even of this force salute her; but the allegiance now paid to her, in France, by the popular novel, the popular newspaper, the popular play, is, one may say, boundless.

I have no wish at all to preach to the French; no intention whatever, in what I now say, to upbraid or wound them. I simply lay my finger on a fact in their present condition; a fact insufficiently noticed, as it seems to me, and yet extremely potent for mischief. It is well worth while to trace the manner of its growth and action.

The French have always had a leaning to the goddess of whom we speak, and have been willing enough to let the world know of their leaning, to pride themselves on their Gaulish salt, their gallantry, and so on. But things have come to their present head gradually. Catholicism was an obstacle; the serious element in the nation was another obstacle. But now just see the course which things have taken, and how they all, one may say, have worked together, for this goddess. First, there was the original Gaul, the basis of the French nation; the Gaul, gay, sociable, quick of sentiment, quick of perception; apt, however, very apt, to be presumptuous and puffed up. Then

came the Roman conquest, and from this we get a new personage, the Gallo-Latin; with the Gaulish qualities for a basis, but with Latin order, reason, lucidity, added, and also Latin sensuality. Finally, we have the Frankish conquest and the Frenchman. The Frenchman proper is the Gallo-Latin, with Frankish or Germanic qualities added and infused. No mixture could be better. The Germans have plenty of faults, but in this combination they seem not to have taken hold; the Germans seem to have given of their seriousness and honesty to the conquered Gallo-Latin, and not of their brutality. And mediæval France, which exhibits the combination and balance, under the influence then exercised by Catholicism, of Gaulish quickness and gaiety with Latin rationality and German seriousness, offers to our view the soundest and the most attractive stage, perhaps, in all French history.

But the balance could not be maintained; at any rate, it was not maintained. Mediæval Catholicism lost its virtue. The serious Germanic races made the Reformation, feeling that without it there was no safety and continuance for those moral ideas which they loved and which were the ground of their being. France did not go with the Reformation; the Germanic qualities in her were not strong enough to make her go with it. ‘France did not want a reformation which was a moral one,’ is Michelet’s account of the matter: La France ne voulait pas de réforme morale. Let us put the case more favourably for her, and say that perhaps, with her quick perception, France caught sense, from the very outset, of that intellectual unsoundness and incompleteness in the Reformation, which is now so visible. But, at any rate, the Reformation did not carry France with it; and the Germanic side in the Frenchman, his Germanic qualities, thus received a check. They subsisted, however, in good force still; the new knowledge and new ideas, brought by the revival of letters, gave an animating stimulus; and in the seventeenth century the Gaulish gaiety and quickness of France, the Latin rationality, and the still subsisting German seriousness, all combining under the puissant breath of the Renascence, produced a literature, the strongest, the most substantial and the most serious which

the French have ever succeeded in producing, and which has, indeed, consummate and splendid excellences.

Still, the Germanic side in the Frenchman had received a check, and in the next century this side became quite attenuated. The Germanic steadiness and seriousness gave way more and more; the Gaulish salt, the Gaulish gaiety, quickness, sentiment, and sociability, the Latin rationality, prevailed more and more, and had the field nearly to themselves. They produced a brilliant and most efficacious literature,—the French literature of the eighteenth century. The goddess Aselgeia had her part in it; it was a literature to be praised with reserves; it was, above all, a revolutionary literature. But European institutions were then in such a superannuated condition, straightforward and just perception, free thought and rationality, were at such a discount, that the brilliant French literature in which these qualities predominated, and which by their predominance was made revolutionary, had in the eighteenth century a great mission to fulfil, and fulfilled it victoriously.

The mission is fulfilled, but meanwhile the Germanic quality in the Frenchman seems pretty nearly to have died out, and the Gallo-Latin in him has quite got the upper hand. Of course there are individuals and groups who are to be excepted; I will allow any number of exceptions you please; and in the mass of the French people, which works and is silent, there may be treasures of resource. But taking the Frenchman who is commonly in view—the usual type of speaking, doing, vocal, visible Frenchman—we may say, and he will probably be not at all displeased at our saying, that the German in him has nearly died out, and the Gallo-Latin has quite got the upper hand. For us, however, this means that the chief source of seriousness and of moral ideas is failing and drying up in him, and that what remains are the sources of Gaulish salt, and quickness, and sentiment, and sociability, and sensuality, and rationality. And, of course, the play and working of these qualities is altered by their being no longer in combination with a dose of German seriousness, but left to work by themselves. Left to work by themselves, they give us what we call the homme

sensuel moyen, the average sensual man. The highest art, the art which by its height, depth, and gravity possesses religiousness,—such as the Greeks had, the art of Pindar and Phidias; such as the Italians had, the art of Dante and Michael Angelo,—this art, with the training which it gives and the standard which it sets up, the French have never had. On the other hand, they had a dose of German seriousness, a Germanic bent for ideas of moral duty, which neither the Greeks had, nor the Italians. But if this dies out, what is left is the homme sensuel moyen. This average sensual man has his very advantageous qualities. He has his gaiety, quickness, sentiment, sociability, rationality. He has his horror of sour strictness, false restraint, hypocrisy, obscurantism, cretinism, and the rest of it. And this is very well; but on the serious, moral side he is almost ludicrously insufficient. Fine sentiments about his dignity and his honour and his heart, about the dignity and the honour and the heart of France, and his adoration of her, do duty for him here; grandiose phrases about the spectacle offered in France and in the French Republic of the ideal for our race, of the épanouissement de l'élite de l'humanité, 'the coming into blow of the choice flower of humanity.' In M. Victor Hugo we have (his worshippers must forgive me for saying so) the average sensual man impassioned and grandiloquent; in M. Zola we have the average sensual man going near the ground. 'Happy the son,' cries M. Victor Hugo, 'of whom, one can say, "He has consoled his mother!" Happy the poet of whom one can say, "He has consoled his country!"' The French themselves, even when they are severest, call this kind of thing by only the mild name of emphasis, 'emphase,'—other people call it fustian. And a surly Johnson will growl out in answer, at one time, that 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'; at another time, that fine sentiments about ma mère are the last refuge of a scoundrel. But what they really are is the creed which in France the average sensual man rehearses, to do duty for serious moral ideas. And, as the result, we have a popular literature and a popular art serving, as has been already said, the goddess Aselgeia.

Such an art and literature easily make their way everywhere. In England and America the French literature of the seventeenth century is peculiarly fitted to do great good, and nothing but good; it can hardly be too much studied by us. And it is studied by us very little. The French literature of the eighteenth century, also, has qualities to do us much good, and we are not likely to take harm from its other qualities; we may study it to our great profit and advantage. And it is studied by us very little. The higher French literature of the present day has more knowledge and a wider range than its great predecessors, but less soundness and perfection, and it exerts much less influence than they did. Action and influence are now with the lower literature of France, with the popular literature in the service of the goddess Aselgeia. And this popular modern French literature, and the art which corresponds to it, bid fair to make their way in England and America far better than their predecessors. They appeal to instincts so universal and accessible; they appeal, people are beginning boldly to say, to Nature herself. Few things have lately struck me more than M. Renan's dictum, which I have already quoted, about what used to be called the virtue of chastity. The dictum occurs in his very interesting autobiography, published but the other day. M. Renan, whose genius I unfeignedly admire, is, I need hardly say, a man of the most perfect propriety of life; he has told us so himself. He was brought up for a priest, and he thinks it would not have been in good taste for him to become a free liver. But this abstinence is a mere matter of personal delicacy, a display of good and correct taste on his own part in his own very special circumstances. 'Nature,' he cries, 'cares nothing about chastity.' What a slap in the face to the sticklers for 'Whatsoever things are pure'!

I have had to take a long sweep to arrive at the point which I wished to reach. If we are to enjoy the benefit, I said, of the comfortable doctrine of the remnant, we must be capable of receiving also, and of holding fast, the hard doctrine of the unsoundness of the majority, and of the certainty that the unsoundness of the majority, if it is not withstood and remedied, must be their ruin. And therefore, even

though a gifted man like M. Renan may be so carried away by the tide of opinion in France where he lives, as to say that Nature cares nothing about chastity, and to see with amused indulgence the worship of the great goddess Lubricity, let us stand fast, and say that her worship is against nature, human nature, and that it is ruin. For this is the test of its being against human nature, that for human societies it is ruin. And the test is one from which there is no escape, as from the old tests in such matters there may be. For if you allege that it is the will of God that we should be pure, the sceptical Gallo-Latins will tell you that they do not know any such person. And in like manner, if it is said that those who serve the goddess Aselgeia shall not inherit the kingdom of God, the Gallo-Latin may tell you that he does not believe in any such place. But that the sure tendency and upshot of things establishes that the service of the goddess Aselgeia is ruin, that her followers are marred and stunted by it and disqualified for the ideal society of the future, is an infallible test to employ.

The saints admonish us to let our thoughts run upon whatsoever things are pure, if we would inherit the kingdom of God; and the divine Plato tells us that we have within us a many-headed beast and a man, and that by dissoluteness we feed and strengthen the beast in us, and starve the man; and finally, following the divine Plato among the sages at a humble distance, comes the prosaic and unfashionable Paley, and says in his precise way that ‘this vice has a tendency, which other species of vice have not so directly, to unsettle and weaken the powers of the understanding; as well as, I think, in a greater degree than other vices, to render the heart thoroughly corrupt.’ True; and once admitted and fostered, it eats like a canker, and with difficulty can ever be brought to let go its hold again, but for ever tightens it. Hardness and insolence come in its train; an insolence which grows until it ends by exasperating and alienating everybody; a hardness which grows until the man can at last scarcely take pleasure in anything, outside the service of his goddess, except cupidity and greed, and cannot be touched with emotion by any language except fustian. Such are the fruits of the worship of the great goddess Aselgeia.

So, instead of saying that Nature cares nothing about chastity, let us say that human nature, our nature, cares about it a great deal. Let us say that, by her present popular literature, France gives proof that she is suffering from a dangerous and perhaps fatal disease; and that it is not clericalism which is the real enemy to the French so much as their goddess; and if they can none of them see this themselves, it is only a sign of how far the disease has gone, and the case is so much the worse. The case is so much the worse; and for men in such case to be so vehemently busy about clerical and dynastic intrigues at home, and about alliances and colonial acquisitions and purifications of the flag abroad, might well make one borrow of the prophets and exclaim, 'Surely ye are perverse'! perverse to neglect your really pressing matters for those secondary ones. And when the ingenious and inexhaustible M. Blowitz, of our great London Times, who sees everybody and knows everything, when he expounds the springs of politics and the causes of the fall and success of ministries, and the combinations which have not been tried but should be, and takes upon him the mystery of things in the way with which we are so familiar,—to this wise man himself one is often tempted, again, to say with the prophets: 'Yet the Eternal also is wise, and will not call back his words.' M. Blowitz is not the only wise one; the Eternal has his wisdom also, and somehow or other it is always the Eternal's wisdom which at last carries the day. The Eternal has attached to certain moral causes the safety or the ruin of States, and the present popular literature of France is a sign that she has a most dangerous moral disease.

Now if the disease goes on and increases, then, whatever sagacious advice M. Blowitz may give, and whatever political combinations may be tried, and whether France gets colonies or not, and whether she allies herself with this nation or with that, things will only go from bad to worse with her; she will more and more lose her powers of soul and spirit, her intellectual productiveness, her skill in counsel, her might for war, her formidableness as a foe, her value as an ally, and the life of that famous State will be more and more impaired, until it perish. And this is that hard

but true doctrine of the sages and prophets, of the inexorable fatality of operation, in moral failure of the unsound majority, to impair and destroy States. But we will not talk or think of destruction for a State with such gifts and graces as France, and which has had such a place in history, and to which we, many of us, owe so much delight and so much good. And yet if France had no greater numbers than the Athens of Plato or the Judah of Isaiah, I do not see how she could well escape out of the throttling arms of her goddess and recover. She must recover through a powerful and profound renewal, a great inward change, brought about by 'the remnant' amongst her people; and, for this, a remnant small in numbers would not suffice. But in a France of thirty-five millions, who shall set bounds to the numbers of the remnant, or to its effectualness and power of victory?

In these United States (for I come round to the United States at last) you are fifty millions and more. I suppose that, as in England, as in France, as everywhere, so likewise here, the majority of people doubt very much whether the majority is unsound; or, rather, they have no doubt at all about the matter, they are sure that it is not unsound. But let us consent to-night to remain to the end in the ideas of the sages and prophets whom we have been following all along; and let us suppose that in the present actual stage of the world, as in all the stages through which the world has passed hitherto, the majority is and must be in general unsound everywhere,—even in the United States, even here in New York itself. Where is the failure? I have already, in the past, speculated in the abstract about you, perhaps, too much. But I suppose that in a democratic community like this, with its newness, its magnitude, its strength, its life of business, its sheer freedom and equality, the danger is in the absence of the discipline of respect; in hardness and materialism, exaggeration and boastfulness; in a false smartness, a false audacity, a want of soul and delicacy. 'Whatsoever things are elevated,'—whatsoever things are nobly serious, have true elevation,[2]—that perhaps, in our catalogue of maxims which are to possess the mind, is the maxim which points to where the failure of the unsound majority, in a

great democracy like yours, will probably lie. At any rate let us for the moment agree to suppose so. And the philosophers and the prophets, whom I at any rate am disposed to believe, and who say that moral causes govern the standing and the falling of States, will tell us that the failure to mind whatsoever things are elevated must impair with an inexorable fatality the life of a nation, just as the failure to mind whatsoever things are just, or whatsoever things are amiable, or whatsoever things are pure, will impair it; and that if the failure to mind whatsoever things are elevated should be real in your American democracy, and should grow into a disease, and take firm hold on you, then the life of even these great United States must inevitably suffer and be impaired more and more, until it perish.

Then from this hard doctrine we will betake ourselves to the more comfortable doctrine of the remnant. ‘The remnant shall return;’ shall ‘convert and be healed’ itself first, and shall then recover the unsound majority. And you are fifty millions and growing apace. What a remnant yours may be, surely! A remnant of how great numbers, how mighty strength, how irresistible efficacy! Yet we must not go too fast, either, nor make too sure of our efficacious remnant. Mere multitude will not give us a saving remnant with certainty. The Assyrian Empire had multitude, the Roman Empire had multitude; yet neither the one nor the other could produce a sufficing remnant any more than Athens or Judah could produce it, and both Assyria and Rome perished like Athens and Judah.

But you are something more than a people of fifty millions. You are fifty millions mainly sprung, as we in England are mainly sprung, from that German stock which has faults indeed,—faults which have diminished the extent of its influence, diminished its power of attraction and the interest of its history, and which seems moreover just now, from all I can see and hear, to be passing through a not very happy moment, morally, in Germany proper. Yet of the German stock it is, I think, true, as my father said more than fifty years ago, that it has been a stock ‘of the most moral races of men that the world has yet seen, with the soundest laws, the least

violent passions, the fairest domestic and civil virtues.' You come, therefore, of about the best parentage which a modern nation can have. Then you have had, as we in England have also had, but more entirely than we and more exclusively, the Puritan discipline. Certainly I am not blind to the faults of that discipline. Certainly I do not wish it to remain in possession of the field for ever, or too long. But as a stage and a discipline, and as means for enabling that poor inattentive and immoral creature, man, to love and appropriate and make part of his being divine ideas, on which he could not otherwise have laid or kept hold, the discipline of Puritanism has been invaluable; and the more I read history, the more I see of mankind, the more I recognise its value. Well, then, you are not merely a multitude of fifty millions; you are fifty millions sprung from this excellent Germanic stock, having passed through this excellent Puritan discipline, and set in this enviable and unbounded country. Even supposing, therefore, that by the necessity of things your majority must in the present stage of the world probably be unsound, what a remnant, I say,—what an incomparable, all-transforming remnant,—you may fairly hope with your numbers, if things go happily, to have!

LITERATURE AND SCIENCE.

Practical people talk with a smile of Plato and of his absolute ideas; and it is impossible to deny that Plato's ideas do often seem unpractical and impracticable, and especially when one views them in connexion with the life of a great work-a-day world like the United States. The necessary staple of the life of such a world Plato regards with disdain; handicraft and trade and the working professions he regards with disdain; but what becomes of the life of an industrial modern community if you take handicraft and trade and the working professions out of it? The base mechanic arts and handicrafts, says Plato, bring about a natural weakness in the principle of excellence in a man, so that he cannot govern the ignoble growths

in him, but nurses them, and cannot understand fostering any other. Those who exercise such arts and trades, as they have their bodies, he says, marred by their vulgar businesses, so they have their souls, too, bowed and broken by them. And if one of these uncomely people has a mind to seek self-culture and philosophy, Plato compares him to a bald little tinker, who has scraped together money, and has got his release from service, and has had a bath, and bought a new coat, and is rigged out like a bridegroom about to marry the daughter of his master who has fallen into poor and helpless estate.

Nor do the working professions fare any better than trade at the hands of Plato. He draws for us an inimitable picture of the working lawyer, and of his life of bondage; he shows how this bondage from his youth up has stunted and warped him, and made him small and crooked of soul, encompassing him with difficulties which he is not man enough to rely on justice and truth as means to encounter, but has recourse, for help out of them, to falsehood and wrong. And so, says Plato, this poor creature is bent and broken, and grows up from boy to man without a particle of soundness in him, although exceedingly smart and clever in his own esteem.

One cannot refuse to admire the artist who draws these pictures. But we say to ourselves that his ideas show the influence of a primitive and obsolete order of things, when the warrior caste and the priestly caste were alone in honour, and the humble work of the world was done by slaves. We have now changed all that; the modern majority consists in work, as Emerson declares; and in work, we may add, principally of such plain and dusty kind as the work of cultivators of the ground, handicraftsmen, men of trade and business, men of the working professions. Above all is this true in a great industrious community such as that of the United States.

Now education, many people go on to say, is still mainly governed by the ideas of men like Plato, who lived when the warrior caste and the priestly or philosophical class were alone in honour, and the really useful part of the community were slaves.

It is an education fitted for persons of leisure in such a community. This education passed from Greece and Rome to the feudal communities of Europe, where also the warrior caste and the priestly caste were alone held in honour, and where the really useful and working part of the community, though not nominally slaves as in the pagan world, were practically not much better off than slaves, and not more seriously regarded. And how absurd it is, people end by saying, to inflict this education upon an industrious modern community, where very few indeed are persons of leisure, and the mass to be considered has not leisure, but is bound, for its own great good, and for the great good of the world at large, to plain labour and to industrial pursuits, and the education in question tends necessarily to make men dissatisfied with these pursuits and unfitted for them!

That is what is said. So far I must defend Plato, as to plead that his view of education and studies is in the general, as it seems to me, sound enough, and fitted for all sorts and conditions of men, whatever their pursuits may be. ‘An intelligent man,’ says Plato, ‘will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and will less value the others.’ I cannot consider that a bad description of the aim of education, and of the motives which should govern us in the choice of studies, whether we are preparing ourselves for a hereditary seat in the English House of Lords or for the pork trade in Chicago.

Still I admit that Plato’s world was not ours, that his scorn of trade and handicraft is fantastic, that he had no conception of a great industrial community such as that of the United States, and that such a community must and will shape its education to suit its own needs. If the usual education handed down to it from the past does not suit it, it will certainly before long drop this and try another. The usual education in the past has been mainly literary. The question is whether the studies which were long supposed to be the best for all of us are practically the best now; whether others are not better. The tyranny of the past, many think, weighs on us injuriously in the predominance given to letters in education. The question is raised whether, to meet

the needs of our modern life, the predominance ought not now to pass from letters to science; and naturally the question is nowhere raised with more energy than here in the United States. The design of abasing what is called ‘mere literary instruction and education,’ and of exalting what is called ‘sound, extensive, and practical scientific knowledge,’ is, in this intensely modern world of the United States, even more perhaps than in Europe, a very popular design, and makes great and rapid progress.

I am going to ask whether the present movement for ousting letters from their old predominance in education, and for transferring the predominance in education to the natural sciences, whether this brisk and flourishing movement ought to prevail, and whether it is likely that in the end it really will prevail. An objection may be raised which I will anticipate. My own studies have been almost wholly in letters, and my visits to the field of the natural sciences have been very slight and inadequate, although those sciences have always strongly moved my curiosity. A man of letters, it will perhaps be said, is not competent to discuss the comparative merits of letters and natural science as means of education. To this objection I reply, first of all, that his incompetence, if he attempts the discussion but is really incompetent for it, will be abundantly visible; nobody will be taken in; he will have plenty of sharp observers and critics to save mankind from that danger. But the line I am going to follow is, as you will soon discover, so extremely simple, that perhaps it may be followed without failure even by one who for a more ambitious line of discussion would be quite incompetent.

Some of you may possibly remember a phrase of mine which has been the object of a good deal of comment; an observation to the effect that in our culture, the aim being to know ourselves and the world, we have, as the means to this end, to know the best which has been thought and said in the world. A man of science, who is also an excellent writer and the very prince of debaters, Professor Huxley, in a discourse at the opening of Sir Josiah Mason’s college at Birmingham, laying hold of this phrase, expanded it by quoting some more words of mine, which are these: ‘The

civilised world is to be regarded as now being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have for their proper outfit a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another. Special local and temporary advantages being put out of account, that modern nation will in the intellectual and spiritual sphere make most progress, which most thoroughly carries out this programme.'

Now on my phrase, thus enlarged, Professor Huxley remarks that when I speak of the above-mentioned knowledge as enabling us to know ourselves and the world, I assert literature to contain the materials which suffice for thus making us know ourselves and the world. But it is not by any means clear, says he, that after having learnt all which ancient and modern literatures have to tell us, we have laid a sufficiently broad and deep foundation for that criticism of life, that knowledge of ourselves and the world, which constitutes culture. On the contrary, Professor Huxley declares that he finds himself 'wholly unable to admit that either nations or individuals will really advance, if their outfit draws nothing from the stores of physical science. An army without weapons of precision, and with no particular base of operations, might more hopefully enter upon a campaign on the Rhine, than a man, devoid of a knowledge of what physical science has done in the last century, upon a criticism of life.'

This shows how needful it is for those who are to discuss any matter together, to have a common understanding as to the sense of the terms they employ,—how needful, and how difficult. What Professor Huxley says, implies just the reproach which is so often brought against the study of belles lettres, as they are called: that the study is an elegant one, but slight and ineffectual; a smattering of Greek and Latin and other ornamental things, of little use for any one whose object is to get at truth, and to be a practical man. So, too, M. Renan talks of the 'superficial humanism' of a school-course which treats us as if we were all going to be poets,

writers, preachers, orators, and he opposes this humanism to positive science, or the critical search after truth. And there is always a tendency in those who are remonstrating against the predominance of letters in education, to understand by letters belles lettres, and by belles lettres a superficial humanism, the opposite of science or true knowledge.

But when we talk of knowing Greek and Roman antiquity, for instance, which is the knowledge people have called the humanities, I for my part mean a knowledge which is something more than a superficial humanism, mainly decorative. ‘I call all teaching scientific,’ says Wolf, the critic of Homer, ‘which is systematically laid out and followed up to its original sources. For example: a knowledge of classical antiquity is scientific when the remains of classical antiquity are correctly studied in the original languages.’ There can be no doubt that Wolf is perfectly right; that all learning is scientific which is systematically laid out and followed up to its original sources, and that a genuine humanism is scientific.

When I speak of knowing Greek and Roman antiquity, therefore, as a help to knowing ourselves and the world, I mean more than a knowledge of so much vocabulary, so much grammar, so many portions of authors in the Greek and Latin languages. I mean knowing the Greeks and Romans, and their life and genius, and what they were and did in the world; what we get from them, and what is its value. That, at least, is the ideal; and when we talk of endeavouring to know Greek and Roman antiquity, as a help to knowing ourselves and the world, we mean endeavouring so to know them as to satisfy this ideal, however much we may still fall short of it.

The same also as to knowing our own and other modern nations, with the like aim of getting to understand ourselves and the world. To know the best that has been thought and said by the modern nations, is to know, says Professor Huxley, ‘only what modern literatures have to tell us; it is the criticism of life contained in modern

literature.' And yet 'the distinctive character of our times,' he urges, 'lies in the vast and constantly increasing part which is played by natural knowledge.' And how, therefore, can a man, devoid of knowledge of what physical science has done in the last century, enter hopefully upon a criticism of modern life?

Let us, I say, be agreed about the meaning of the terms we are using. I talk of knowing the best which has been thought and uttered in the world; Professor Huxley says this means knowing literature. Literature is a large word; it may mean everything written with letters or printed in a book. Euclid's Elements and Newton's Principia are thus literature. All knowledge that reaches us through books is literature. But by literature Professor Huxley means belles lettres. He means to make me say, that knowing the best which has been thought and said by the modern nations is knowing their belles lettres and no more. And this is no sufficient equipment, he argues, for a criticism of modern life. But as I do not mean, by knowing ancient Rome, knowing merely more or less of Latin belles lettres, and taking no account of Rome's military, and political, and legal, and administrative work in the world; and as, by knowing ancient Greece, I understand knowing her as the giver of Greek art, and the guide to a free and right use of reason and to scientific method, and the founder of our mathematics and physics and astronomy and biology,—I understand knowing her as all this, and not merely knowing certain Greek poems, and histories, and treatises, and speeches,—so as to the knowledge of modern nations also. By knowing modern nations, I mean not merely knowing their belles lettres, but knowing also what has been done by such men as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin. 'Our ancestors learned,' says Professor Huxley, 'that the earth is the centre of the visible universe, and that man is the cynosure of things terrestrial; and more especially was it inculcated that the course of nature had no fixed order, but that it could be, and constantly was, altered.' But for us now, continues Professor Huxley, 'the notions of the beginning and the end of the world entertained by our forefathers are no longer credible. It is very certain that the earth

is not the chief body in the material universe, and that the world is not subordinated to man's use. It is even more certain that nature is the expression of a definite order, with which nothing interferes.' 'And yet,' he cries, 'the purely classical education advocated by the representatives of the humanists in our day gives no inkling of all this!'

In due place and time I will just touch upon that vexed question of classical education; but at present the question is as to what is meant by knowing the best which modern nations have thought and said. It is not knowing their belles lettres merely which is meant. To know Italian belles lettres is not to know Italy, and to know English belles lettres is not to know England. Into knowing Italy and England there comes a great deal more, Galileo and Newton, amongst it. The reproach of being a superficial humanism, a tincture of belles lettres, may attach rightly enough to some other disciplines; but to the particular discipline recommended when I proposed knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world, it does not apply. In that best I certainly include what in modern times has been thought and said by the great observers and knowers of nature.

There is, therefore, really no question between Professor Huxley and me as to whether knowing the great results of the modern scientific study of nature is not required as a part of our culture, as well as knowing the products of literature and art. But to follow the processes by which those results are reached, ought, say the friends of physical science, to be made the staple of education for the bulk of mankind. And here there does arise a question between those whom Professor Huxley calls with playful sarcasm 'the Levites of culture,' and those whom the poor humanist is sometimes apt to regard as its Nebuchadnezzars.

The great results of the scientific investigation of nature we are agreed upon knowing, but how much of our study are we bound to give to the processes by which those results are reached? The results have their visible bearing on human life. But

all the processes, too, all the items of fact, by which those results are reached and established, are interesting. All knowledge is interesting to a wise man, and the knowledge of nature is interesting to all men. It is very interesting to know, that, from the albuminous white of the egg, the chick in the egg gets the materials for its flesh, bones, blood, and feathers; while, from the fatty yolk of the egg, it gets the heat and energy which enable it at length to break its shell and begin the world. It is less interesting, perhaps, but still it is interesting, to know that when a taper burns, the wax is converted into carbonic acid and water. Moreover, it is quite true that the habit of dealing with facts, which is given by the study of nature, is, as the friends of physical science praise it for being, an excellent discipline. The appeal, in the study of nature, is constantly to observation and experiment; not only is it said that the thing is so, but we can be made to see that it is so. Not only does a man tell us that when a taper burns the wax is converted into carbonic acid and water, as a man may tell us, if he likes, that Charon is punting his ferry-boat on the river Styx, or that Victor Hugo is a sublime poet, or Mr. Gladstone the most admirable of statesmen; but we are made to see that the conversion into carbonic acid and water does actually happen. This reality of natural knowledge it is, which makes the friends of physical science contrast it, as a knowledge of things, with the humanist's knowledge, which is, say they, a knowledge of words. And hence Professor Huxley is moved to lay it down that, 'for the purpose of attaining real culture, an exclusively scientific education is at least as effectual as an exclusively literary education.' And a certain President of the Section for Mechanical Science in the British Association is, in Scripture phrase, 'very bold,' and declares that if a man, in his mental training, 'has substituted literature and history for natural science, he has chosen the less useful alternative.' But whether we go these lengths or not, we must all admit that in natural science the habit gained of dealing with facts is a most valuable discipline, and that every one should have some experience of it.

More than this, however, is demanded by the reformers. It is proposed to make the

training in natural science the main part of education, for the great majority of mankind at any rate. And here, I confess, I part company with the friends of physical science, with whom up to this point I have been agreeing. In differing from them, however, I wish to proceed with the utmost caution and diffidence. The smallness of my own acquaintance with the disciplines of natural science is ever before my mind, and I am fearful of doing these disciplines an injustice. The ability and pugnacity of the partisans of natural science makes them formidable persons to contradict. The tone of tentative inquiry, which befits a being of dim faculties and bounded knowledge, is the tone I would wish to take and not to depart from. At present it seems to me, that those who are for giving to natural knowledge, as they call it, the chief place in the education of the majority of mankind, leave one important thing out of their account: the constitution of human nature. But I put this forward on the strength of some facts not at all recondite, very far from it; facts capable of being stated in the simplest possible fashion, and to which, if I so state them, the man of science will, I am sure, be willing to allow their due weight.

Deny the facts altogether, I think, he hardly can. He can hardly deny, that when we set ourselves to enumerate the powers which go to the building up of human life, and say that they are the power of conduct, the power of intellect and knowledge, the power of beauty, and the power of social life and manners,—he can hardly deny that this scheme, though drawn in rough and plain lines enough, and not pretending to scientific exactness, does yet give a fairly true representation of the matter. Human nature is built up by these powers; we have the need for them all. When we have rightly met and adjusted the claims of them all, we shall then be in a fair way for getting soberness and righteousness, with wisdom. This is evident enough, and the friends of physical science would admit it.

But perhaps they may not have sufficiently observed another thing: namely, that the several powers just mentioned are not isolated, but there is, in the generality of mankind, a perpetual tendency to relate them one to another in divers ways. With

one such way of relating them I am particularly concerned now. Following our instinct for intellect and knowledge, we acquire pieces of knowledge; and presently, in the generality of men, there arises the desire to relate these pieces of knowledge to our sense for conduct, to our sense for beauty,—and there is weariness and dissatisfaction if the desire is baulked. Now in this desire lies, I think, the strength of that hold which letters have upon us.

All knowledge is, as I said just now, interesting; and even items of knowledge which from the nature of the case cannot well be related, but must stand isolated in our thoughts, have their interest. Even lists of exceptions have their interest. If we are studying Greek accents, it is interesting to know that pais and pas, and some other monosyllables of the same form of declension, do not take the circumflex upon the last syllable of the genitive plural, but vary, in this respect, from the common rule. If we are studying physiology, it is interesting to know that the pulmonary artery carries dark blood and the pulmonary vein carries bright blood, departing in this respect from the common rule for the division of labour between the veins and the arteries. But every one knows how we seek naturally to combine the pieces of our knowledge together, to bring them under general rules, to relate them to principles; and how unsatisfactory and tiresome it would be to go on for ever learning lists of exceptions, or accumulating items of fact which must stand isolated.

Well, that same need of relating our knowledge, which operates here within the sphere of our knowledge itself, we shall find operating, also, outside that sphere. We experience, as we go on learning and knowing,—the vast majority of us experience,—the need of relating what we have learnt and known to the sense which we have in us for conduct, to the sense which we have in us for beauty.

A certain Greek prophetess of Mantineia in Arcadia, Diotima by name, once explained to the philosopher Socrates that love, and impulse, and bent of all kinds, is, in fact, nothing else but the desire in men that good should for ever be present to

them. This desire for good, Diotima assured Socrates, is our fundamental desire, of which fundamental desire every impulse in us is only some one particular form. And therefore this fundamental desire it is, I suppose,—this desire in men that good should be for ever present to them,—which acts in us when we feel the impulse for relating our knowledge to our sense for conduct and to our sense for beauty. At any rate, with men in general the instinct exists. Such is human nature. And the instinct, it will be admitted, is innocent, and human nature is preserved by our following the lead of its innocent instincts. Therefore, in seeking to gratify this instinct in question, we are following the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.

But, no doubt, some kinds of knowledge cannot be made to directly serve the instinct in question, cannot be directly related to the sense for beauty, to the sense for conduct. These are instrument-knowledges; they lead on to other knowledges, which can. A man who passes his life in instrument-knowledges is a specialist. They may be invaluable as instruments to something beyond, for those who have the gift thus to employ them; and they may be disciplines in themselves wherein it is useful for every one to have some schooling. But it is inconceivable that the generality of men should pass all their mental life with Greek accents or with formal logic. My friend Professor Sylvester, who is one of the first mathematicians in the world, holds transcendental doctrines as to the virtue of mathematics, but those doctrines are not for common men. In the very Senate House and heart of our English Cambridge I once ventured, though not without an apology for my profaneness, to hazard the opinion that for the majority of mankind a little of mathematics, even, goes a long way. Of course this is quite consistent with their being of immense importance as an instrument to something else; but it is the few who have the aptitude for thus using them, not the bulk of mankind.

The natural sciences do not, however, stand on the same footing with these instrument-knowledges. Experience shows us that the generality of men will find more interest in learning that, when a taper burns, the wax is converted into carbonic

acid and water, or in learning the explanation of the phenomenon of dew, or in learning how the circulation of the blood is carried on, than they find in learning that the genitive plural of pais and pas does not take the circumflex on the termination. And one piece of natural knowledge is added to another, and others are added to that, and at last we come to propositions so interesting as Mr. Darwin's famous proposition that 'our ancestor was a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits.' Or we come to propositions of such reach and magnitude as those which Professor Huxley delivers, when he says that the notions of our forefathers about the beginning and the end of the world were all wrong, and that nature is the expression of a definite order with which nothing interferes.

Interesting, indeed, these results of science are, important they are, and we should all of us be acquainted with them. But what I now wish you to mark is, that we are still, when they are propounded to us and we receive them, we are still in the sphere of intellect and knowledge. And for the generality of men there will be found, I say, to arise, when they have duly taken in the proposition that their ancestor was 'a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' there will be found to arise an invincible desire to relate this proposition to the sense in us for conduct, and to the sense in us for beauty. But this the men of science will not do for us, and will hardly even profess to do. They will give us other pieces of knowledge, other facts, about other animals and their ancestors, or about plants, or about stones, or about stars; and they may finally bring us to those great 'general conceptions of the universe, which are forced upon us all,' says Professor Huxley, 'by the progress of physical science.' But still it will be knowledge only which they give us; knowledge not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, and touched with emotion by being so put; not thus put for us, and therefore, to the majority of mankind, after a certain while, unsatisfying, wearying.

Not to the born naturalist, I admit. But what do we mean by a born naturalist? We

mean a man in whom the zeal for observing nature is so uncommonly strong and eminent, that it marks him off from the bulk of mankind. Such a man will pass his life happily in collecting natural knowledge and reasoning upon it, and will ask for nothing, or hardly anything, more. I have heard it said that the sagacious and admirable naturalist whom we lost not very long ago, Mr. Darwin, once owned to a friend that for his part he did not experience the necessity for two things which most men find so necessary to them,—religion and poetry; science and the domestic affections, he thought, were enough. To a born naturalist, I can well understand that this should seem so. So absorbing is his occupation with nature, so strong his love for his occupation, that he goes on acquiring natural knowledge and reasoning upon it, and has little time or inclination for thinking about getting it related to the desire in man for conduct, the desire in man for beauty. He relates it to them for himself as he goes along, so far as he feels the need; and he draws from the domestic affections all the additional solace necessary. But then Darwins are extremely rare. Another great and admirable master of natural knowledge, Faraday, was a Sandemanian. That is to say, he related his knowledge to his instinct for conduct and to his instinct for beauty, by the aid of that respectable Scottish sectary, Robert Sandeman. And so strong, in general, is the demand of religion and poetry to have their share in a man, to associate themselves with his knowing, and to relieve and rejoice it, that, probably, for one man amongst us with the disposition to do as Darwin did in this respect, there are at least fifty with the disposition to do as Faraday.

Education lays hold upon us, in fact, by satisfying this demand. Professor Huxley holds up to scorn mediæval education, with its neglect of the knowledge of nature, its poverty even of literary studies, its formal logic devoted to ‘showing how and why that which the Church said was true must be true.’ But the great mediæval Universities were not brought into being, we may be sure, by the zeal for giving a jejune and contemptible education. Kings have been their nursing fathers, and queens have been their nursing mothers, but not for this. The mediæval Universities

came into being, because the supposed knowledge, delivered by Scripture and the Church, so deeply engaged men's hearts, by so simply, easily, and powerfully relating itself to their desire for conduct, their desire for beauty. All other knowledge was dominated by this supposed knowledge and was subordinated to it, because of the surpassing strength of the hold which it gained upon the affections of men, by allying itself profoundly with their sense for conduct, their sense for beauty.

But now, says Professor Huxley, conceptions of the universe fatal to the notions held by our forefathers have been forced upon us by physical science. Grant to him that they are thus fatal, that the new conceptions must and will soon become current everywhere, and that every one will finally perceive them to be fatal to the beliefs of our forefathers. The need of humane letters, as they are truly called, because they serve the paramount desire in men that good should be for ever present to them,—the need of humane letters, to establish a relation between the new conceptions, and our instinct for beauty, our instinct for conduct, is only the more visible. The Middle Age could do without humane letters, as it could do without the study of nature, because its supposed knowledge was made to engage its emotions so powerfully. Grant that the supposed knowledge disappears, its power of being made to engage the emotions will of course disappear along with it,—but the emotions themselves, and their claim to be engaged and satisfied, will remain. Now if we find by experience that humane letters have an undeniable power of engaging the emotions, the importance of humane letters in a man's training becomes not less, but greater, in proportion to the success of modern science in extirpating what it calls 'mediæval thinking.'

Have humane letters, then, have poetry and eloquence, the power here attributed to them of engaging the emotions, and do they exercise it? And if they have it and exercise it, how do they exercise it, so as to exert an influence upon man's sense for conduct, his sense for beauty? Finally, even if they both can and do exert an influence upon the senses in question, how are they to relate to them the

results,—the modern results,—of natural science? All these questions may be asked. First, have poetry and eloquence the power of calling out the emotions? The appeal is to experience. Experience shows that for the vast majority of men, for mankind in general, they have the power. Next do they exercise it? They do. But then, how do they exercise it so as to affect man's sense for conduct, his sense for beauty? And this is perhaps a case for applying the Preacher's words: 'Though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.'[3] Why should it be one thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say, 'Patience is a virtue,' and quite another thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say with Homer,

τλητὸν γὰρ Μοῖραι θυμὸν θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν—[4]

'for an enduring heart have the destinies appointed to the children of men?' Why should it be one thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say with the philosopher Spinoza, Felicitas in eo consistit quod homo suum esse conservare potest—'Man's happiness consists in his being able to preserve his own essence,' and quite another thing, in its effect upon the emotions, to say with the Gospel, 'What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, forfeit himself?' How does this difference of effect arise? I cannot tell, and I am not much concerned to know; the important thing is that it does arise, and that we can profit by it. But how, finally, are poetry and eloquence to exercise the power of relating the modern results of natural science to man's instinct for conduct, his instinct for beauty? And here again I answer that I do not know how they will exercise it, but that they can and will exercise it I am sure. I do not mean that modern philosophical poets and modern philosophical moralists are to come and relate for us, in express terms, the results of modern scientific research to our instinct for conduct, our instinct for beauty. But I mean that we shall find, as a matter of experience, if we know the best that has been thought and uttered in the world, we shall find that the art and poetry and eloquence of men who lived, perhaps, long ago, who had the most limited natural knowledge,

who had the most erroneous conceptions about many important matters, we shall find that this art, and poetry, and eloquence, have in fact not only the power of refreshing and delighting us, they have also the power,—such is the strength and worth, in essentials, of their authors' criticism of life,—they have a fortifying, and elevating, and quickening, and suggestive power, capable of wonderfully helping us to relate the results of modern science to our need for conduct, our need for beauty. Homer's conceptions of the physical universe were, I imagine, grotesque; but really, under the shock of hearing from modern science that 'the world is not subordinated to man's use, and that man is not the cynosure of things terrestrial,' I could, for my own part, desire no better comfort than Homer's line which I quoted just now,

τλητὸν γὰρ Μοῖραι θυμὸν θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν—

'for an enduring heart have the destinies appointed to the children of men!'

And the more that men's minds are cleared, the more that the results of science are frankly accepted, the more that poetry and eloquence come to be received and studied as what in truth they really are,—the criticism of life by gifted men, alive and active with extraordinary power at an unusual number of points;—so much the more will the value of humane letters, and of art also, which is an utterance having a like kind of power with theirs, be felt and acknowledged, and their place in education be secured.

Let us therefore, all of us, avoid indeed as much as possible any invidious comparison between the merits of humane letters, as means of education, and the merits of the natural sciences. But when some President of a Section for Mechanical Science insists on making the comparison, and tells us that 'he who in his training has substituted literature and history for natural science has chosen the less useful alternative,' let us make answer to him that the student of humane letters only, will, at least, know also the great general conceptions brought in by modern physical science; for science, as Professor Huxley says, forces them upon us all. But the

student of the natural sciences only, will, by our very hypothesis, know nothing of humane letters; not to mention that in setting himself to be perpetually accumulating natural knowledge, he sets himself to do what only specialists have in general the gift for doing genially. And so he will probably be unsatisfied, or at any rate incomplete, and even more incomplete than the student of humane letters only.

I once mentioned in a school-report, how a young man in one of our English training colleges having to paraphrase the passage in Macbeth beginning,

‘Can’st thou not minister to a mind diseased?’

turned this line into, ‘Can you not wait upon the lunatic?’ And I remarked what a curious state of things it would be, if every pupil of our national schools knew, let us say, that the moon is two thousand one hundred and sixty miles in diameter, and thought at the same time that a good paraphrase for

‘Can’st thou not minister to a mind diseased?’

was, ‘Can you not wait upon the lunatic?’ If one is driven to choose, I think I would rather have a young person ignorant about the moon’s diameter, but aware that ‘Can you not wait upon the lunatic?’ is bad, than a young person whose education had been such as to manage things the other way.

Or to go higher than the pupils of our national schools. I have in my mind’s eye a member of our British Parliament who comes to travel here in America, who afterwards relates his travels, and who shows a really masterly knowledge of the geology of this great country and of its mining capabilities, but who ends by gravely suggesting that the United States should borrow a prince from our Royal Family, and should make him their king, and should create a House of Lords of great landed proprietors after the pattern of ours; and then America, he thinks, would have her future happily and perfectly secured. Surely, in this case, the President of the Section for Mechanical Science would himself hardly say that our member of Parliament, by concentrating himself upon geology and mineralogy, and so on, and not attending to

literature and history, had ‘chosen the more useful alternative.’

If then there is to be separation and option between humane letters on the one hand, and the natural sciences on the other, the great majority of mankind, all who have not exceptional and overpowering aptitudes for the study of nature, would do well, I cannot but think, to choose to be educated in humane letters rather than in the natural sciences. Letters will call out their being at more points, will make them live more.

I said that before I ended I would just touch on the question of classical education, and I will keep my word. Even if literature is to retain a large place in our education, yet Latin and Greek, say the friends of progress, will certainly have to go. Greek is the grand offender in the eyes of these gentlemen. The attackers of the established course of study think that against Greek, at any rate, they have irresistible arguments. Literature may perhaps be needed in education, they say; but why on earth should it be Greek literature? Why not French or German? Nay, ‘has not an Englishman models in his own literature of every kind of excellence?’ As before, it is not on any weak pleadings of my own that I rely for convincing the gainsayers; it is on the constitution of human nature itself, and on the instinct of self-preservation in humanity. The instinct for beauty is set in human nature, as surely as the instinct for knowledge is set there, or the instinct for conduct. If the instinct for beauty is served by Greek literature and art as it is served by no other literature and art, we may trust to the instinct of self-preservation in humanity for keeping Greek as part of our culture. We may trust to it for even making the study of Greek more prevalent than it is now. Greek will come, I hope, some day to be studied more rationally than at present; but it will be increasingly studied as men increasingly feel the need in them for beauty, and how powerfully Greek art and Greek literature can serve this need. Women will again study Greek, as Lady Jane Grey did; I believe that in that chain of forts, with which the fair host of the Amazons are now engirdling our English universities, I find that here in America, in colleges like Smith College in

Massachusetts, and Vassar College in the State of New York, and in the happy families of the mixed universities out West, they are studying it already.

Defuit una mihi symmetria prisca,—'The antique symmetry was the one thing wanting to me,' said Leonardo da Vinci; and he was an Italian. I will not presume to speak for the Americans, but I am sure that, in the Englishman, the want of this admirable symmetry of the Greeks is a thousand times more great and crying than in any Italian. The results of the want show themselves most glaringly, perhaps, in our architecture, but they show themselves, also, in all our art. Fit details strictly combined, in view of a large general result nobly conceived; that is just the beautiful symmetria prisca of the Greeks, and it is just where we English fail, where all our art fails. Striking ideas we have, and well-executed details we have; but that high symmetry which, with satisfying and delightful effect, combines them, we seldom or never have. The glorious beauty of the Acropolis at Athens did not come from single fine things stuck about on that hill, a statue here, a gateway there;—no, it arose from all things being perfectly combined for a supreme total effect. What must not an Englishman feel about our deficiencies in this respect, as the sense for beauty, whereof this symmetry is an essential element, awakens and strengthens within him! what will not one day be his respect and desire for Greece and its symmetria prisca, when the scales drop from his eyes as he walks the London streets, and he sees such a lesson in meanness as the Strand, for instance, in its true deformity! But here we are coming to our friend Mr. Ruskin's province, and I will not intrude upon it, for he is its very sufficient guardian.

And so we at last find, it seems, we find flowing in favour of the humanities the natural and necessary stream of things, which seemed against them when we started. The 'hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' this good fellow carried hidden in his nature, apparently, something destined to develop into a necessity for humane letters. Nay, more; we seem finally to be even led to the further conclusion that our hairy ancestor carried in his nature, also, a

necessity for Greek.

And therefore, to say the truth, I cannot really think that humane letters are in much actual danger of being thrust out from their leading place in education, in spite of the array of authorities against them at this moment. So long as human nature is what it is, their attractions will remain irresistible. As with Greek, so with letters generally: they will some day come, we may hope, to be studied more rationally, but they will not lose their place. What will happen will rather be that there will be crowded into education other matters besides, far too many; there will be, perhaps, a period of unsettlement and confusion and false tendency; but letters will not in the end lose their leading place. If they lose it for a time, they will get it back again. We shall be brought back to them by our wants and aspirations. And a poor humanist may possess his soul in patience, neither strive nor cry, admit the energy and brilliancy of the partisans of physical science, and their present favour with the public, to be far greater than his own, and still have a happy faith that the nature of things works silently on behalf of the studies which he loves, and that, while we shall all have to acquaint ourselves with the great results reached by modern science, and to give ourselves as much training in its disciplines as we can conveniently carry, yet the majority of men will always require humane letters; and so much the more, as they have the more and the greater results of science to relate to the need in man for conduct, and to the need in him for beauty.

EMERSON.

Forty years ago, when I was an undergraduate at Oxford, voices were in the air there which haunt my memory still. Happy the man who in that susceptible season of youth hears such voices! they are a possession to him for ever. No such voices as those which we heard in our youth at Oxford are sounding there now. Oxford has more criticism now, more knowledge, more light; but such voices as those of our

youth it has no longer. The name of Cardinal Newman is a great name to the imagination still; his genius and his style are still things of power. But he is over eighty years old; he is in the Oratory at Birmingham; he has adopted, for the doubts and difficulties which beset men's minds to-day, a solution which, to speak frankly, is impossible. Forty years ago he was in the very prime of life; he was close at hand to us at Oxford; he was preaching in St. Mary's pulpit every Sunday; he seemed about to transform and to renew what was for us the most national and natural institution in the world, the Church of England. Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St. Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music,—subtle, sweet, mournful? I seem to hear him still, saying: 'After the fever of life, after wearinesses and sicknesses, fightings and despondings, languor and fretfulness, struggling and succeeding; after all the changes and chances of this troubled, unhealthy state,—at length comes death, at length the white throne of God, at length the beatific vision.' Or, if we followed him back to his seclusion at Littlemore, that dreary village by the London road, and to the house of retreat and the church which he built there,—a mean house such as Paul might have lived in when he was tent-making at Ephesus, a church plain and thinly sown with worshippers,—who could resist him there either, welcoming back to the severe joys of church-fellowship, and of daily worship and prayer, the firstlings of a generation which had well-nigh forgotten them? Again I seem to hear him: 'The season is chill and dark, and the breath of the morning is damp, and worshippers are few; but all this befits those who are by their profession penitents and mourners, watchers and pilgrims. More dear to them that loneliness, more cheerful that severity, and more bright that gloom, than all those aids and appliances of luxury by which men nowadays attempt to make prayer less disagreeable to them. True faith does not covet comforts; they who realise that awful day, when they shall see Him face to face whose eyes are as a flame of fire, will as

little bargain to pray pleasantly now as they will think of doing so then.'

Somewhere or other I have spoken of those 'last enchantments of the Middle Age' which Oxford sheds around us, and here they were! But there were other voices sounding in our ear besides Newman's. There was the puissant voice of Carlyle; so sorely strained, over-used, and mis-used since, but then fresh, comparatively sound, and reaching our hearts with true, pathetic eloquence. Who can forget the emotion of receiving in its first freshness such a sentence as that sentence of Carlyle upon Edward Irving, then just dead: 'Scotland sent him forth a herculean man; our mad Babylon wore and wasted him with all her engines,—and it took her twelve years!' A greater voice still,—the greatest voice of the century,—came to us in those youthful years through Carlyle: the voice of Goethe. To this day,—such is the force of youthful associations,—I read the Wilhelm Meister with more pleasure in Carlyle's translation than in the original. The large, liberal view of human life in Wilhelm Meister, how novel it was to the Englishman in those days! and it was salutary, too, and educative for him, doubtless, as well as novel. But what moved us most in Wilhelm Meister was that which, after all, will always move the young most,—the poetry, the eloquence. Never, surely, was Carlyle's prose so beautiful and pure as in his rendering of the Youths' dirge over Mignon!—'Well is our treasure now laid up, the fair image of the past. Here sleeps it in the marble, undecaying; in your hearts, also, it lives, it works. Travel, travel, back into life! Take along with you this holy earnestness, for earnestness alone makes life eternity.' Here we had the voice of the great Goethe;—not the stiff, and hindered, and frigid, and factitious Goethe who speaks to us too often from those sixty volumes of his, but of the great Goethe, and the true one.

And besides those voices, there came to us in that old Oxford time a voice also from this side of the Atlantic,—a clear and pure voice, which for my ear, at any rate, brought a strain as new, and moving, and unforgettable, as the strain of Newman, or Carlyle, or Goethe. Mr. Lowell has well described the apparition of Emerson to your

young generation here, in that distant time of which I am speaking, and of his workings upon them. He was your Newman, your man of soul and genius visible to you in the flesh, speaking to your bodily ears, a present object for your heart and imagination. That is surely the most potent of all influences! nothing can come up to it. To us at Oxford Emerson was but a voice speaking from three thousand miles away. But so well he spoke, that from that time forth Boston Bay and Concord were names invested to my ear with a sentiment akin to that which invests for me the names of Oxford and of Weimar; and snatches of Emerson's strain fixed themselves in my mind as imperishably as any of the eloquent words which I have been just now quoting. 'Then dies the man in you; then once more perish the buds of art, poetry, and science, as they have died already in a thousand thousand men.' 'What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand.' 'Trust thyself! every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the Divine Providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age; betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest spirit the same transcendent destiny; and not pinched in a corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but redeemers and benefactors, pious aspirants to be noble clay plastic under the Almighty effort, let us advance and advance on chaos and the dark!' These lofty sentences of Emerson, and a hundred others of like strain, I never have lost out of my memory; I never can lose them.

At last I find myself in Emerson's own country, and looking upon Boston Bay. Naturally I revert to the friend of my youth. It is not always pleasant to ask oneself questions about the friends of one's youth; they cannot always well support it. Carlyle, for instance, in my judgment, cannot well support such a return upon him. Yet we should make the return; we should part with our illusions, we should know

the truth. When I come to this country, where Emerson now counts for so much, and where such high claims are made for him, I pull myself together, and ask myself what the truth about this object of my youthful admiration really is. Improper elements often come into our estimate of men. We have lately seen a German critic make Goethe the greatest of all poets, because Germany is now the greatest of military powers, and wants a poet to match. Then, too, America is a young country; and young countries, like young persons, are apt sometimes to evince in their literary judgments a want of scale and measure. I set myself, therefore, resolutely to come at a real estimate of Emerson, and with a leaning even to strictness rather than to indulgence. That is the safer course. Time has no indulgence; any veils of illusion which we may have left around an object because we loved it, Time is sure to strip away.

I was reading the other day a notice of Emerson by a serious and interesting American critic. Fifty or sixty passages in Emerson's poems, says this critic,—who had doubtless himself been nourished on Emerson's writings, and held them justly dear,—fifty or sixty passages from Emerson's poems have already entered into English speech as matter of familiar and universally current quotation. Here is a specimen of that personal sort of estimate which, for my part, even in speaking of authors dear to me, I would try to avoid. What is the kind of phrase of which we may fairly say that it has entered into English speech as matter of familiar quotation? Such a phrase, surely, as the 'Patience on a monument' of Shakespeare; as the 'Darkness visible' of Milton; as the 'Where ignorance is bliss' of Gray. Of not one single passage in Emerson's poetry can it be truly said that it has become a familiar quotation like phrases of this kind. It is not enough that it should be familiar to his admirers, familiar in New England, familiar even throughout the United States; it must be familiar to all readers and lovers of English poetry. Of not more than one or two passages in Emerson's poetry can it, I think, be truly said, that they stand ever-present in the memory of even many lovers of English poetry. A great number

of passages from his poetry are no doubt perfectly familiar to the mind and lips of the critic whom I have mentioned, and perhaps of a wide circle of American readers. But this is a very different thing from being matter of universal quotation, like the phrases of the legitimate poets.

And, in truth, one of the legitimate poets, Emerson, in my opinion, is not. His poetry is interesting, it makes one think; but it is not the poetry of one of the born poets. I say it of him with reluctance, although I am sure that he would have said it of himself; but I say it with reluctance, because I dislike giving pain to his admirers, and because all my own wish, too, is to say of him what is favourable. But I regard myself, not as speaking to please Emerson's admirers, not as speaking to please myself; but rather, I repeat, as communing with Time and Nature concerning the productions of this beautiful and rare spirit, and as resigning what of him is by their unalterable decree touched with caducity, in order the better to mark and secure that in him which is immortal.

Milton says that poetry ought to be simple, sensuous, impassioned. Well, Emerson's poetry is seldom either simple, or sensuous, or impassioned. In general it lacks directness; it lacks concreteness; it lacks energy. His grammar is often embarrassed; in particular, the want of clearly-marked distinction between the subject and the object of his sentence is a frequent cause of obscurity in him. A poem which shall be a plain, forcible, inevitable whole he hardly ever produces. Such good work as the noble lines graven on the Concord Monument is the exception with him; such ineffective work as the 'Fourth of July Ode' or the 'Boston Hymn' is the rule. Even passages and single lines of thorough plainness and commanding force are rare in his poetry. They exist, of course; but when we meet with them they give us a slight shock of surprise, so little has Emerson accustomed us to them. Let me have the pleasure of quoting one or two of these exceptional passages:—

'So nigh is grandeur to our dust,

So near is God to man,

When Duty whispers low, Thou must,

The youth replies, I can.’

Or again this:—

‘Though love repine and reason chafe,

There came a voice without reply:

“’Tis man’s perdition to be safe,

When for the truth he ought to die.”’

Excellent! but how seldom do we get from him a strain blown so clearly and firmly! Take another passage where his strain has not only clearness, it has also grace and beauty:—

‘And ever, when the happy child

In May beholds the blooming wild,

And hears in heaven the bluebird sing,

“Onward,” he cries, “your baskets bring!

In the next field is air more mild,

And in yon hazy west is Eden’s balmier spring.”’

In the style and cadence here there is a reminiscence, I think, of Gray; at any rate the pureness, grace, and beauty of these lines are worthy even of Gray. But Gray holds his high rank as a poet, not merely by the beauty and grace of passages in his poems; not merely by a diction generally pure in an age of impure diction: he holds it, above all, by the power and skill with which the evolution of his poems is conducted. Here is his grand superiority to Collins, whose diction in his best poem, the ‘Ode to Evening,’ is purer than Gray’s; but then the ‘Ode to Evening’ is like a river which loses itself in the sand, whereas Gray’s best poems have an evolution sure and

satisfying. Emerson's 'Mayday,' from which I just now quoted, has no real evolution at all; it is a series of observations. And, in general, his poems have no evolution. Take, for example, his 'Titmouse.' Here he has an excellent subject; and his observation of Nature, moreover, is always marvellously close and fine. But compare what he makes of his meeting with his titmouse with what Cowper or Burns makes of the like kind of incident! One never quite arrives at learning what the titmouse actually did for him at all, though one feels a strong interest and desire to learn it; but one is reduced to guessing, and cannot be quite sure that after all one has guessed right. He is not plain and concrete enough,—in other words, not poet enough,—to be able to tell us. And a failure of this kind goes through almost all his verse, keeps him amid symbolism and allusion and the fringes of things, and, in spite of his spiritual power, deeply impairs his poetic value. Through the inestimable virtue of concreteness, a simple poem like 'The Bridge' of Longfellow, or the 'School Days' of Mr. Whittier, is of more poetic worth, perhaps, than all the verse of Emerson.

I do not, then, place Emerson among the great poets. But I go further, and say that I do not place him among the great writers, the great men of letters. Who are the great men of letters? They are men like Cicero, Plato, Bacon, Pascal, Swift, Voltaire,—writers with, in the first place, a genius and instinct for style; writers whose prose is by a kind of native necessity true and sound. Now the style of Emerson, like the style of his transcendentalist friends and of the 'Dial' so continually,—the style of Emerson is capable of falling into a strain like this, which I take from the beginning of his 'Essay on Love': 'Every soul is a celestial being to every other soul. The heart has its sabbaths and jubilees, in which the world appears as a hymeneal feast, and all natural sounds and the circle of the seasons are erotic odes and dances.' Emerson altered this sentence in the later editions. Like Wordsworth, he was in later life fond of altering; and in general his later alterations, like those of Wordsworth, are not improvements. He softened the passage in

question, however, though without really mending it. I quote it in its original and strongly-marked form. Arthur Stanley used to relate that about the year 1840, being in conversation with some Americans in quarantine at Malta, and thinking to please them, he declared his warm admiration for Emerson's 'Essays,' then recently published. However, the Americans shook their heads, and told him that for home taste Emerson was decidedly too greeny. We will hope, for their sakes, that the sort of thing they had in their heads was such writing as I have just quoted. Unsound it is, indeed, and in a style almost impossible to a born man of letters.

It is a curious thing, that quality of style which marks the great writer, the born man of letters. It resides in the whole tissue of his work, and of his work regarded as a composition for literary purposes. Brilliant and powerful passages in a man's writings do not prove his possession of it; it lies in their whole tissue. Emerson has passages of noble and pathetic eloquence, such as those which I quoted at the beginning; he has passages of shrewd and felicitous wit; he has crisp epigram; he has passages of exquisitely touched observation of nature. Yet he is not a great writer; his style has not the requisite wholeness of good tissue. Even Carlyle is not, in my judgment, a great writer. He has surpassingly powerful qualities of expression, far more powerful than Emerson's, and reminding one of the gifts of expression of the great poets,—of even Shakespeare himself. What Emerson so admirably says of Carlyle's 'devouring eyes and pourtraying hand,' 'those thirsty eyes, those portrait-eating, portrait-painting eyes of thine, those fatal perceptions,' is thoroughly true. What a description is Carlyle's of the first publisher of Sartor Resartus, 'to whom the idea of a new edition of Sartor is frightful, or rather ludicrous, unimaginable'; of this poor Fraser, in whose 'wonderful world of Tory pamphleteers, conservative Younger-brothers, Regent Street loungers, Crockford gamblers, Irish Jesuits, drunken reporters, and miscellaneous unclean persons (whom nitre and much soap will not wash clean), not a soul has expressed the smallest wish that way!' What a portrait, again, of the well-beloved John Sterling!

‘One, and the best, of a small class extant here, who, nigh drowning in a black wreck of Infidelity (lighted up by some glare of Radicalism only, now growing dim too), and about to perish, saved themselves into a Coleridgian Shovel-Hattedness.’ What touches in the invitation of Emerson to London! ‘You shall see blockheads by the million; Pickwick himself shall be visible,—innocent young Dickens, reserved for a questionable fate. The great Wordsworth shall talk till you yourself pronounce him to be a bore. Southey’s complexion is still healthy mahogany brown, with a fleece of white hair, and eyes that seem running at full gallop. Leigh Hunt, man of genius in the shape of a cockney, is my near neighbour, with good humour and no common-sense; old Rogers with his pale head, white, bare, and cold as snow, with those large blue eyes, cruel, sorrowful, and that sardonic shelf chin.’ How inimitable it all is! And finally, for one must not go on for ever, this version of a London Sunday, with the public-houses closed during the hours of divine service! ‘It is silent Sunday; the populace not yet admitted to their beer-shops, till the respectabilities conclude their rubric mummeries,—a much more audacious feat than beer.’ Yet even Carlyle is not, in my judgment, to be called a great writer; one cannot think of ranking him with men like Cicero and Plato and Swift and Voltaire. Emerson freely promises to Carlyle immortality for his histories. They will not have it. Why? Because the materials furnished to him by that devouring eye of his, and that pourtraying hand, were not wrought in and subdued by him to what his work, regarded as a composition for literary purposes, required. Occuring in conversation, breaking out in familiar correspondence, they are magnificent, inimitable; nothing more is required of them; thus thrown out anyhow, they serve their turn and fulfil their function. And, therefore, I should not wonder if really Carlyle lived, in the long run, by such an invaluable record as that correspondence between him and Emerson, of which we owe the publication to Mr. Charles Norton,—by this and not by his works, as Johnson lives in Boswell, not by his works. For Carlyle’s sallies, as the staple of a literary work, become wearisome; and as time more and more applies to

Carlyle's works its stringent test, this will be felt more and more. Shakespeare, Molière, Swift,—they, too, had, like Carlyle, the devouring eye and the pourtraying hand. But they are great literary masters, they are supreme writers, because they knew how to work into a literary composition their materials, and to subdue them to the purposes of literary effect. Carlyle is too wilful for this, too turbid, too vehement.

You will think I deal in nothing but negatives. I have been saying that Emerson is not one of the great poets, the great writers. He has not their quality of style. He is, however, the propounder of a philosophy. The Platonic dialogues afford us the example of exquisite literary form and treatment given to philosophical ideas. Plato is at once a great literary man and a great philosopher.

If we speak carefully, we cannot call Aristotle or Spinoza or Kant great literary men, or their productions great literary works. But their work is arranged with such constructive power that they build a philosophy, and are justly called great philosophical writers. Emerson cannot, I think, be called with justice a great philosophical writer. He cannot build; his arrangement of philosophical ideas has no progress in it, no evolution; he does not construct a philosophy. Emerson himself knew the defects of his method, or rather want of method, very well; indeed, he and Carlyle criticise themselves and one another in a way which leaves little for any one else to do in the way of formulating their defects. Carlyle formulates perfectly the defects of his friend's poetic and literary production when he says of the 'Dial': 'For me it is too ethereal, speculative, theoretic; I will have all things condense themselves, take shape and body, if they are to have my sympathy.' And, speaking of Emerson's orations, he says: 'I long to see some concrete Thing, some Event, Man's Life, American Forest, or piece of Creation, which this Emerson loves and wonders at, well Emersonised,—depictured by Emerson, filled with the life of Emerson, and cast forth from him, then to live by itself. If these orations balk me of this, how profitable soever they may be for others, I will not love them.' Emerson himself formulates perfectly the defect of his own philosophical productions when

he speaks of his ‘formidable tendency to the lapidary style. I build my house of boulders.’ ‘Here I sit and read and write,’ he says again, ‘with very little system, and, as far as regards composition, with the most fragmentary result; paragraphs incompressible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle.’ Nothing can be truer; and the work of a Spinoza or Kant, of the men who stand as great philosophical writers, does not proceed in this wise.

Some people will tell you that Emerson’s poetry, indeed, is too abstract, and his philosophy too vague, but that his best work is his English Traits. The English Traits are beyond question very pleasant reading. It is easy to praise them, easy to commend the author of them. But I insist on always trying Emerson’s work by the highest standards. I esteem him too much to try his work by any other. Tried by the highest standards, and compared with the work of the excellent markers and recorders of the traits of human life,—of writers like Montaigne, La Bruyère, Addison,—the English Traits will not stand the comparison. Emerson’s observation has not the disinterested quality of the observation of these masters. It is the observation of a man systematically benevolent, as Hawthorne’s observation in Our Old Home is the work of a man chagrined. Hawthorne’s literary talent is of the first order. His subjects are generally not to me subjects of the highest interest; but his literary talent is of the first order, the finest, I think, which America has yet produced,—finer, by much, than Emerson’s. Yet Our Old Home is not a masterpiece any more than English Traits. In neither of them is the observer disinterested enough. The author’s attitude in each of these cases can easily be understood and defended. Hawthorne was a sensitive man, so situated in England that he was perpetually in contact with the British Philistine; and the British Philistine is a trying personage. Emerson’s systematic benevolence comes from what he himself calls somewhere his ‘persistent optimism’; and his persistent optimism is the root of his greatness and the source of his charm. But still let us keep our literary conscience true, and judge every kind of literary work by the laws really proper to it. The kind

of work attempted in the English Traits and in Our Old Home is work which cannot be done perfectly with a bias such as that given by Emerson's optimism or by Hawthorne's chagrin. Consequently, neither English Traits nor Our Old Home is a work of perfection in its kind.

Not with the Miltons and Grays, not with the Platos and Spinozas, not with the Swifts and Voltaires, not with the Montaignes and Addisons, can we rank Emerson. His work of various kinds, when one compares it with the work done in a corresponding kind by these masters, fails to stand the comparison. No man could see this clearer than Emerson himself. It is hard not to feel despondency when we contemplate our failures and shortcomings: and Emerson, the least self-flattering and the most modest of men, saw so plainly what was lacking to him that he had his moments of despondency. 'Alas, my friend,' he writes in reply to Carlyle, who had exhorted him to creative work,—'Alas, my friend, I can do no such gay thing as you say. I do not belong to the poets, but only to a low department of literature,—the reporters; suburban men.' He deprecated his friend's praise; praise 'generous to a fault,' he calls it; praise 'generous to the shaming of me,—cold, fastidious, ebbing person that I am. Already in a former letter you had said too much good of my poor little arid book, which is as sand to my eyes. I can only say that I heartily wish the book were better; and I must try and deserve so much favour from the kind gods by a bolder and truer living in the months to come,—such as may perchance one day release and invigorate this cramp hand of mine. When I see how much work is to be done; what room for a poet, for any spiritualist, in this great, intelligent, sensual, and avaricious America,—I lament my fumbling fingers and stammering tongue.' Again, as late as 1870, he writes to Carlyle: 'There is no example of constancy like yours, and it always stings my stupor into temporary recovery and wonderful resolution to accept the noble challenge. But "the strong hours conquer us;" and I am the victim of miscellany,—miscellany of designs, vast debility, and procrastination.' The forlorn note belonging to the phrase, 'vast debility,' recalls that saddest and most

discouraged of writers, the author of Obermann, Senancour, with whom Emerson has in truth a certain kinship. He has, in common with Senancour, his pureness, his passion for nature, his single eye; and here we find him confessing, like Senancour, a sense in himself of sterility and impotence.

And now I think I have cleared the ground. I have given up to envious Time as much of Emerson as Time can fairly expect ever to obtain. We have not in Emerson a great poet, a great writer, a great philosophy-maker. His relation to us is not that of one of those personages; yet it is a relation of, I think, even superior importance. His relation to us is more like that of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius is not a great writer, a great philosophy-maker; he is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. Emerson is the same. He is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. All the points in thinking which are necessary for this purpose he takes; but he does not combine them into a system, or present them as a regular philosophy. Combined in a system by a man with the requisite talent for this kind of thing, they would be less useful than as Emerson gives them to us; and the man with the talent so to systematise them would be less impressive than Emerson. They do very well as they now stand;—like ‘boulders,’ as he says;—in ‘paragraphs incompressible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle.’ In such sentences his main points recur again and again, and become fixed in the memory.

We all know them. First and foremost, character. Character is everything. ‘That which all things tend to educe,—which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver,—is character.’ Character and self-reliance. ‘Trust thyself! every heart vibrates to that iron string.’ And yet we have our being in a not ourselves. ‘There is a power above and behind us, and we are the channels of its communications.’ But our lives must be pitched higher. ‘Life must be lived on a higher plane; we must go up to a higher platform, to which we are always invited to ascend; there the whole scene changes.’ The good we need is for ever close to us, though we attain it not. ‘On the brink of the waters of life and truth, we are

miserably dying.' This good is close to us, moreover, in our daily life, and in the familiar, homely places. 'The unremitting retention of simple and high sentiments in obscure duties,—that is the maxim for us. Let us be poised and wise, and our own to-day. Let us treat the men and women well,—treat them as if they were real; perhaps they are. Men live in their fancy, like drunkards whose hands are too soft and tremulous for successful labour. I settle myself ever firmer in the creed, that we should not postpone and refer and wish, but do broad justice where we are, by whomsoever we deal with; accepting our actual companions and circumstances, however humble or odious, as the mystic officials to whom the universe has delegated its whole pleasure for us. Massachusetts, Connecticut River, and Boston Bay, you think paltry places, and the ear loves names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; and if we will tarry a little we may come to learn that here is best. See to it only that thyself is here.' Furthermore, the good is close to us all. 'I resist the scepticism of our education and of our educated men. I do not believe that the differences of opinion and character in men are organic. I do not recognise, besides the class of the good and the wise, a permanent class of sceptics, or a class of conservatives, or of malignants, or of materialists. I do not believe in the classes. Every man has a call of the power to do something unique.' Exclusiveness is deadly. 'The exclusive in social life does not see that he excludes himself from enjoyment in the attempt to appropriate it. The exclusionist in religion does not see that he shuts the door of heaven on himself in striving to shut out others. Treat men as pawns and ninepins, and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heart you shall lose your own: The selfish man suffers more from his selfishness than he from whom that selfishness withholds some important benefit.' A sound nature will be inclined to refuse ease and self-indulgence. 'To live with some rigour of temperance, or some extreme of generosity, seems to be an asceticism which common good-nature would appoint to those who are at ease and in plenty, in sign that they feel a brotherhood with the great multitude of suffering

men.' Compensation, finally, is the great law of life; it is everywhere, it is sure, and there is no escape from it. This is that 'law alive and beautiful, which works over our heads and under our feet. Pitiless, it avails itself of our success when we obey it, and of our ruin when we contravene it. We are all secret believers in it. It rewards actions after their nature. The reward of a thing well done is to have done it. The thief steals from himself, the swindler swindles himself. You must pay at last your own debt.'

This is tonic indeed! And let no one object that it is too general; that more practical, positive direction is what we want; that Emerson's optimism, self-reliance, and indifference to favourable conditions for our life and growth have in them something of danger. 'Trust thyself;' 'what attracts my attention shall have it;' 'though thou shouldst walk the world over thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble;' 'what we call vulgar society is that society whose poetry is not yet written, but which you shall presently make as enviable and renowned as any.' With maxims like these, we surely, it may be said, run some risk of being made too well satisfied with our own actual self and state, however crude and imperfect they may be. 'Trust thyself?' It may be said that the common American or Englishman is more than enough disposed already to trust himself. I often reply, when our sectarians are praised for following conscience: Our people are very good in following their conscience; where they are not so good is in ascertaining whether their conscience tells them right. 'What attracts my attention shall have it?' Well, that is our people's plea when they run after the Salvation Army, and desire Messrs. Moody and Sankey. 'Thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble?' But think of the turn of the good people of our race for producing a life of hideousness and immense ennui; think of that specimen of your own New England life which Mr. Howells gives us in one of his charming stories which I was reading lately; think of the life of that ragged New England farm in the Lady of the Aroostook; think of Deacon Blood, and Aunt Maria, and the straight-backed chairs

with black horse-hair seats, and Ezra Perkins with perfect self-reliance depositing his travellers in the snow! I can truly say that in the little which I have seen of the life of New England, I am more struck with what has been achieved than with the crudeness and failure. But no doubt there is still a great deal of crudeness also. Your own novelists say there is, and I suppose they say true. In the New England, as in the Old, our people have to learn, I suppose, not that their modes of life are beautiful and excellent already; they have rather to learn that they must transform them.

To adopt this line of objection to Emerson's deliverances would, however, be unjust. In the first place, Emerson's points are in themselves true, if understood in a certain high sense; they are true and fruitful. And the right work to be done, at the hour when he appeared, was to affirm them generally and absolutely. Only thus could he break through the hard and fast barrier of narrow, fixed ideas, which he found confronting him, and win an entrance for new ideas. Had he attempted developments which may now strike us as expedient, he would have excited fierce antagonism, and probably effected little or nothing. The time might come for doing other work later, but the work which Emerson did was the right work to be done then.

In the second place, strong as was Emerson's optimism, and unconquerable as was his belief in a good result to emerge from all which he saw going on around him, no misanthropical satirist ever saw shortcomings and absurdities more clearly than he did, or exposed them more courageously. When he sees 'the meanness,' as he calls it, 'of American politics,' he congratulates Washington on being 'long already happily dead,' on being 'wrapt in his shroud and for ever safe.' With how firm a touch he delineates the faults of your two great political parties of forty years ago! The Democrats, he says, 'have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it. The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless; it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends, but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is

timid, and merely defensive of property. It vindicates no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no generous policy. From neither party, when in power, has the world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation.' Then with what subtle though kindly irony he follows the gradual withdrawal in New England, in the last half century, of tender consciences from the social organisations,—the bent for experiments such as that of Brook Farm and the like,—follows it in all its 'dissidence of dissent and Protestantism of the Protestant religion!' He even loves to rally the New Englander on his philanthropical activity, and to find his beneficence and its institutions a bore! 'Your miscellaneous popular charities, the education at college of fools, the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which many of these now stand, alms to sots, and the thousand-fold relief societies,—though I confess with shame that I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, yet it is a wicked dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold.' 'Our Sunday schools and churches and pauper societies are yokes to the neck. We pain ourselves to please nobody. There are natural ways of arriving at the same ends at which these aim, but do not arrive.' 'Nature does not like our benevolence or our learning much better than she likes our frauds and wars. When we come out of the caucus, or the bank, or the Abolition convention, or the Temperance meeting, or the Transcendental club, into the fields and woods, she says to us: "So hot, my little sir?"'

Yes, truly, his insight is admirable; his truth is precious. Yet the secret of his effect is not even in these; it is in his temper. It is in the hopeful, serene, beautiful temper wherewith these, in Emerson, are indissolubly joined; in which they work, and have their being. He says himself: 'We judge of a man's wisdom by his hope, knowing that the perception of the inexhaustibleness of nature is an immortal youth.' If this be so, how wise is Emerson! for never had man such a sense of the inexhaustibleness of nature, and such hope. It was the ground of his being; it never failed him. Even when he is sadly avowing the imperfection of his literary power

and resources, lamenting his fumbling fingers and stammering tongue, he adds: ‘Yet, as I tell you, I am very easy in my mind and never dream of suicide. My whole philosophy, which is very real, teaches acquiescence and optimism. Sure I am that the right word will be spoken, though I cut out my tongue.’ In his old age, with friends dying and life failing, his tone of cheerful, forward-looking hope is still the same. ‘A multitude of young men are growing up here of high promise, and I compare gladly the social poverty of my youth with the power on which these draw.’ His abiding word for us, the word by which being dead he yet speaks to us, is this: ‘That which befits us, embosomed in beauty and wonder as we are, is cheerfulness and courage, and the endeavour to realise our aspirations. Shall not the heart, which has received so much, trust the Power by which it lives?’

One can scarcely overrate the importance of thus holding fast to happiness and hope. It gives to Emerson’s work an invaluable virtue. As Wordsworth’s poetry is, in my judgment, the most important work done in verse, in our language, during the present century, so Emerson’s Essays are, I think, the most important work done in prose. His work is more important than Carlyle’s. Let us be just to Carlyle, provoking though he often is. Not only has he that genius of his which makes Emerson say truly of his letters, that ‘they savour always of eternity.’ More than this may be said of him. The scope and upshot of his teaching are true; ‘his guiding genius,’ to quote Emerson again, is really ‘his moral sense, his perception of the sole importance of truth and justice.’ But consider Carlyle’s temper, as we have been considering Emerson’s! take his own account of it! ‘Perhaps London is the proper place for me after all, seeing all places are improper: who knows? Meanwhile, I lead a most dyspeptic, solitary, self-shrouded life; consuming, if possible in silence, my considerable daily allotment of pain; glad when any strength is left in me for writing, which is the only use I can see in myself,—too rare a case of late. The ground of my existence is black as death; too black, when all void too; but at times there paint themselves on it pictures of gold, and rainbow, and lightning; all the

brighter for the black ground, I suppose. Withal, I am very much of a fool.'—No, not a fool, but turbid and morbid, wilful and perverse. 'We judge of a man's wisdom by his hope.'

Carlyle's perverse attitude towards happiness cuts him off from hope. He fiercely attacks the desire for happiness; his grand point in Sartor, his secret in which the soul may find rest, is that one shall cease to desire happiness, that one should learn to say to oneself: 'What if thou wert born and predestined not to be happy, but to be unhappy!' He is wrong; Saint Augustine is the better philosopher, who says: 'Act we must in pursuance of what gives us most delight.' Epictetus and Augustine can be severe moralists enough; but both of them know and frankly say that the desire for happiness is the root and ground of man's being. Tell him and show him that he places his happiness wrong, that he seeks for delight where delight will never be really found; then you illumine and further him. But you only confuse him by telling him to cease to desire happiness; and you will not tell him this unless you are already confused yourself.

Carlyle preached the dignity of labour, the necessity of righteousness, the love of veracity, the hatred of shams. He is said by many people to be a great teacher, a great helper for us, because he does so. But what is the due and eternal result of labour, righteousness, veracity?—Happiness. And how are we drawn to them by one who, instead of making us feel that with them is happiness, tells us that perhaps we were predestined not to be happy but to be unhappy?

You will find, in especial, many earnest preachers of our popular religion to be fervent in their praise and admiration of Carlyle. His insistence on labour, righteousness, and veracity, pleases them; his contempt for happiness pleases them too. I read the other day a tract against smoking, although I do not happen to be a smoker myself. 'Smoking,' said the tract, 'is liked because it gives agreeable sensations. Now it is a positive objection to a thing that it gives agreeable sensations.

An earnest man will expressly avoid what gives agreeable sensations.' Shortly afterwards I was inspecting a school, and I found the children reading a piece of poetry on the common theme that we are here to-day and gone to-morrow. I shall soon be gone, the speaker in this poem was made to say,—

'And I shall be glad to go,

For the world at best is a dreary place,

And my life is getting low.'

How usual a language of popular religion that is, on our side of the Atlantic at any rate! But then our popular religion, in disparaging happiness here below, knows very well what it is after. It has its eye on a happiness in a future life above the clouds, in the New Jerusalem, to be won by disliking and rejecting happiness here on earth. And so long as this ideal stands fast, it is very well. But for very many it now stands fast no longer; for Carlyle, at any rate, it had failed and vanished. Happiness in labour, righteousness, and veracity,—in the life of the spirit,—here was a gospel still for Carlyle to preach, and to help others by preaching. But he baffled them and himself by preferring the paradox that we are not born for happiness at all.

Happiness in labour, righteousness, and veracity; in all the life of the spirit; happiness and eternal hope;—that was Emerson's gospel. I hear it said that Emerson was too sanguine; that the actual generation in America is not turning out so well as he expected. Very likely he was too sanguine as to the near future; in this country it is difficult not to be too sanguine. Very possibly the present generation may prove unworthy of his high hopes; even several generations succeeding this may prove unworthy of them. But by his conviction that in the life of the spirit is happiness, and by his hope that this life of the spirit will come more and more to be sanely understood, and to prevail, and to work for happiness,—by this conviction and hope Emerson was great, and he will surely prove in the end to have been right in them. In this country it is difficult, as I said, not to be sanguine. Very many of your writers

are over-sanguine, and on the wrong grounds. But you have two men who in what they have written show their sanguineness in a line where courage and hope are just, where they are also infinitely important, but where they are not easy. The two men are Franklin and Emerson.[5] These two are, I think, the most distinctively and honourably American of your writers; they are the most original and the most valuable. Wise men everywhere know that we must keep up our courage and hope; they know that hope is, as Wordsworth well says,—

‘The paramount duty which Heaven lays,

For its own honour, on man’s suffering heart.’

But the very word duty points to an effort and a struggle to maintain our hope unbroken. Franklin and Emerson maintained theirs with a convincing ease, an inspiring joy. Franklin’s confidence in the happiness with which industry, honesty, and economy will crown the life of this work-day world, is such that he runs over with felicity. With a like felicity does Emerson run over, when he contemplates the happiness eternally attached to the true life in the spirit. You cannot prize him too much, nor heed him too diligently. He has lessons for both the branches of our race. I figure him to my mind as visible upon earth still, as still standing here by Boston Bay, or at his own Concord, in his habit as he lived, but of heightened stature and shining feature, with one hand stretched out towards the East, to our laden and labouring England; the other towards the ever-growing West, to his own dearly-loved America,—‘great, intelligent, sensual, avaricious America.’ To us he shows for guidance his lucid freedom, his cheerfulness and hope; to you his dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation.

THE END.

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[Footnotes]

[1]

Philippians, iv, 8.

[2]

Ὅσα σεμνά.

[3]

Ecclesiastes, viii. 17.

[4]

Iliad, xxiv. 49.

[5]

I found with pleasure that this conjunction of Emerson's name with Franklin's had already occurred to an accomplished writer and delightful man, a friend of Emerson, left almost the sole survivor, alas! of the famous literary generation of Boston,—Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Dr. Holmes has kindly allowed me to print here the ingenious and interesting lines, hitherto unpublished, in which he speaks of Emerson thus:—

'Where in the realm of thought, whose air is song,

Does he, the Buddha of the West, belong?

He seems a wingéd Franklin, sweetly wise,

Born to unlock the secret of the skies;

And which the nobler calling—if 'tis fair

Terrestrial with celestial to compare—

To guide the storm-cloud's elemental flame,

Or walk the chambers whence the lightning came

Amidst the sources of its subtile fire,

And steal their effluence for his lips and lyre?'

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