VARIOUS

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Содержание

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HAPPIEST DAYS

Long ago, when you were a little boy or a little girl,—perhaps not so very long ago, either,—were you never interrupted in your play by being called in to have your face washed, your hair combed, and your soiled apron exchanged for a clean one, preparatory to an introduction to Mrs. Smith, or Dr. Jones, or Aunt Judkins, your mother's early friend? And after being ushered in to that august presence, and made to face a battery of questions which were either above or below your capacity, and which you consequently despised as trash or resented as insult, did you not, as you were gleefully vanishing, hear a soft sigh breathed out upon the air,—"Dear child, he is seeing his happiest days"? In the concrete, it was Mrs. Smith or Dr. Jones speaking of you. But going back to general principles, it was

Commonplacedom expressing its opinion of childhood.

There never was a greater piece of absurdity in the world. I thought so when I was a child, and now I know it; and I desire here to brand it as at once a platitude and a falsehood. How ever the idea gained currency that childhood is the happiest period of life, I cannot conceive. How ever, once started, it kept afloat is equally incomprehensible. I should have supposed that the experience of every sane person would have given the lie to it. I should have supposed that every soul, as it burst into flower, would have hurled off the vile imputation. I can only account for it by recurring to Lady Mary Wortley Montague's statistics, and concluding that the fools *are* three out of four in every person's acquaintance.

I for one lift up my voice emphatically against the assertion, and do affirm that I think childhood is the most mean and miserable portion of human life, and I am thankful to be well out of it. I look upon it as no better than a mitigated form of slavery. There is not a child in the land that can call his soul, or his body, or his jacket his own. A little soft lump of clay he comes into the world, and is moulded into a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor long before he can put in a word about the matter. He has no voice as to his education or his training, what he shall eat, what he shall drink, or wherewithal he shall be clothed. He has to wait upon the wisdom, the whims, and often the wickedness of other people. Imagine, my six-foot friend, how you would feel to be obliged to wear your woollen mittens when

you desire to bloom out in straw-colored kids, or to be buttoned into your black waistcoat when your taste leads you to select your white, or to be forced under your Kossuth hat when you had set your heart on your black beaver: yet this is what children are perpetually called on to undergo. Their wills are just as strong as ours and their tastes are stronger, yet they have to bend the one and sacrifice the other; and they do it under pressure of necessity. Their reason is not convinced; they are forced to yield to superior power; and of all disagreeable things in the world, the most disagreeable is not to have your own way. When you are grown up, you wear a print frock because you cannot afford a silk, or because a silk would be out of place,—you wear India-rubber overshoes because your polished patent-leather would be ruined by the mud; and your self-denial is amply compensated by the reflection of superior fitness or economy. But a child has no such reflection to console him. He puts on his battered, gray old shoes because you make him; he hangs up his new trousers and goes back into his detestable girl's-frock because he will be punished if he does not, and it is intolerable.

It is of no use to say that this is their discipline and is all necessary to their welfare. I maintain that that is a horrible condition of life in which such degrading *surveillance* is necessary. You may affirm that an absolute despotism is the only government fit for Dahomey, and I may not disallow it; but when you go on and say that Dahomey is the happiest country in the world, why, I refer you to Dogberry. Now the parents

of a child are, from the nature of the case, absolute despots. They may be wise, and gentle, and doting despots, and the chain may be satin-smooth and golden-strong; but if it be of rusty iron, parting every now and then and letting the poor prisoner violently loose, and again suddenly caught hold of, bringing him up with a jerk, galling his tender limbs and irretrievably ruining his temper,—it is all the same; there is no help for it. And really, to look around the world and see the people that are its fathers and mothers is appalling,—the narrow-minded, prejudiced, ignorant, ill-tempered, fretful, peevish, passionate, careworn, harassed men and women. Even we grown people, independent of them and capable of self-defence, have as much as we can do to keep the peace. Where is there a city, or a town, or a village, in which are no bickerings, no jealousies, no angers, no petty or swollen spites? Then fancy yourself, instead of the neighbor and occasional visitor of these poor human beings, their children, subject to their absolute control, with no power of protest against their folly, no refuge from their injustice, but living on through thick and thin right under their guns.

"Oh!" but you say, "this is a very one-sided view. You leave out entirely the natural tenderness that comes in to temper the matter. Without that, a child's situation would of course be intolerable; but the love that is born with him makes all things smooth."

No, it does not make all things smooth. It does wonders, to be sure, but it does not make cross people pleasant, nor

violent people calm, nor fretful people easy, nor obstinate people reasonable, nor foolish people wise,—that is, it may do so spasmodically, but it does not hold them to it and keep them at it. A great deal of beautiful moonshine is written about the sanctities of home and the sacraments of marriage and birth. I do not mean to say that there is no sanctity and no sacrament. Moonshine is not nothing. It is light,—real, honest light,—just as truly as the sunshine. It is sunshine at second-hand. It illuminates, but indistinctly. It beautifies, but it does not vivify or fructify. It comes indeed from the sun, but in too roundabout a way to do the sun's work. So, if a woman is pretty nearly sanctified before she is married, wifehood and motherhood may finish the business; but there is not one man in ten thousand of the writers aforesaid who would marry a vixen, trusting to the sanctifying influences of marriage to tone her down to sweetness. A thoughtful, gentle, pure, and elevated woman, who has been accustomed to stand face to face with the eternities, will see in her child a soul. If the circumstances of her life leave her leisure and adequate repose, that soul will be to her a solemn trust, a sacred charge, for which she will give her own soul's life in pledge. But, dear me! how many such women do you suppose there are in your village? Heaven forbid that I should even appear to be depreciating woman! Do I not know too well their strength, and their virtue which is their strength? But stepping out of idyls and novels, and stepping into American kitchens, is it not true that the larger part of the mothers see in their babies, or act as if they saw,

only babies? And if there are three or four or half a dozen of them, as there generally are, so much the more do they see babies whose bodies monopolize the mother's time to the disadvantage of their souls. She loves them, and she works for them day and night; but when they are ranting and ramping and quarrelling, and torturing her over-tense nerves, she forgets the infinite, and applies herself energetically to the finite, by sending Harry with a round scolding into one corner and Susy into another, with no light thrown upon the point in dispute, no principle settled as a guide in future difficulties, and little discrimination as to the relative guilt of the offenders. But there is no court of appeal before which Harry and Susy can lay their case in these charming "happiest days."

Then there are parents who love their children like wild beasts. It is a passionate, blind, instinctive, unreasoning love. They have no more intelligent discernment, when an outside difficulty arises with respect to their children, than a she-bear. They wax furious over the most richly deserved punishment, if inflicted by a teacher's hand; they take the part of their child against legal authority; but, observe, this does not prevent them from laying their own hands heavily on their children. The same obstinate ignorance and narrowness that are exhibited without exist within also. Folly is folly, abroad or at home. A man does not play the fool out-doors and act the sage in the house. When the poor child becomes obnoxious, the same unreasoning rage falls upon him. The object of a ferocious love is the object of an equally ferocious

anger. It is only he who loves wisely that loves well.

The manner in which children's tastes are disregarded, their feelings ignored, and their instincts violated is enough to disaffect one with childhood. They are expected to kiss all flesh that asks them to do so. They are jerked up into the laps of people whom they abhor. They say, "Yes, Ma'am," under pain of bread and water for a week, when their unerring nature prompts them to hurl out, "I won't, you hideous old fright!" They are sent out of the room whenever a fascinating bit of scandal is to be rehearsed, packed off to bed just as everybody is settled down for a charming evening, bothered about their lessons when their play is but fairly under way, and hedged and hampered on every side. It is true that all this may be for their good, but, my dear dolt, what of that? So everything is for the good of grownup people; but does that make us contented? It is doubtless for our good in the long run that we lose our pocketbooks, and break our arms, and catch a fever, and have our brothers defraud a bank, and our houses burn down, and people steal our umbrellas, and borrow our books and never return them. In fact, we know that upon certain conditions all things work together for our good, but, notwithstanding, we find some things a great bore; and we may talk to our children of discipline and health by the hour together, and it will never be anything but an intolerable nuisance to them to be swooped off to bed by a dingy old nurse just as the people are beginning to come, and shining silk, and floating lace, and odorous, faint flowers are taking their ecstatic young

souls back into the golden days of the good Haroun al Raschid.

Even in this very point lies one of the miseries of childhood, that no philosophy comes to temper their sorrow. We do not know why we are troubled, but we know that there *is* some good, grand reason for it. The poor little children do not know even that. They find trouble utterly inconsequent and unreasonable. The problem of evil is to them absolutely incapable of solution. We know that beyond our horizon stretches the infinite universe. We grasp only one link of a chain whose beginning and end is eternity. So we readily adjust ourselves to mystery, and are content. We apply to everything inexplicable the test of partial view, and maintain our tranquillity. We fall into the ranks, and march on, acquiescent, if not jubilant. We hear the roar of cannon and the rattle of musketry. Stalwart forms fall by our side, and brawny arms are stricken. Our own hopes bite the dust, our own hearts bury their dead; but we know that law is inexorable. Effect must follow cause, and there is no happening without causation. So, knowing ourselves to be only one small brigade of the army of the Lord, we defile through the passes of this narrow world, bearing aloft on our banner, and writing ever on our hearts, the divine consolation, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter." This is an unspeakable tranquillizer and comforter, of which, woe is me! the little ones know nothing. They have no underlying generalities on which to stand. Law and logic and eternity are nothing to them. They only know that it rains, and they will have to wait another week before they go a-

fishing; and why couldn't it have rained Friday just as well as Saturday? and it always does rain or something when I want to go anywhere,—so, there! And the frantic flood of tears comes up from outraged justice as well as from disappointed hope. It is the flimsiest of all possible arguments to say that their sorrows are trifling, to talk about their little cares and trials. These little things are great to little men and women. A pine bucket full is just as full as a hogshead. The ant has to tug just as hard to carry a grain of corn as the Irishman does to carry a hod of bricks. You can see the bran running out of Fanny's doll's arm, or the cat putting her foot through Tom's new kite, without losing your equanimity; but their hearts feel the pang of hopeless sorrow, or foiled ambition, or bitter disappointment,—and the emotion is the thing in question, not the event that caused it.

It is an additional disadvantage to children in their troubles that they can never estimate the relations of things. They have no perspective. All things are at equal distances from the point of sight. Life presents to them neither foreground nor background, principal figure nor subordinates, but only a plain spread of canvas on which one thing stands out just as big and just as black as another. You classify your *désagréments*. This is a mere temporary annoyance, and receives but a passing thought. This is a life-long sorrow, but it is superficial; it will drop off from you at the grave, be folded away with your cerements, and leave no scar on your spirit. This thrusts its lancet into the secret place where your soul abideth, but you know that it tortures only to heal; it is

recuperative, not destructive, and you will rise from it to newness of life. But when little ones see a ripple in the current of their joy, they do not know, they cannot tell, that it is only a pebble breaking softly in upon the summer flow to toss a cool spray up into the white bosom of the lilies, or to bathe the bending violets upon the green and grateful bank. It seems to them as if the whole strong tide is thrust fiercely and violently back, and hurled into a new channel, chasmed in the rough, rent granite. It is impossible to calculate the waste of grief and pathos which this incapacity causes. Fanny's doll aforesaid is left too near the fire, and waxy tears roll down her ruddy cheeks, to the utter ruin of her pretty face and her gay frock; and anon poor Fanny breaks her little heart in moans and sobs and sore lamentation. It is Rachel weeping for her children. I went on a tramp one May morning to buy a tissue-paper wreath of flowers for a little girl to wear to a May-party, where all the other little girls were expected to appear similarly crowned. After a long and weary search, I was forced to return without it. Scarcely had I pulled the bell, when I heard the quick pattering of little feet in the entry. Never in all my life shall I lose the memory of those wistful eyes that did not so much as look up to my face, but levelled themselves to my hand, and filmed with bitter disappointment to find it empty. *I* could see that the wreath was a very insignificant matter. I knew that every little beggar in the street had garlanded herself with sixpenny roses, and I should have preferred that my darling should be content with her own silky brown hair; but my taste availed her

nothing, and the iron entered into her soul. Once a little boy, who could just stretch himself up as high as his papa's knee, climbed surreptitiously into the store-closet and upset the milk-pitcher. Terrified, he crept behind the flour-barrel, and there Nemesis found him, and he looked so charming and so guilty that two or three others were called to come and enjoy the sight. But he, unhappy midget, did not know that he looked charming; he did not know that his guilty consciousness only made him the more interesting; he did not know that he seemed an epitome of humanity, a Liliputian miniature of the great world; and his large, blue, solemn eyes were filled with remorse. As he stood there, silent, with his grave, utterly mournful face, he had robbed a bank, he had forged a note, he had committed a murder, he was guilty of treason. All the horror of conscience, all the shame of discovery, all the unavailing regret of a detected, atrocious, but not utterly hardened pirate tore his poor little innocent heart. Yet children are seeing their happiest days!

These people—the aforesaid three-fourths of our acquaintance—lay great stress on the fact that children are free from care, as if freedom from care were one of the beatitudes of Paradise; but I should like to know if freedom from care is any blessing to beings who don't know what care is. You who are careful and troubled about many things may dwell on it with great satisfaction, but children don't find it delightful by any means. On the contrary, they are never so happy as when they can get a little care, or cheat themselves into the belief that they have it. You can

make them proud for a day by sending them on some responsible errand. If you will not place care upon them, they will make it for themselves. You shall see a whole family of dolls stricken down simultaneously with malignant measles, or a restive horse evoked from a passive parlor-chair. They are a great deal more eager to assume care than you are to throw it off. To be sure, they may be quite as eager to be rid of it after a while; but while this does not prove that care is delightful, it certainly does prove that freedom from care is not.

Now I should like, Herr Narr, to have you look at the other side for a moment: for there is a positive and a negative pole. Children not only have their full share of misery, but they do not have their full share of happiness; at least, they miss many sources of happiness to which we have access. They have no consciousness. They have sensations, but no perceptions. We look longingly upon them, because they are so graceful, and simple, and natural, and frank, and artless; but though this may make us happy, it does not make them happy, because they don't know anything about it. It never occurs to them that they are graceful. No child is ever artless to himself. The only difference he sees between you and himself is that you are grown-up and he is little. Sometimes I think he does have a dim perception that when he is sick it is because he has eaten too much, and he must take medicine, and feed on heartless dry toast, while, when you are sick, you have the dyspepsia, and go to Europe. But the beauty and sweetness of children are entirely wasted on themselves, and their frankness

is a source of infinite annoyance to each other. A man enjoys *himself*. If he is handsome, or wise, or witty, he generally knows it, and takes great satisfaction in it; but a child does not. He loses half his happiness because he does not know that he is happy. If he ever has any consciousness, it is an isolated, momentary thing, with no relation to anything antecedent or subsequent. It lays hold on nothing. Not only have they no perception of themselves, but they have no perception of anything. They never recognize an exigency. They do not salute greatness. Has not the Autocrat told us of some lady who remembered a certain momentous event in our Revolutionary War, and remembered it only by and because of the regret she experienced at leaving her doll behind, when her family was forced to fly from home? What humiliation is this! What an utter failure to appreciate the issues of life! For her there was no revolution, no upheaval of world-old theories, no struggle for freedom, no great combat of the heroisms. All the passion and pain, the mortal throes of error, the glory of sacrifice, the victory of an idea, the triumph of right, the dawn of a new era,—all, all were hidden from her behind a lump of wax. And what was true of her is true of all her class. Having eyes, they see not; with their ears they do not hear. The din of arms, the waving of banners, the gleam of swords, fearful sights and great signs in the heavens, or the still, small voice that thrills when wind and fire and earthquake have swept by, may proclaim the coming of the Lord, and they stumble along, munching bread-and-butter. Out in the solitudes Nature speaks with her many-

toned voices, and they are deaf. They have a blind sensational enjoyment, such as a squirrel or a chicken may have, but they can in no wise interpret the Mighty Mother, nor even hear her words. The ocean moans his secret to unheeding ears. The agony of the underworld finds no speech in the mountain-peaks, bare and grand. The old oaks stretch out their arms in vain. Grove whispers to grove, and the robin stops to listen, but the child plays on. He bruises the happy buttercups, he crushes the quivering anemone, and his cruel fingers are stained with the harebell's purple blood. Rippling waterfall and rolling river, the majesty of sombre woods, the wild waste of wilderness, the fairy spirits of sunshine, the sparkling wine of June, and the golden languor of October, the child passes by, and a dipper of blackberries, or a pocketful of chestnuts, fills and satisfies his horrible little soul. And in face of all this people say—there are people who *dare* to say—that childhood's are the "happiest days."

I may have been peculiarly unfortunate in my surroundings, but the children of poetry and novels were very infrequent in my day. The innocent cherubs never studied in my school-house, nor played puss-in-the-corner in our back-yard. Childhood, when I was young, had rosy cheeks and bright eyes, as I remember, but it was also extremely given to quarrelling. It used frequently to "get mad." It made nothing of twitching away books and balls. It often pouted. Sometimes it would bite. If it wore a fine frock, it would strut. It told lies,—"whoppers" at that. It took the biggest half of the apple. It was not, as a general thing, magnanimous,

but "aggravating." It may have been fun to you who looked on, but it was death to us who were in the midst.

This whole way of viewing childhood, this regretful retrospect of its vanished joys, this infatuated apotheosis of doughiness and rank unfinish, this fearful looking-for of dread old age, is low, gross, material, utterly unworthy of a sublime manhood, utterly false to Christian truth. Childhood is preëminently the animal stage of existence. The baby is a beast,—a very soft, tender, caressive beast,—a beast full of promise,—a beast with the germ of an angel,—but a beast still. A week-old baby gives no more sign of intelligence, of love, or ambition, or hope, or fear, or passion, or purpose, than a week-old monkey, and is not half so frisky and funny. In fact, it is a puling, scowling, wretched, dismal, desperate-looking animal. It is only as it grows old that the beast gives way and the angel-wings bud, and all along through infancy and childhood the beast gives way and gives way and the angel-wings bud and bud; and yet we entertain our angel so unawares that we look back regretfully to the time when the angel was in abeyance and the beast raved regnant.

The only advantage which childhood has over manhood is the absence of foreboding, and this indeed is much. A large part of our suffering is anticipatory, much of which children are spared. The present happiness is clouded for them by no shadowy possibility; but for this small indemnity shall we offset the glory of our manly years? Because their narrowness cannot take in the contingencies that threaten peace, are they blessed above all

others? Does not the same narrowness cut them off from the bright certainty that underlies all doubts and fears? If ignorance is bliss, man stands at the summit of mortal misery, and the scale of happiness is a descending one. We must go down into the ocean-depths, where, for the scintillant soul, a dim, twilight instinct lights up gelatinous lives. If childhood is indeed the happiest period, then the mysterious God-breathed breath was no boon and the Deity is cruel. Immortality were well exchanged for the blank of annihilation.

There is infinite talk of the dissipated illusions of youth, the paling of bright, young dreams. Life, it is said, turns out to be different from what was pictured. The rosy-hued morning fades away into the gray and livid evening, the black and ghastly night. In especial cases it may be so, but I do not believe it is the general experience. It surely need not be. It should not be. I have found things a great deal better than I expected. I am but one; but with all my oneness, with all that there is of me, I protest against such shallow generalities. I think they are slanderous of Him who ordained life, its processes and its vicissitudes. He never made our dreams to outstrip our realizations. Every conception, brain-born, has its execution, hand-wrought. Life is not a paltry tin cup which the child drains dry, leaving the man to go weary and hopeless, quaffing at it in vain with black, parched lips. It is a fountain ever springing. It is a great deep, which the wisest has never bounded, the grandest never fathomed.

It is not only idle, but stupid, to lament the departure of

childhood's joys. It is as if something precious and valued had been forcibly torn from us, and we go sorrowing for lost treasure. But these things fall off from us naturally; we do not give them up. We are never called upon to give them up. There is no pang, no sorrow, no wrenching away of a part of our lives. The baby lies in his cradle and plays with his fingers and toes. There comes an hour when his fingers and toes no longer afford him amusement. He has attained to the dignity of a rattle, a whip, a ball. Has he suffered a loss? Has he not rather made a great gain? When he passed from his toes to his toys, did he do it mournfully? Does he look at his little feet and hands with a sigh for the joys that once loitered there, but are now forever gone? Does he not rather feel a little ashamed, when you remind him of those days? Does he not feel that it trenches somewhat on his dignity? Yet the regret of maturity for its past joys amounts to nothing less than this. Such regret is regret that we cannot lie in the sunshine and play with our toes,—that we are no longer but one remove, or but few removes, from the idiot. Away with such folly! Every season of life has its distinctive and appropriate enjoyments, which bud and blossom and ripen and fall off as the season glides on to its close, to be succeeded by others better and brighter. There is no consciousness of loss, for there is no loss. There is only a growing up, and out of, and beyond.

Life does turn out differently from what was anticipated. It is an infinitely higher and holier and nobler thing than our childhood fancied. The world that lay before us then was but

a tinsel toy to the world which our firm feet tread. We have entered into the undiscovered land. We have explored its ways of pleasantness, its depths of dole, its mountains of difficulty, its valleys of delight, and, behold! it is very good. Storms have swept fiercely, but they swept to purify. We have heard in its thunders the Voice that woke once the echoes of the Garden. Its lightnings have riven a path for the Angel of Peace.

Manhood discovers what childhood can never divine,—that the sorrows of life are superficial, and the happinesses of life structural; and this knowledge alone is enough to give a peace which passeth understanding.

Yes, the dreams of youth were dreams, but the waking was more glorious than they. They were only dreams,—fitful, flitting, fragmentary visions of the coming day. The shallow joys, the capricious pleasures, the wavering sunshine of infancy have deepened into virtues, graces, heroisms. We have the bold outlook of calm, self-confident courage, the strong fortitude of endurance, the imperial magnificence of self-denial. Our hearts expand with benevolence, our lives broaden with beneficence. We cease our perpetual skirmishing at the outposts, and go inward to the citadel. Down into the secret places of life we descend. Down among the beautiful ones in the cool and quiet shadows, on the sunny summer levels, we walk securely, and the hidden fountains are unsealed.

For those people who do nothing, for those to whom Christianity brings no revelation, for those who see no eternity

in time, no infinity in life, for those to whom opportunity is but the handmaid of selfishness, to whom smallness is informed by no greatness, for whom the lowly is never lifted up by indwelling love to the heights of divine performance,—for them, indeed, each hurrying year may well be a King of Terrors. To pass out from the flooding light of the morning, to feel all the dewiness drunk up by the thirsty, insatiate sun, to see the shadows slowly and swiftly gathering, and no starlight to break the gloom, and no home beyond the gloom for the unhoused, startled, shivering soul,—ah! this indeed is terrible. The "confusions of a wasted youth" strew thick confusions of a dreary age. Where youth garners up only such power as beauty or strength may bestow, where youth is but the revel of physical or frivolous delight, where youth aspires only with paltry and ignoble ambitions, where youth presses the wine of life into the cup of variety, there indeed Age comes, a thrice unwelcome guest. Put him off. Thrust him back. Weep for the early days: you have found no happiness to replace their joys. Mourn for the trifles that were innocent, since the trifles of your manhood are heavy with guilt. Fight to the last. Retreat inch by inch. With every step you lose. Every day robs you of treasure. Every hour passes you over to insignificance; and at the end stands Death. The bare and desolate decline drops suddenly into the hopeless, dreadful grave, the black and yawning grave, the foul and loathsome grave.

But why those who are Christians and not Pagans, who believe that death is not an eternal sleep, who wrest from life its uses

and gather from life its beauty,—why they should dally along the road, and cling frantically to the old landmarks, and shrink fearfully from the approaching future, I cannot tell. You are getting into years. True. But you are getting out again. The bowed frame, the tottering step, the unsteady hand, the failing eye, the heavy ear, the tremulous voice, they will all be yours. The grasshopper will become a burden, and desire shall fail. The fire shall be smothered in your heart, and for passion you shall have only peace. This is not pleasant. It is never pleasant to feel the inevitable passing away of priceless possessions. If this were to be the culmination of your fate, you might indeed take up the wail for your lost youth. But this is only for a moment. The infirmities of age come gradually. Gently we are led down into the valley. Slowly, and not without a soft loveliness, the shadows lengthen. At the worst these weaknesses are but the stepping-stones in the river, passing over which you shall come to immortal vigor, immortal fire, immortal beauty. All along the western sky flames and glows the auroral light of another life. The banner of victory waves right over your dungeon of defeat. By the golden gateway of the sunsetting,

"Through the dear might of Him who walked the waves,"

you shall pass into the "cloud-land, gorgeous land," whose splendor is unveiled only to the eyes of the Immortals. Would you loiter to your inheritance?

You are "getting into years." Yes, but the years are getting into you,—the ripe, rich years, the genial, mellow years, the lusty, luscious years. One by one the crudities of your youth are falling off from you,—the vanity, the egotism, the isolation, the bewilderment, the uncertainty. Nearer and nearer you are approaching yourself. You are consolidating your forces. You are becoming master of the situation. Every wrong road into which you have wandered has brought you, by the knowledge of that mistake, so much closer to the truth. You no longer draw your bow at a venture, but shoot straight at the mark. Your possibilities concentrate, and your path is cleared. On the ruins of shattered plans you find your vantage-ground. Your broken hopes, your thwarted purposes, your defeated aspirations become a staff of strength with which you mount to sublimer heights. With self-possession and self-command return the possession and the command of all things. The title-deed of creation, forfeited, is reclaimed. The king has come to his own again. Earth and sea and sky pour out their largess of love. All the past crowds down to lay its treasures at your feet. Patriotism stands once more in the breach at Thermopylae,—bears down the serried hosts of Bannockburn,—lays its calm hand in the fire, still, as if it felt the pressure of a mother's lips,—gathers to its heart the points of opposing spears, to make a way for the avenging feet behind. All that the ages have of greatness and glory your hand may pluck, and every year adds to the purple vintage. Every year comes laden with the riches of the lives that were lavished on it. Every

year brings to you softness and sweetness and strength. Every year evokes order from confusion, till all things find scope and adjustment. Every year sweeps a broader circle for your horizon, grooves a deeper channel for your experience. Through sun and shade and shower you ripen to a large and liberal life.

Yours is the deep joy, the unspoken fervor, the sacred fury of the fight. Yours is the power to redress wrong, to defend the weak, to succor the needy, to relieve the suffering, to confound the oppressor. While vigor leaps in great tidal pulses along your veins, you stand in the thickest of the fray, and broadsword and battle-axe come crashing down through helmet and visor. When force has spent itself, you withdraw from the field, your weapons pass into younger hands, you rest under your laurels, and your works do follow you. Your badges are the scars of your honorable wounds. Your life finds its vindication in the deeds which you have wrought.

The possible to-morrow has become the secure yesterday. Above the tumult and the turbulence, above the struggle and the doubt, you sit in the serene evening, awaiting your promotion.

Come, then, O dreaded years! Your brows are awful, but not with frowns. I hear your resonant tramp far off, but it is sweet as the May-maidens' song. In your grave prophetic eyes I read a golden promise. I know that you bear in your bosom the fulness of my life. Veiled monarchs of the future, shining dim and beautiful, you shall become my vassals, swift-footed to bear my messages, swift-handed to work my will. Nourished by the

nectar which you will pour in passing from your crystal cups, Death shall have no dominion over me, but I shall go on from strength to strength and from glory to glory.

* * * * *

THE PROMISE OF THE DAWN

A CHRISTMAS STORY

A winter's evening. Do you know how that comes here among the edges of the mountains that fence in the great Mississippi valley? The sea-breath in the New-England States thins the air and bleaches the sky, sucks the vitality out of Nature, I fancy, to put it into the brains of the people: but here, the earth every day in the year pulses out through hill or prairie or creek a full, untamed animal life,—shakes off the snow too early in spring, in order to put forth untimed and useless blossoms, wasteful of her infinite strength. So when this winter's evening came to a lazy town bedded in the hills that skirt Western Virginia close by the Ohio, it found that the December air, fiercely as it blew the snow-clouds about the hill-tops, was instinct with a vigorous, frosty life, and that the sky above the clouds was not wan and washed-out, as farther North, but massive, holding yet a sensuous yellow languor, the glow of unforgotten autumn days.

The very sun, quite certain of where he would soonest meet with gratitude, gave his kindliest good-night smile to the great valley of the West, asleep under the snow: very kind to-night, just as calm and loving, though he knew the most plentiful harvest which the States had yielded that year was one of murdered dead,

as he gave to the young, untainted world, that morning, long ago, when God blessed it, and saw that it was good. Because, you see, this was the eve of a more helpful, God-sent day than that, in spite of all the dead: Christmas eve. To-morrow Christ was coming, —whatever he may be to you,—Christ. The sun knew that, and glowed as cheerily, steadily, on blood as water. Why, God had the world! Let them fret, and cut each other's throats, if they would. God had them: and Christ was coming. But one fancied that the earth, not quite so secure in the infinite Love that held her, had learned to doubt, in her six thousand years of hunger, and heard the tidings with a thrill of relief. Was the Helper coming? Was it the true Helper? The very hope, even, gave meaning to the tender rose-blush on the peaks of snow, to the childish sparkle on the grim rivers. They heard and understood. The whole world answered.

One man, at least, fancied so: Adam Craig, hobbling down the frozen streets of this old-fashioned town. He thought, rubbing his bony hands together, that even the wind knew that Christmas was coming, the day that Christ was born: it went shouting boisterously through the great mountain-gorges, its very uncouth soul shaken with gladness. The city itself, he fancied, had caught a new and curious beauty: this winter its mills were stopped, and it had time to clothe the steep streets in spotless snow and icicles; its windows glittered red and cheery out into the early night: it looked just as if the old burgh had done its work, and sat down, like one of its own mill-men, to enjoy the evening, with not the

cleanest face in the world, to be sure, but with an honest, jolly old heart under all, beating rough and glad and full. That was Adam Craig's fancy: but his head was full of queer fancies under the rusty old brown wig: queer, maybe, yet as pure and childlike as the prophet John's: coming, you know, from the same kinship. Adam had kept his fancies to himself these forty years. A lame old chap, cobbling shoes day by day, fighting the wolf desperately from the door for the sake of orphan brothers and sisters, has not much time to put the meanings God and Nature have for his ignorant soul into words, has he? But the fancies had found utterance for themselves, somehow: in his hatchet-shaped face, even, with its scraggy gray whiskers; in the quick, shrewd smile; in the eyes, keen eyes, but childlike, too. In the very shop out there on the creek-bank you could trace them. Adam had cobbled there these twenty years, chewing tobacco and taking snuff, (his mother's habit, that,) but the little shop was pure: people with brains behind their eyes would know that a clean and delicate soul lived there; they might have known it in other ways too, if they chose: in his gruff, sharp talk, even, full of slang and oaths; for Adam, invoke the Devil often as he might, never took the name of Christ or a woman in vain. So his foolish fancies, as he called them, cropped out. It must be so, you know: put on what creed you may, call yourself chevalier or Sambo, the speech your soul has held with God and the Devil will tell itself in every turn of your head, and jangle of your laugh: you cannot help that.

But it was Christmas eve. Adam took that in with keener

enjoyment, in every frosty breath he drew. Different from any Christmas eve before: pulling off his scuffed cap to feel the full strength of the "nor'rer." Whew! how it blew! straight from the ice-fields of the Pole, he thought. So few people there were up there to be glad Christ was coming! But those filthy little dwarfs up there needed Him all the same: every man of them had a fiend tugging at his soul, like us, was lonely, wanted a God to help him, and—a wife to love him. Adam stopped short here a minute, something choking in his throat. "Jinny!" he said, under his breath, turning to some new hope in his heart, with as tender, awe-struck a touch as one lays upon a new-born infant. "Jinny!" praying silently with blurred eyes. I think Christ that moment came very near to the woman who was so greatly loved, and took her in His arms, and blessed her. Adam jogged on, trying to begin a whistle, but it ended in a miserable grunt: his heart was throbbing under his smoke-dried skin, silly as a woman's, so light it was, and full.

"Get along, Old Dot, and carry one!" shouted the boys, sledding down the icy sidewalk.

"Yip! you young devils, you!" stopping to give them a helping shove and a cheer; loving little children always, but never as to-day.

Surely there never was such a Christmas eve before! The frozen air glistened grayly up into heaven itself, he thought; the snow-covered streets were alive, noisy,—glad into their very cellars and shanties; the sun was sorry to go away. No wonder.

His heartiest ruby-gleam lingered about the white Virginia heights behind the town, and across the river quite glorified the pale stretch of the Ohio hills. Free and slave. (Adam was an Abolitionist.) Well, let that be. God's hand of power, like His sunlight, held the master and the slave in loving company. To-morrow was the sign.

The cobbler stopped on the little swinging foot-bridge that crosses the creek in the centre of the city. The faint saffron sunset swept from the west over the distant wooded hills, the river, the stone bridge below him, whose broad gray piers painted perpetual arches on the sluggish, sea-colored water. The smoke from one or two far-off foundries hung just above it, motionless in the gray, in tattered drifts, dyed by the sun, clear drab and violet. A still picture. A bit of Venice, poor Adam thought, who never had been fifty miles out of Wheeling. The quaint American town was his world: he brought the world into it. There were relics of old Indian forts and mounds, the old times and the new. The people, too, though the cobbler only dimly saw that, were as much the deposit and accretion of all dead ages as was the coal that lay bedded in the fencing hills. Irish, Dutch, whites, blacks, Moors, old John Bull himself: you can find the dregs of every day of the world in any mill-town of the States. Adam had a dull perception of this. Christmas eve came to all the world, coming here.

Leaning on the iron wires, while the unsteady little bridge shook under him, he watched the stunned beams of the sun

urging themselves through the smoke-clouds. He thought they were like "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" It wakened something in the man's hackneyed heart deeper even than the thought of the woman he had prayed for. A sudden vision that a great Peace held the world as did that glow of upper light: he rested in its calm. Up the street a few steps rose the walls of the old theatre, used as a prison now for captured Confederates: it was full now; he could see them looking out from behind the bars, grimy and tattered. Far to the north, on Mount Woods, the white grave-stones stood out clear in the darkening evening. His enemies, the busy streets, the very war itself, the bones and souls of the dead yonder,—the great Peace held them all. We might call them evil, but they were sent from God, and went back to God. All things were in Him.

I tell you, that when this one complete Truth got into this poor cobbler's brain,—in among its vulgar facts of North and South, and patched shoes, and to-morrow's turkey,—a great poet-insight looked out of his eyes for the minute. Saint John looked thus as he wrote that primitive natal word, "God is love." Cobblers, as well as Saint John, or the dying Herder, need great thoughts, and water from God to refresh them, believe me.

Trotting on, hardly needing his hickory stick, Adam could see the little brown shop yonder on the creek-bank. All dark: but did you ever see anything brighter than the way the light shone in the sitting-room, behind the Turkey-red curtains? Such

a taste that little woman had! Two years ago the cobbler finished his life-work, he thought: he had been mother and father both to the orphans left with him, faithful to them, choking down the hungry gnawing within for something nearer than brother or sister. Two years ago they had left him, struck out into the world for themselves.

"Then, you see," Adam used to say, "I was settlin' down into an old man; dryin' up, d' ye see? thinkin' the Lord had forgotten me, when He said to other men, 'Come, it's *your* turn now for home and lovin'.' Them young ones was dear enough, but a man has a cravin' for somethin' that's his own. But it was too late, I thought. Bitter; despisin' the Lord's eyesight; thinkin' He didn't see or care what would keep me from hell. I believed in God, like most poor men do, thinkin' Him cold-blooded, not hearin' when we cry out for work, or a wife, or child. *I* didn't cry. *I* never prayed. But look there. Do you see—*her*? Jinny?" It was to the young Baptist preacher Adam said this, when he came to make a pastoral visit to Adam's wife. "That's what He did. I'm not ashamed to pray now. I ask Him every hour to give me a tight grip on her so that I kin follow her up, and to larn me some more of His ways. That's my religious 'xperience, Sir."

The young man coughed weakly, and began questioning old Craig as to his faith in immersion. The cobbler stumped about the kitchen a minute before answering, holding himself down. His face was blood-red when he did speak, quite savage, the young speaker said afterward.

"I don't go to church, Sir. My wife does. I don't say *now*, 'Damn the churches!' or that you, an' the likes of you, an' yer Master, are all shams an' humbugs. I know Him now. He's 'live to me. So now, when I see you belie Him, an' keep men from Him with yer hundreds o' wranglin' creeds, an' that there's as much honest love of truth outside the Church as in it, I don't put yer bigotry an' foulness on Him. I on'y think there's an awful mistake: just this: that the Church thinks it is Christ's body an' us uns is outsiders, an' we think so too, an' despise Him through you with yer stingy souls an' fights an' squabblins; not seein' that the Church is jes' an hospital, where some of the sickest of God's patients is tryin' to get cured."

The preacher never went back; spoke in a church-meeting soon after of the prevalence of Tom Paine's opinions among the lower classes. Half of our sham preachers take the vague name of "Paine" to cover all of Christ's opponents,—not ranking themselves there, of course.

Adam thought he had won a victory. "Ef you'd heard me flabbergast the parson!" he used to say, with a jealous anxiety to keep Christ out of the visible Church, to shut his eyes to the true purity in it, to the fact that the Physician was in His hospital. To-night some more infinite gospel had touched him. "Good evenin', Mr. Pitts," he said, meeting the Baptist preacher. "Happy Christmas, Sir!" catching a glance of his broken boots. "Danged ef I don't send that feller a pair of shoes unbeknownst, to-morrow! He's workin' hard, an' it's not for money."

The great Peace held even its erring Church, as Adam dully saw. The streets were darkening, but full even yet of children crowding in and out of the shops. Not a child among them was more busy or important, or keener for a laugh than Adam, with his basket on his arm and his hand in his pocket clutching the money he had to lay out. The way he had worked for that! Over-jobs, you know, done at night when Jinny and the baby were asleep. It was carrying him through splendidly, though: the basket was quite piled up with bundles: as for the turkey, hadn't he been keeping that in the back-yard for weeks, stuffing it until it hardly could walk? That turkey, do you know, was the first thing Baby ever took any notice of, except the candle? Jinny was quite opposed to killing it, for that reason, and proposed they should have ducks instead; but as old Jim Farley and Granny Simpson were invited for dinner, and had been told about the turkey, matters must stay as they were.

"Poor souls, they'll not taste turkey agin this many a day, I'm thinkin', Janet. When we give an entertainment, it's allus them-like we'll ask. That's the Master's biddin', ye know."

But the pudding was yet to buy. He had a dirty scrap of paper on which Jinny had written down the amount. "The hand that woman writes!" He inspected it anxiously at every street-lamp. Did you ever see anything finer than that tongue, full of its rich brown juices and golden fat? or the white, crumbly suet? Jinny said veal: such a saving little body she was! but we know what a pudding ought to be. Now for the pippins for it, yellow they

are, holding summer yet; and a few drops of that brandy in the window, every drop shining and warm: that'll put a soul into it, and—He stopped before the confectioner's: just a moment, to collect himself; for this was the crowning point, this. There they were, in the great, gleaming window below: the rich Malaga raisins, bedded in their cases, cold to the lips, but within all glowing sweetness and passion; and the cool, tart little currants. If Jinny could see that window! and Baby. To be sure, Baby mightn't appreciate it, but—White frosted cakes, built up like fairy palaces, and mountains of golden oranges, and the light trembling through delicate candies, purple and rose-color. "Let's have a look, boys!"—and Adam crowded into the swarm outside.

Over the shops there was a high brick building, a concert-hall. You could hear the soft, dreamy air floating down from it, made vocal into a wordless love and pathos. Adam forgot the splendors of the window, listening; his heart throbbed full under his thin coat; it ached with an infinite tenderness. The poor old cobbler's eyes filled with tears: he could have taken Jesus and the great world all into his arms then. How loving and pure it was, the world! Christ's footsteps were heard. The eternal stars waited above; there was not a face in the crowd about him that was not clear and joyous. These delicate, pure women flitting past him up into the lighted hall,—it made his nerves thrill into pleasure to look at them. Jesus' world! His creatures.

He put his hand into the basket, and shyly took out a bunch of flowers he had bought,—real flowers, tender, sweet-smelling

little things. Wouldn't Jinny wonder to find them on her bureau in the morning? Their fragrance, so loving and innocent, filled the frosty air, like a breath of the purity of this Day coming. Just as he was going to put them back carefully, a hand out of the crowd caught hold of them, a dirty hand, with sores on it, and a woman thrust her face from under her blowzy bonnet into his: a young face, deadly pale, on which some awful passion had cut the lines; lips dyed scarlet with rank blood, lips, you would think, that in hell itself would utter a coarse jest.

"Give 'em to me, old cub!" she said, pulling at them. "I want 'em for a better nor you."

"Go it, Lot!" shouted the boys.

He struck her. A woman? Yes; if it had been a slimy eel standing upright, it would have been less foul a thing than this.

"Damn you!" she muttered, chafing the hurt arm. Whatever words this girl spoke came from her teeth out,—seemed to have no meaning to her.

"Let's see, Lot."

She held out her arm, and the boy, a black one, plastered it with grime from the gutter. The others yelled with delight. Adam hurried off. A pure air? God help us! He threw the flowers into the gutter with a bitter loathing. *Her* fingers would be polluted, if they touched them now. He would not tell her of this: he would cut off his hand rather than talk to her of this,—let her know such things were in the world. So pure and saintly she was, his little wife! a homely little body, but with the cleanest, most loving

heart, doing her Master's will humbly. The cobbler's own veins were full of Scotch blood, as pure indignant as any knight's of the Holy Greal. He wiped his hand, as though a leper had tainted it.

Passing down Church Street, the old bell rang out the hour. All day he had fancied its tone had gathered a lighter, more delicate sweetness with every chime. The Christ-child was coming; the world held up its hands adoring; all that was needed of men was to love Him, and rejoice. Its tone was different now: there was a brutal cry of pain in the ponderous voice that shook the air,—a voice saying something to God, unintelligible to him. He thrust out the thought of that woman with a curse: he had so wanted to have a good day, to feel how great and glad the world was, and to come up close to Christ with Jinny and the baby! He did soon forget the vileness there behind, going down the streets; they were so cozy and friendly-hearted, the parlor-windows opening out red and cheerfully, as is the custom in Southern and Western towns; they said "Happy Christmas" to every passer-by. The owners, going into the houses, had a hearty word for Adam. "Well, Craig, how goes it?" or, "Fine, frosty weather, Sir." It quite heartened the cobbler. He made shoes for most of these people, and whether men are free and equal or not, any cobbler will have a reverence for the man he has shod.

So Adam trotted on, his face a little redder, and his stooped chest, especially next the basket, in quite a glow. There she was, clear out in the snow, waiting for him by the curb-stone. How she took hold of the basket, and Adam made believe she was

carrying the whole weight of it! How the fire-light struck out furiously through the Turkey-red curtains, so as to show her to him quicker!—to show him the snug coffee-colored dress, and the bits of cherry ribbon at her throat,—to show him how the fair curly hair was tucked back to leave the rosy ears bare he thought so dainty,—to show him how young she was, how faded and worn and tired-out she was, how hard the years had been, —to show him how his great love for her was thickening the thin blood with life, making a child out of the thwarted woman, —to show him—this more than all, this that his soul watched for, breathless, day and night—that she loved him, that she knew nothing better than the ignorant, loving heart, the horny hands that had taken her hungry fate to hold, and made of it a color and a fragrance. "Christmas is coming, little woman!" Of course it was. If it had not taken the whole world into its embrace yet, there it was compacted into a very glow of love and warmth and coziness in that snuggest of rooms, and in that very Jinny and Baby,—Christmas itself,—especially when he kissed her, and she blushed and laughed, the tears in her eyes, and went fussing for that queer roll of white flannel.

Adam took off his coat: he always went at the job of nursing the baby in his shirt-sleeves. The anxious sweat used to break on his forehead before he was through. He got its feet to the fire. "I'm dead sure that much is right," he used to say. Jinny put away the bundles, wishing to herself Mrs. Perkins would happen in to see them: one didn't like to be telling what they had for dinner,

but if it was known accidentally—You poets, whose brains have quite snubbed and sent to Coventry your stomachs, never could perceive how the pudding was a poem to the cobbler and his wife,—how a very actual sense of the live goodness of Jesus was in it,—how its spicy steam contained all the cordial cheer and jollity they had missed in meaningless days of the year. Then she brought her sewing-chair, and sat down, quite idle.

"No work for to-night! I'll teach you how to keep Christmas, Janet, woman!"

It was her first, one might say. Orphan girls that go about from house to house sewing, as Jinny had done, don't learn Christmas by heart year by year. It was a new experience: she was taking it in, one would think, to look at her, with all her might, with the earnest blue eyes, the shut-up brain behind the narrow forehead, the loving heart: a contracted tenement, that heart, by-the-by, adapted for single lodgers. She wasn't quite sure that Christmas was not, after all, a relic of Papistry,—for Jinny was a thorough Protestant: a Christian, as far as she understood Him, with a keen interest in the Indian missions. "Let us begin in our own country," she said, and always prayed for the Sioux just after Adam and Baby. In fact, if we are all parts of God's temple, Jinny was a very essential, cohesive bit of mortar. Adam had a wider door for his charity: it took all the world in, he thought,—though the preachers did enter with a shove, as we know. However, this was Christmas: the word took up all common things, the fierce wind without, the clean hearth, the modest color on her cheek,

the very baby, and made of them one grand, sweet poem, that sang to the man the same story the angels told eighteen centuries ago: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."

Sitting there in the evenings, Adam was the talker: such a fund of anecdote he had! Jinny never could hear the same story too often. To-night there was a bit of a sigh in them: his heart was tender: about the Christmases at home, when he and Nelly were little chubs together, and hung up their stockings regularly every Christmas eve.

"Twins, Nelly an' me was, oldest of all. When I was bound to old Lowe, it went hard, ef I couldn't scratch together enough for a bit of ribbon-bow or a ring for Nell, come Christmas. She used to sell the old flour-barrels an' rags, an' have her gift all ready by my plate that mornin': never missed. I never hed a sweetheart then."

Jinny laid her hand on his knee.

"Ye 'r' glad o' that, little woman? Well, well! I didn't care for women, only Ellen. She was the only livin' thing as come near me. I gripped on to her like death, havin' only her. But she—hed more nor me."

Jinny knew the story well.

"She went away with him?" softly.

"Yes, she did. I don't blame her. She was young, unlarned. No man cared for our souls. So, when she loved him well, she thort God spoke to her. So she was tuk from me. She went away."

He patted the baby, his skinny hand all shaking. Jinny took it

in hers, and, leaning over, stroked his hair.

"You've hed hard trouble, to turn it gray like this."

"No trouble like that, woman, when he left her."

"Left her! An' then she was tired of God, an' of livin', or dyin'. So as she loved him! You know, my husband. As I love you. An' he left her! What wonder *what* she did? All alone! So as she loved him still! God shut His eyes to what she did."

The yellow, shaggy face was suddenly turned from her. The voice choked.

"Did He, little woman? *You* know."

"So, when she was a-tryin' to forget, the only way she knew, God sent an angel to bring her up, an' have her soul washed clean."

Adam laughed bitterly.

"That's not the way men told the story, child. I got there six months after: to New York, you know. I found in an old paper jes' these words: 'The woman, Ellen Myers, found dead yesterday on one of the docks, was identified. Died of starvation and whiskey.' That was Nelly, as used to hang up her stockin' with me. Christian people read that. But nobody cried but me."

"They're tryin' to help them now at the Five Points there."

"God help them as helps others this Christmas night! But it's not for such as you to talk of the Five Points, Janet," rousing himself. "What frabbit me to talk of Nelly the night? Someways she's been beside me all day, as if she was grippin' me by the sleeve, beggin', dumb-like."

The moody frown deepened.

"The baby! See, Adam, it'll waken! Quick, man!"

And Adam, with a start, began hushing it after the fashion of a chimpanzee. The old bell rang out another hour: how genial and loving it was!

"Nine o'clock! Let me up, boys!"—and Lot Tyndal hustled them aside from the steps of the concert-hall. They made way for her: her thin, white arms could deal furious blows, they knew from experience. Besides, they had seen her, when provoked, fall in some cellar-door in a livid dead spasm. They were afraid of her. Her filthy, wet skirt flapped against her feet, as she went up; she pulled her flaunting bonnet closer over her head. There was a small room at the top of the stairs, a sort of greenroom for the performers. Lot shoved the door open and went in. Madame – was there, the prima-donna, if you chose to call her so: the rankest bloom of fifty summers, in white satin and pearls: a faded dahlia. Women hinted that the fragrance of the dahlia had not been healthful in the world; but they crowded to hear her: such a wonderful contralto! The manager, a thin old man, with a hook-nose, and kindly, uncertain smile, stood by the stove, with a group of gentlemen about him. The wretch from the street went up to him, unsteadily.

"Lot's drunk," one door-keeper whispered to another.

"No; the Devil's in her, though, like a tiger, to-night."

Yet there was a certain grace and beauty in her face, as she looked at the manager, and spoke low and sudden.

"I'm not a beggar. I want money,—honest money. It's Christmas eve. They say you want a voice for the chorus, in the carols. Put me where I'll be hid, and I'll sing for you."

The manager's hand fell from his watch-chain. Storrs, a young lawyer of the place, touched his shoulder.

"Don't look so aghast, Pumphrey. Let her sing a ballad to show you. Her voice is a real curiosity."

Madame – looked dubiously across the room: her black maid had whispered to her. Lot belonged to an order she had never met face to face before: one that lives in the suburbs of hell.

"Let her sing, Pumphrey."

"If"–looking anxiously to the lady.

"Certainly," drawled that type of purity. "If it is so curious, her voice."

"Sing, then," nodding to the girl.

There was a strange fierceness under her dead, gray eye.

"Do you mean to employ me to-night?"

Her tones were low, soft, from her teeth out, as I told you. Her soul was chained, below: a young girl's soul, hardly older than your little daughter's there, who sings Sunday-school hymns for you in the evenings. Yet one fancied, if this girl's soul were let loose, it would utter a madder cry than any fiend in hell.

"Do you mean to employ me?" biting her finger-ends until they bled.

"Don't be foolish, Charlotte," whispered Storrs. "You may be thankful you're not sent to jail instead. But sing for him. He'll

give you something, may-be."

She did not damn him, as he expected, stood quiet a moment, her eyelids fallen, relaxed with an inexpressible weariness. A black porter came to throw coals into the stove: he knew "dat debbil, Lot," well: had helped drag her drunk to the lock-up a day or two before. Now, before the white folks, he drew his coat aside, loathing to touch her. She followed him with a glazed look.

"Do you see what I am?" she said to the manager.

Nothing pitiful in her voice. It was too late for that.

"He wouldn't touch me: I'm not fit. I want help. Give me some honest work."

She stopped and put her hand on his coat-sleeve. The child she might have been, and never was, looked from her face that moment.

"God made me, I think," she said, humbly.

The manager's thin face reddened.

"God bless my soul! what shall I do, Mr. Storrs?"

The young man's thick lip and thicker eyelid drooped. He laughed, and whispered a word or two.

"Yes," gruffly, being reassured. "There's a policeman outside. Joe, take her out, give her in charge to him."

The negro motioned her before him with a billet of wood he held. She laughed. Her laugh had gained her the name of "Devil Lot."

"Why,"—fires that God never lighted blazing in her eyes,—"I thought you wanted me to sing! I'll sing. We'll have a hymn. It's

Christmas, you know."

She staggered. Liquor, or some subtler poison, was in her veins. Then, catching by the lintel, she broke into that most deep of all adoring cries,—

"I know that my Redeemer liveth."

A strange voice. The men about her were musical critics: they listened intently. Low, uncultured, yet full, with childish grace and sparkle; but now and then a wailing breath of an unutterable pathos.

"Git out wid you," muttered the negro, who had his own religious notions, "pollutin' de name ob de Lord in *yer* lips!"

Lot laughed.

"Just for a joke, Joe. *My* Redeemer!"

He drove her down the stairs.

"Do you want to go to jail, Lot?" he said, more kindly. "It's orful cold out to-night."

"No. Let me go."

She went through the crowd out into the vacant street, down to the wharf, humming some street-song,—from habit, it seemed; sat down on a pile of lumber, picking the clay out of the holes in her shoes. It was dark: she did not see that a man had followed her, until his white-gloved hand touched her. The manager, his uncertain face growing red.

"Young woman"—

Lot got up, pushed off her bonnet. He looked at her.

"My God! No older than Susy," he said.

By a gas-lamp she saw his face, the trouble in it.

"Well?" biting her finger-ends again.

"I'm sorry for you, I"—

"Why?" sharply. "There's more like me. Fifteen thousand in the city of New York. I came from there."

"Not like you, child."

"Yes, like me," with a gulping noise in her throat. "I'm no better than the rest."

She sat down and began digging in the snow, holding the sullen look desperately on her face. The kind word had reached the tortured soul beneath, and it struggled madly to be free.

"Can I help you?"

No answer.

"There's something in your face makes me heart-sick. I've a little girl of your age."

She looked up quickly.

"Who are you, girl?"

She stood up again, her child's face white, the dark river rolling close by her feet.

"I'm Lot. I always was what you see. My mother drank herself to death in the Bowery dens. I learned my trade there, slow and sure."

She stretched out her hands into the night, with a wild cry,—

"My God! I had to live!"

What was to be done? Whose place was it to help her? he thought. He loathed to touch her. But her soul might be as pure

and groping as little Susy's.

"I wish I could help you, girl," he said. "But I'm a moral man. I have to be careful of my reputation. Besides, I couldn't bring you under the same roof with my child."

She was quiet now.

"I know. There's not one of those Christian women up in the town yonder 'ud take Lot into their kitchens to give her a chance to save herself from hell. Do you think I care? It's not for myself I'm sorry. It's too late."

Yet as this child, hardly a woman, gave her soul over forever, she could not keep her lips from turning white.

"There's thousands more of us. Who cares? Do preachers and them as sits in the grand churches come into our dens to teach us better?"

Pumphrey grew uneasy.

"Who taught you to sing?" he said.

The girl started. She did not answer for a minute.

"What did you say?" she said.

"Who taught you?"

Her face flushed warm and dewy; her eyes wandered away, moistened and dreamy; she curled her hair-softly on her finger.

"I'd—I'd rather not speak of that," she said, low. "He's dead now. *He* called me—Lottie," looking up with a sudden, childish smile. "I was only fifteen then."

"How old are you now?"

"Four years more. But I tell you I've seen the world in that

time."

It was Devil Lot looked over at the dark river now.

He turned away to go up the wharf. No help for so foul a thing as this. He dared not give it, if there were. She had sunk down with her old, sullen glare, but she rose and crept after him. Why, this was her only chance of help from all the creatures God had made!

"Let me tell you," she said, holding by a fire-plug. "It's not for myself I care. It's for Benny. That's my little brother. I've raised him. He loves me; *he don't know*. I've kept him alone allays. I don't pray, you know; but when Ben puts his white little arms about me 't nights and kisses me, somethin' says to me, 'God loves you, Lot.' So help me God, that boy shall never know what his sister was! He's gettin' older now. I want work, before he can know. Now, will you help me?"

"How can I?"

The whole world of society spoke in the poor manager.

"I'll give you money."

Her face hardened.

"Lot, I'll be honest. There's no place for such as you. Those that have made you what you are hold good stations among us; but when a woman's once down, there's no raising her up."

"*Never*?"

"Never."

She stood, her fair hair pushed back from her face, her eye deadening every moment, quite quiet.

"Good bye, Lot."

The figure touched him somehow, standing alone in the night there.

"It wasn't my fault at the first," she wandered. "Nobody teached me better."

"I'm not a church-member, thank God!" said Pumphrey to himself, and so washed his hands in innocency.

"Well, good bye, girl," kindly. "Try and lead a better life. I wish I could have given you work."

"It was only for Benny that I cared, Sir."

"You're sick? Or"—

"It'll not last long, now. I only keep myself alive eating opium now and then. D' ye know? I fell by your hall to-day; had a fit, they said. It wasn't a fit; it was death, Sir."

He smiled.

"Why didn't you die, then?"

"I wouldn't. Benny would have known then, I said,—'I will not. I must take care o' him first.' Good bye. You'd best not be seen here."

And so she left him.

One moment she stood uncertain, being alone, looking down into the seething black water covered with ice.

"There's one chance yet," she muttered. "It's hard; but I'll try,"—with a shivering sigh; and went dragging herself along the wharf, muttering still something about Benny.

As she went through the lighted streets, her step grew lighter.

She lifted her head. Why, she was only a child yet, in some ways, you know; and this was Christmas-time; and it wasn't easy to believe, that, with the whole world strong and glad, and the True Love coming into it, there was no chance for her. Was it? She hurried on, keeping in the shadow of the houses to escape notice, until she came to the more open streets,—the old "commons." She stopped at the entrance of an alley, going to a pump, washing her face and hands, then combing her fair, silky hair.

"I'll try it," she said again.

Some sudden hope had brought a pink flush to her cheek and a moist brilliance to her eye. You could not help thinking, had society not made her what she was, how fresh and fair and debonair a little maiden she would have been.

"He's my mother's brother. He'd a kind face, though he struck me. I'll kill him, if he strikes me agin," the dark trade-mark coming into her eyes. "But mebbe," patting her hair, "he'll not. Just call me Charley, as Ben does: help me to be like his wife: I'll hev a chance for heaven at last."

She turned to a big brick building and ran lightly up the stairs on the outside. It had been a cotton-factory, but was rented in tenement-rooms now. On the highest porch was one of Lot's rooms: she had two. The muslin curtain was undrawn, a red fire-light shone out. She looked in through the window, smiling. A clean, pure room: the walls she had whitewashed herself; a white cot-bed in one corner; a glowing fire, before which a little child sat on a low cricket, building a house out of blocks. A brave,

honest-faced little fellow, with clear, reserved eyes, and curling golden hair. The girl, Lot, might have looked like that at his age.

"Benny!" she called, tapping on the pane.

"Yes, Charley!" instantly, coming quickly to the door.

She caught him up in her arms.

"Is my baby tired waiting for sister? I'm finding Christmas for him, you know."

He put his arms about her neck, kissing her again and again, and laying his head down on her shoulder.

"I'm so glad you've come, Charley! so glad! so glad!"

"Has my boy his stocking up? Such a big boy to have his stocking up!"

He put his chubby hands over her eyes quickly, laughing.

"Don't look, Charley! don't! Benny's played you a trick now, I tell you!" pulling her towards the fire. "Now look! Not Benny's stocking: Charley's, *I* guess."

The girl sat down on the cricket, holding him on her lap, playing with the blocks, as much of a child as he.

"Why, Bud! Such an awful lot of candies that stocking'll hold!" laughing with him. "It'll take all Kriss Kringle's sack."

"*Kriss Kringle*! Oh, Charley! I'm too big; I'm five years now. You can't cheat me."

The girl's very lips went white. She got up at his childish words, and put him down.

"No, I'll not cheat you, Benny,—never, any more."

"Where are you going, Charley?"

"Just out a bit," wrapping a plain shawl about her. "To find Christmas, you know. For you—and me."

He pattered after her to the door.

"You'll come put me to bed, Charley dear? I'm so lonesome!"

"Yes, Bud. Kiss me. One,—two,—three times,—for God's good-luck."

He kissed her. And Lot went out into the wide, dark world,—into Christmas night, to find a friend.

She came a few minutes later to a low frame-building, painted brown: Adam Craig's house and shop. The little sitting-room had a light in it: his wife would be there with the baby. Lot knew them well, though they never had seen her. She had watched them through the window for hours in winter nights. Some damned soul might have thus looked wistfully into heaven: pitying herself, feeling more like God than the blessed within, because she knew the pain in her heart, the struggle to do right, and pitied it. She had a reason for the hungry pain in her blood when the kind-faced old cobbler passed her. She was Nelly's child. She had come West to find him.

"Never, that he should know *me*! never that! but for Benny's sake."

If Benny could have brought her to him, saying, "See, this is Charley, my Charley!" But Adam knew her by another name,—Devil Lot.

While she stood there, looking in at the window, the snow drifting on her head in the night, two passers-by halted an instant.

"Oh, father, look!" It was a young girl spoke. "Let me speak to that woman."

"What does thee mean, Maria?"

She tried to draw her hand from his arm.

"Let me go,—she's dying, I think. Such a young, fair face! She thinks God has forgotten her. Look!"

The old Quaker hesitated.

"Not thee, Maria. Thy mother shall find her to-morrow. Thee must never speak to her. Accursed! 'Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.'"

They passed on. Lot heard it all. God had offered the pure young girl a chance to save a soul from death; but she threw it aside. Lot did not laugh: looked after them with tearless eyes, until they were out of sight. She went to the door then. "It's for Benny," she whispered, swallowing down the choking that made her dumb. She knocked and went in.

Jinny was alone: sitting by the fire, rocking the baby to sleep, singing some child's hymn: a simple little thing, beginning,—

> "Come, let us sing of Jesus,
> Who wept our path along:
> Come, let us sing of Jesus,
> The tempted, and the strong."

Such a warm, happy flush lightened in Charley's heart at that! She did not know why; but her fear was gone. The baby, too, a white, pure little thing, was lying in the cradle, cooing softly

to itself. The mother—instinct is nearest the surface in a loving woman; the girl went up quickly to it, and touched its cheek, with a smile: she could not help it.

"It's so pretty!" she said.

Jinny's eyes glowed.

"*I* think so," she said, simply. "It's my baby. Did you want me?"

Lot remembered then. She drew back, her face livid and grave.

"Yes. Do you know me? I'm Lot Tyndal. Don't jerk your baby back! Don't! I'll not touch it. I want to get some honest work. I've a little brother."

There was a dead silence. Jinny's brain, I told you, was narrow, her natural heart not generous or large in its impulse; the kind of religion she learned did not provide for anomalies of work like this. (So near at hand, you know. Lot was neither a Sioux nor a Rebel.)

"I'm Lot,"—desperately. "You know what I am. I want you to take us in, stop the boys from hooting at me on the streets, make a decent Christian woman out of me. There's plain words. Will you do it? I'll work for you. I'll nurse the baby, the dear little baby."

Jinny held her child tighter to her breast, looking at the vile clothes of the wretch, the black marks which years of crime had left on her face. Don't blame Jinny. Her baby was God's gift to her: she thought of that, you know. She did not know those plain,

coarse words were the last cry for help from a drowning soul, going down into depths whereof no voice has come back to tell the tale. Only Jesus. Do you know what message He carried to those "spirits in prison"?

"I daren't do it. What would they say of me?" she faltered.

Lot did not speak. After a while she motioned to the shop. Adam was there. His wife went for him, taking the baby with her. Charley saw that, though everything looked dim to her; when Adam came in, she knew, too, that his face was angry and dark.

"It's Christmas eve," she said.

She tried to say more, but could not.

"You must go from here!" speaking sharp, hissing. "I've no faith in the whinin' cant of such as you. Go out, Janet. This is no place for you or the child."

He opened the street-door for Lot to go out. He had no faith in her. No shrewd, common-sense man would have had. Besides, this was his Christmas night: the beginning of his new life, when he was coming near to Christ in his happy home and great love. Was this foul worm of the gutter to crawl in and tarnish it all?

She stopped one instant on the threshold. Within was a home, a chance for heaven; out yonder in the night—what?

"You will put me out?" she said.

"I know your like. There's no help for such as you"; and he closed the door.

She sat down on the curb-stone. It was snowing hard. For about an hour she was there, perfectly quiet. The snow lay in

warm, fleecy drifts about her: when it fell on her arm, she shook it off: it was so pure and clean, and *she*——She could have torn her flesh from the bones, it seemed so foul to her that night. Poor Charley! If she had only known how God loved something within her, purer than the snow, which no foulness of flesh or circumstance could defile! Would you have told her, if you had been there? She only muttered, "Never," to herself now and then, "Never."

A little boy came along presently, carrying a loaf of bread under his arm,—a manly, gentle little fellow. She let Benny play with him sometimes.

"Why, Lot!" he said. "I'll walk part of the way home with you. I'm afraid."

She got up and took him by the hand. She could hardly speak. Tired, worn-out in body and soul; her feet had been passing for years through water colder than the river of death: but it was nearly over now.

"It's better for Benny it should end this way," she said.

She knew how it would end.

"Rob," she said, when the boy turned to go to his own home, "you know Adam Craig? I want you to bring him to my room early to-morrow morning,—by dawn. Tell him he'll find his sister Nelly's child there: and never to tell that child that his 'Charley' was Lot Tyndal. You'll remember, Rob?"

"I will. Happy Christmas, Charley!"

She waited a minute, her foot on the steps leading to her room.

"Rob!" she called, weakly, "when you play with Ben, I wish you'd call me Charley to him, and never—that other name."

"I'll mind," the child said, looking wistfully at her.

She was alone now. How long and steep the stairs were! She crawled up slowly. At the top she took a lump of something brown from her pocket, looked at it long and steadily. Then she glanced upward.

"It's the only way to keep Benny from knowing," she said. She ate it, nearly all, then looked around, below her, with a strange intentness, as one who says good-bye. The bell tolled the hour. Unutterable pain was in its voice,—may-be dumb spirits like Lot's crying aloud to God.

"One hour nearer Christmas," said Adam Craig, uneasily. "Christ's coming would have more meaning, Janet, if this were a better world. If it wasn't for these social necessities that"–

He stopped. Jinny did not answer.

Lot went into her room, roused Ben with a kiss. "His last remembrance of me shall be good and pleasant," she said. She took him on her lap, untying his shoes.

"My baby has been hunting eggs to-day in Rob's stable," shaking the hay from his stockings.

"Why, Charley! how could you know?" with wide eyes.

"So many things I know! Oh, Charley's wise! To-morrow, Bud will go see new friends,—such kind friends! Charley knows. A baby, Ben. My boy will like that: he's a big giant beside that baby. *Ben* can hold it, and touch it, and kiss it."

She looked at his pure hands with hungry eyes.

"Go on. What else but the baby?"

"Kind friends for Ben, better and kinder than Charley."

"That's not true. Where are you going, Charley? I hate the kind friends. I'll stay with you,"—beginning to cry.

Her eyes sparkled, and she laughed childishly.

"Only a little way, Bud, I'm going. You watch for me,—all the time you watch for me. Some day you and I'll go out to the country, and be good children together."

What dawning of a new hope was this? She did not feel as if she lied. Some day,—it might be true. Yet the vague gleam died out of her heart, and when Ben, in his white night-gown, knelt down to say the prayer his mother had taught him, it was "Devil Lot's" dead, crime-marked face that bent over him.

"God bless Charley!" he said.

She heard that. She put him into the bed, then quietly bathed herself, filled his stocking with the candies she had bought, and lay down beside him,—her limbs growing weaker, but her brain more lifeful, vivid, intent.

"Not long now," she thought. "Love me, Benny. Kiss me good-night."

The child put his arms about her neck, and kissed her forehead.

"Charley's cold," he said. "When we are good children together, let's live in a tent. Will you, Sis? Let's make a tent now."

"Yes, dear."

She struggled up, and pinned the sheet over him to the headboard; it was a favorite fancy of Ben's.

"That's a good Charley," sleepily. "Good night. I'll watch for you all the time, all the time."

He was asleep,—did not waken even when she strained him to her heart, passionately, with a wild cry.

"Good bye, Benny." Then she lay quiet. "We might have been good children together, if only–I don't know whose fault it is," throwing her thin arms out desperately. "I wish—oh, I do wish somebody had been kind to me!"

Then the arms fell powerless, and Charley never moved again. But her soul was clear. In the slow tides of that night, it lived back, hour by hour, the life gone before. There was a skylight above her; she looked up into the great silent darkness between earth and heaven,—Devil Lot, whose soul must go out into that darkness alone. She said that. The world that had held her under its foul heel did not loathe her as she loathed herself that night. *Lot*.

The dark hours passed, one by one. Christmas was nearer, nearer,—the bell tolled. It had no meaning for her: only woke a weak fear that she should not be dead before morning, that any living eye should be vexed by her again. Past midnight. The great darkness slowly grayed and softened. What did she wait for? The vile worm Lot,—who cared in earth or heaven when she died? *Then the Lord turned, and looked upon Charley*. Never yet was the soul so loathsome, the wrong so deep, that the loving

Christ has not touched it once with His hands, and said, "Will you come to me?" Do you know how He came to her? how, while the unquiet earth needed Him, and the inner deeps of heaven were freshening their fairest morning light to usher in the birthday of our God, He came to find poor Charley, and, having died to save her, laid His healing hands upon her? It was in her weak, ignorant way she saw Him. While she, Lot, lay there corrupt, rotten in soul and body, it came to her how, long ago, Magdalene, more vile than Lot, had stood closest to Jesus. Magdalene loved much, and was forgiven.

So, after a while, Charley, the child that might have been, came to His feet humbly, with bitter sobs. "Lord, I'm so tired!" she said. "I'd like to try again, and be a different girl." That was all. She clung close to His hand as she went through the deep waters.

Benny, stirring in his sleep, leaned over, and kissed her lips. "So cold!" he whispered, drowsily. "God—bless—Charley!" She smiled, but her eyes were closed.

The darkness was gone: the gray vault trembled with a coming radiance; from the East, where the Son of Man was born, a faint flush touched the earth: it was the promise of the Dawn. Lot's foul body lay dead there with the Night: but Jesus took the child Charley in His arms, and blessed her.

Christmas evening. How still and quiet it was! The Helper had come. Not to the snow-covered old earth, falling asleep in the crimson sunset mist: it did not need Him. Not an atom of its

living body, from the granite mountain to the dust on the red sea-fern, had failed to perform its work: taking time, too, to break forth in a wild luxuriance of beauty as a psalm of thanksgiving. The Holy Spirit you talk of in the churches had been in the old world since the beginning, since the day it brooded over the waters, showing itself as the spirit of Life in granite rock or red sea-fern,—as the spirit of Truth in every heroic deed, in every true word of poet or prophet,—as the spirit of Love as–Let your own hungry heart tell how. To-day it came to man as the Helper. We all saw that dimly, and showed that we were glad, in some weak way. God, looking down, saw a smile upon the faces of His people.

The fire glowed redder and cheerier in Adam's little cottage; the lamp was lighted; Jinny had set out a wonderful table, too. Benny had walked around and around it, rubbing his hands slowly in dumb ecstasy. Such oranges! and frosted cakes covered with crushed candy! Such a tree in the middle, hung with soft-burning tapers, and hidden in the branches the white figure of the loving Christ-child. That was Adam's fancy. Benny sat in Jinny's lap now, his head upon her breast. She was rocking him to sleep, singing some cheery song for him, although that baby of hers lay broad awake in the cradle, aghast and open-mouthed at his neglect. It had been just "Benny" all day,—Benny that she had followed about, uneasy lest the wind should blow through the open door on him, or the fire be too hot, or that every moment should not be full to the brim with fun and pleasure, touching his

head or hand now and then with a woful tenderness, her throat choked, and her blue eyes wet, crying in her heart incessantly, "Lord, forgive me!"

"Tell me more of Charley," she said, as they sat there in the evening.

He was awake a long time after that, telling her, ending with, —

"She said, 'You watch for me, Bud, all the time.' That's what she said. So she'll come. She always does, when she says. Then we're going to the country to be good children together. I'll watch for her."

So he fell asleep, and Jinny kissed him,—looking at him an instant, her cheek growing paler.

"That is for you, Benny," she whispered to herself,—"and this," stooping to touch his lips again, "this is for Charley. Last night," she muttered, bitterly, "it would have saved her."

Old Adam sat on the side of the bed where the dead girl lay.

"Nelly's child!" he said, stroking the hand, smoothing the fair hair. All day he had said only that,—"Nelly's child!"

Very like her she was,—the little Nell who used to save her cents to buy a Christmas-gift for him, and bring it with flushed cheeks, shyly, and slip it on his plate. This child's cheeks would have flushed like hers—at a kind word; the dimpled, innocent smile lay in them,—only a kind word would have brought it to life. She was dead now, and he—he had struck her yesterday. She lay dead there with her great loving heart, her tender, childish

beauty,—a harlot,—Devil Lot. No more.

The old man pushed his hair back, with shaking hands, looking up to the sky. "Lord, lay not this sin to my charge!" he said. His lips were bloodless. There was not a street in any city where a woman like this did not stand with foul hand and gnawing heart. They came from God, and would go back to Him. To-day the Helper came; but who showed Him to them, to Nelly's child?

Old Adam took the little cold hand in his: he said something under his breath: I think it was, "Here am I, Lord, and the wife that Thou hast given," as one who had found his life's work, and took it humbly. A sworn knight in Christ's order.

Christmas-day had come,—the promise of the Dawn, sometime to broaden into the full and perfect day. At its close now, a still golden glow, like a great Peace, filled the earth and heaven, touching the dead Lot there, and the old man kneeling beside her. He fancied that it broke from behind the dark bars of cloud in the West, thinking of the old appeal, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and the King of Glory shall come in." Was He going in, yonder? A weary man, pale, thorn-crowned, bearing the pain and hunger of men and women vile as Lot, to lay them at His Father's feet? Was he to go with loving heart, and do likewise? Was that the meaning of Christmas-day? The quiet glow grew deeper, more restful; the bell tolled: its sound faded, solemn and low, into the quiet, as one that says in his heart, Amen.

That night, Benny, sleeping in the still twilight, stirred and smiled suddenly, as though some one had given him a happy kiss,

and, half waking, cried, "Oh, Charley! Charley!"

IN THE HALF-WAY HOUSE

I

At twenty we fancied the blest Middle Ages
  A spirited cross of romantic and grand,
All templars and minstrels and ladies and pages,
  And love and adventure in Outre-Mer land;
But, ah, where the youth dreamed of building a minster,
  The man takes a pew and sits reckoning his pelf,
And the Graces wear fronts, the Muse thins to a spinster,
When Middle-Age stares from one's glass at himself!

II

Do you twit me with days when I had an Ideal,
  And saw the sear future through spectacles green?
Then find me some charm, while I look round and see all
  These fat friends of forty, shall keep me nineteen;
Should we go on pining for chaplets of laurel
  Who've paid a perruquier for mending our thatch,
Or, our feet swathed in baize, with our fate pick a quarrel,

If, instead of cheap bay-leaves, she sent a dear scratch?

III

We called it our Eden, that small patent-baker,
When life was half moonshine and half Mary Jane;
But the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker!—
Bid Adam have duns and slip down a back-lane?
Nay, after the Fall did the modiste keep coming
With last styles of fig-leaf to Madam Eve's bower?
Did Jubal, or whoever taught the girls thrumming,
Make the Patriarchs deaf at a dollar the hour?

IV

As I think what I was, I sigh, *Desunt nonnulla*!
Years are creditors Sheridan's self could not bilk;
But then, as my boy says, "What right has a fullah
To ask for the cream, when himself spilled the milk?"
Perhaps when you're older, my lad, you'll discover
The secret with which Auld Lang Syne there is gilt,—
Superstition of old man, maid, poet, and lover,—
That cream rises thickest on milk that was spilt!

V

We sailed for the moon, but, in sad disillusion,
Snug under Point Comfort are glad to make fast,
And strive (sans our glasses) to make a confusion
'Twixt our rind of green cheese and the moon of the past;
Ah, Might-have-been, Could-have-been, Would-have-been! rascals,
He's a genius or fool whom ye cheat at two-score,
And the man whose boy-promise was likened to Pascal's
Is thankful at forty they don't call him bore!

VI

With what fumes of fame was each confident pate full!
How rates of insurance should rise on the Charles!
And which of us now would not feel wisely grateful,
If his rhymes sold as fast as the Emblems of Quarles?
E'en if won, what's the good of Life's medals and prizes?
The rapture's in what never was or is gone;
That we missed them makes Helens of plain Ann Elizys,
For the goose of To-day still is Memory's swan.

VII

And yet who would change the old dream for new treasure?
  Make not youth's sourest grapes the best wine of our life?
Need he reckon his date by the Almanac's measure
  Who is twenty life-long in the eyes of his wife?
Ah, Fate, should I live to be nonagenarian,
  Let me still take Hope's frail I.O.U.s upon trust,
Still talk of a trip to the Islands Macarian,
  And still climb the dream-tree for—ashes and dust!

* * * * *

MR. BUCKLE AS A THINKER

The recent death of Henry Thomas Buckle calls a new attention to his published works. Pathetic it will seem to all that he should be cut off in the midst of labors so large, so assiduous and adventurous; and there are few who will not feel inclined to make up, as it were, to his memory for this untimely interruption of his pursuits, by assigning the highest possible value to his actual performance. Additional strength will be given to these dispositions by the impressions of his personal character. This was, indeed, such as to conciliate the utmost good-will. If we except occasional touches of self-complacency, which betray, perhaps, a trifling foible, it may be said that everything is pleasing which is known concerning him. His devotion, wellnigh heroic, to scholarly aims; his quiet studiousness; his filial virtue; his genial sociability, graced by, and gracing, the self-supporting habit of his soul; his intrepidity of intellect, matched by a beautiful boldness and openness in speech; the absence, too, from works so incisive, of a single trace of truculence: all this will now be remembered; and those are unamiable persons, in whom the remembrance does not breed a desire to believe him as great in thought as he was brave, as prosperous in labor as he was persevering.

But however it may be with others, certainly he who has undertaken the duties of a scholar must not yield too readily to

these amiable wishes. He, as a sworn soldier of Truth, stands sacredly bound to be as free from favor as from fear, and to follow steadily wherever the standards of his imperial mistress lead him on. And so performing his lawful service, he may bear in mind that at last the interests of Truth are those of every soul, be it of them that we number with the dead, or that are still reckoned among these that we greet as living. Let us not be petty in our kindness. Over the fresh grave of a scholar let us rise to that high and large friendliness which respects more the scope of every man's nature than the limited measure of any man's performance, and sides bravely with the soul of the departed, even though it be against his fame. Who would not choose this for himself? Who would not whisper from his grave, "My personal weaknesses let those spare who can; my work do not praise, but judge; and never think in behalf of my mortal fame to lower those stars that my spirit would look up to yet and forever"?

As a man and scholar, Mr. Buckle needs no forbearance; and men must commend him, were it only in justice to themselves. Such intellectual courage, such personal purity, such devotion to ideal aims, such a clean separation of boldness from bitterness, —in thought, no blade more trenchant, in feeling, no heart more human;—when these miss their honor and their praise, then will men have forgotten how to estimate fine qualities.

Meanwhile, as a thinker, he must be judged according to the laws of thought. Here we are to forget whether he be living or dead, and whether his personal traits were delightful

or disagreeable. Here there is but one question, and that is the question of truth.

And as a thinker, I can say nothing less than that Mr. Buckle signally failed. His fundamental conceptions, upon which reposes the whole edifice of his labor, are sciolistic assumptions caught up in his youth from Auguste Comte and other one-eyed seers of modern France; his generalization, multitudinous and imposing, is often of the card-castle description, and tumbles at the touch of an inquisitive finger; and his cobweb logic, spun chiefly out of his wishes rather than his understanding, is indeed facile and ingenious, but of a strength to hold only flies. Such, at any rate, is the judgment passed upon him in the present paper; and if it is stated roundly, the critic can be held all the better to its justification, and the more freely condemned, should these charges not be sustained.

But while in the grand topography of thought and in the larger processes of reasoning the failure of Mr. Buckle, according to the judgment here given, is complete, it is freely admitted that as a writer and man of letters he has claims not only to respect, but even to admiration. His mental fertility is remarkable, his memory marvellous, his reading immense, his mind discursive and agile, his style pellucid as water and often vigorous, while his *subordinate* conceptions are always ingenious and frequently valuable. Besides this, he is a genuine enthusiast, and sees before him that El Dorado of the understanding where golden knowledge shall lie yellow on all the hills and yellow under every

footfall,—where the very peasant shall have princely wealth, and no man shall need say to another, "Give me of thy wisdom." It is this same element of romantic expectation which stretches a broad and shining margin about the spacious page of Bacon; it is this which wreathes a new fascination around the royal brow of Raleigh; it is this, in part, which makes light the bulky and antiquated tomes of Hakluyt; and the grace of it is that which we often miss in coming from ancient to modern literature. Better it is, too, than much erudition and many "proprieties" of thought; and one may note it as curious, that Mr. Buckle, seeking to disparage imagination, should have written a book whose most winning and enduring charm is the appeal to imagination it makes. Moreover, he is an enthusiast in behalf of just that which is distinctively modern: he is a white flame of precisely those heats which smoulder now in the duller breast of the world in general; he worships at all the pet shrines; he expresses the peculiar loves and hatreds of the time. Who is so devout a believer in free speech and free trade and the let-alone policy in government, and the coming of the Millennium by steam? Who prostrates himself with such unfeigned adoration before the great god, "State-of-Society," or so mutters, for a mystic *O'm*, the word "Law"? Then how delightful it is, when he traces the whole ill of the world to just those things which we now all agree to detest,—to theological persecution, bigotry, superstition, and infidelity to Isaac Newton! In fine, the recent lessons of that great schoolboy, the world, or those over which the said youth now is

poring or idling or blubbering, Mr. Buckle has not only got by heart, not only recites them capitally, but believes with assurance that they are the sole lessons worth learning in any time; and all the inevitable partialities of the text-book, all the errors and *ad captandum* statements with which its truth is associated, he takes with such implicit faith, and believes in so confidently as part and parcel of our superiority to all other times, that the effect upon most of us cannot be otherwise than delectable.

Unhappily, the text-book in which he studied these fine lessons chanced to be the French edition, and, above all, the particular compilation of Auguste Comte,—Comte, the one-eyed Polyphemus of modern literature, enormous in stature and strength, but a devourer of the finer races in thought, feeding his maw upon the beautiful offspring of the highest intelligence, whom the Olympians love. Therefore it befell that our eager and credulous scholar unlearned quite as much as he learned, acquiring the wisdoms of our time in the crudest and most liberal commixture with its unwisdoms. And thus, though his house is laboriously put together, yet it is built upon the sand; and though his bark has much good timber, and is well modelled for speed, yet its keel is wholly rotten, so that whosoever puts to sea therein will sail far more swiftly to bottom than to port.

And precisely this, in lieu of all else, it is my present purpose to show: that the keel of his craft is unsound,—that his fundamental notions are fundamental falsities, such as no thinker can fall into without discredit to his powers of thought.

Fortunately, he has begun by stating and arguing these; so that there can be no question either what they are, or by what considerations he is able to support them.

The foundation-timber of Mr. Buckle's work consists of three pieces, or propositions, two of which take the form of denial. First, he denies that there is in man anything of the nature of Free-Will, and attributes the belief in it to vulgar and childish ignorance. Secondly, and in support of the primary negation, he denies that there is any oracle in man's bosom,—that his spirit had any knowledge of itself or of the relationships it sustains: in other words, denies the validity of Consciousness. Thirdly and lastly, he attempts to show that all actions of individuals originate not in themselves, but result from a law working in the general and indistinguishable *lump* of society,—from laws of like nature with that which preserves the balance of the sexes; so that no man has more to do with his own deed than the mother in determining whether her child shall be male or female. By the two former statements man is stripped of all the grander prerogatives and characteristics of personality; by the last he is placed as freight, whether dead or alive it were hard to say, in the hold of the self-steering ship, "Society." These propositions and the reasons, or unreasons, by which they are supported, we will examine in order.

1. *Free-Will*. The question of free-will has at sundry times and seasons, and by champions many and furious, been disputed, till the ground about it is all beaten into blinding dust, wherein no

reasonable man can now desire to cloud his eyes and clog his lungs. It is, indeed, one of the cheerful signs of our times, that there is a growing relish for clear air and open skies, a growing indisposition to mingle in old and profitless controversies. It commonly happens in such controversies, as it undoubtedly has happened in the dispute about free-will, that both parties have been trying to pull up Life or Spirit by the roots, and make a show, *à la* Barnum, of all its secrets. The enterprise was zealously prosecuted, but would not prosper. In truth, there are strict and jealous limits to the degree in which man's mind can become an object to itself. By silent consciousness, by an action of reason and imagination sympathetic with pure inward life, man may *feel* far down into the sweet, awful depths and mysteries of his being; and the results of this inward intimation are given in the great poems, the great art and divine philosophy of all time, and in the commanding beliefs of mankind; but so soon as one begins to come to his own existence as an outsider and stranger, and attempts to bear away its secret, so soon he begins to be balked.

Mr. Buckle, however, has assumed in a summary and authoritative way to settle this question of free-will; and, without entering into the dust and suffocation of the old interminable dispute, we may follow him far enough to see whether he has thrown any light upon the matter, or has only thrown light upon his own powers as a thinker.

His direct polemic against the doctrine of Free-Will consists simply of an attempt to identify it with the notion of Chance

in physics. The notion of Chance, he says, is the same with that of Free-Will; the doctrine of Necessary Connection with the dogma of Predestination. This statement has certainly an imposing air. But consider it. To assert the identity of chance and free-will is but another way of saying that pure freedom is one and the same with absolute lawlessness,—that where freedom exists, law, order, reason do not. If this be a misconception, as it surely is a total and fatal misconception, of the nature of freedom, then does the statement of our author, with all that rests upon it, fall instantly and utterly to the ground.

It is a misconception. Freedom and lawlessness are not the same. To make this finally clear, let us at once give the argument the widest possible scope; since the largest way of looking at the matter, as indeed it often happens, will prove also the nearest and simplest. In the universe as a whole Will does certainly originate, since there is, undoubtedly, origination somewhere. Freely, too, it must arise, for there is nothing behind it to bring it under constraint: indeed, all origination is by its nature free. But our philosopher tells us that wherever there is a pure and free origination of will, there is lawlessness, caprice, chance. The universe, therefore, should be a scene, not of absolute order, but of absolute disorder; and since it is not such, we have nothing for it but to say that either the logic of the universe, or that of Mr. Buckle, is very much awry.

In the universe, Will freely originates, but forever in unison with divine Reason; and the result is at once pure necessity and

pure freedom: for these, if both be, as we say, absolutely *pure*, are one and the same. A coercing necessity is impure, for it is at war with that to which it applies; only a necessity in sweetest affinity with that which it governs is of the purest degree; and this is, of course, identical with the highest and divinest freedom.

And here we approach the solution of our problem, so far as it can be solved. Freedom and free-will exist only in virtue of reason, only in connection with the rational soul. In a rough account of man, and leaving out of sight all that is not strictly relevant to the present point, we discriminate in him two natures. One of these comprises the whole body of organic desires and energies, with all that *kind* of intellect by which one perceives the relation of things to his selfish wishes. By this nature, man is a selfish and intellectual animal; a polyp with arms that go round the world; a sponge with eyes and energies and delights; a cunning *ego*, to whom all outside of himself is but for a prey. But aloft over this, and constituting the second nature, into whose kingdom one should be born as by a second birth, is the sovereign eye and soul of Reason, discerning Justice and Beauty and the Best, creating in man's bosom an ideal, redeeming him out of his littleness, bringing him into fellowship with Eternal Truth, and making him universal. Now between these two natures there is, for there must be, a mediating term, a power by which man *enacts* reason, and causes doing to accord with seeing. This is will, and it must, from its very nature, be free; for to say that it is a mere representative of the major force in desire is simply

to say that it does not exist. A mediation without freedom in the mediator is something worse than the mediation of Holland between England and the United States in the dispute concerning the North-East Boundary.

So far, now, as the sovereign law and benefaction of the higher nature, through a perfect mediation of the will, descends upon the lower, so far man enters into free alliance with that which is sovereign in the universe, and is himself established in perfected freedom. The right action of free-will is, then, freedom in the making. But by this entrance into the great harmonies of the world, by this loyalty to the universal reason which alone makes one free, it must be evident that the order of the world is graced and supported rather than assailed.

But how if free-will fail of its highest function? Must not the order of the world then suffer? Not a whit. Universal Reason prevails, but in two diverse ways: she may either be felt as a mere Force or Fate, or she may be recognized and loved and obeyed as an Authority. Wherever the rational soul, her oracle, is given, there she proffers the privilege of knowing her only as a divine authority,—of free loyalty, of honorable citizenship in her domains. But to those who refuse this privilege she appears as fate; and though their honor is lost, hers is not; for the order of the world continues to be vindicated. The just and faithful citizen, who of his own election obeys the laws, illustrates in one way the order of society and the supremacy of moral law. The villain in the penitentiary illustrates the order of society and the

supremacy of moral law in quite another way. But order and law are illustrated by both, though in ways so very different. So one may refuse to make reason a free necessity in his own bosom; but then the constable of the universe speedily taps him upon the shoulder, and law is honored, though he is disgraced.

Now Mr. Buckle supposed that order in the world and in history could be obtained only by sacrificing the freedom of the individual; and that he so supposed determines his own rank as a thinker. There is no second question to be asked concerning a candidate for the degree of master in philosophy who begins by making this mistake.

But does some one, unwilling so soon to quit the point, require of me to explain *how* will can originate in man? My only answer is, I do not know. Does the questioner know *how* motion originates in the universe? It does or did originate; science is clear in assigning a progress, and therefore a beginning, to the solar system: can you find its origin in aught but the self-activity of Spirit, whose *modus operandi* no man can explain? *All* origination is inscrutable; the plummet of understanding cannot sound it; but wherefore may not one sleep as sweetly, knowing that the wondrous fact is near at hand, in the bosoms of his contemporaries and in his own being, as if it were pushed well out of sight into the depths of primeval time? To my mind, there is something thoroughly weak and ridiculous in the way that Comte and his company run away from the Absolute and Inexplicable, fearing only its nearness; like a child who is quite willing there

should he bears at the North Pole, but would lie awake of nights, if he thought there were one in the nearest wood. And it is the more ridiculous because Mystery is no bear; nor can I, for one, conceive why it should not be to every man a joy to know that all the marvel which ever was in Nature is in her now, and that the divine inscrutable processes are going on under our eyes and in them and in our hearts.

Doubtless, however, many will adhere to the logic that has satisfied them so long and so well,—that it is impossible the will should move otherwise than in obedience to motives, and that, obeying a motive, it is not free. Why should we not, then, amuse ourselves a little with these complacent motive-mongers? They profess a perfect explanation of mental action, and make it the stigma of a deeper philosophy, that it must leave somewhat in all action of the mind, and therefore in a doctrine of the will, unexplained. Let, now, these good gentlemen explain to us how a motive ever gets to be a motive. For there is precisely the same difficulty in initiating motion here as elsewhere. You look on a peach; you desire it; and you are moved by the desire to pluck or purchase it. Now it is plain that you could not desire this peach until you had perceived that it was a desirable fruit. But you could not perceive that the fruit was desirable until you had experienced desire of it. And here we are at the old, inexplicable seesaw. It must appear desirable in order to be desired; it must be desired in order to appear desirable: the perception must precede the desire, and the desire must precede the perception. These are

foolish subtilties, but all the fitter for their purpose. Our motive-mongering friends should understand that they can explain no farther than their neighbors,—that by enslaving the will they only shift the difficulty, not solve it.

Anything but this shallow sciolism! More philosophical a thousand times than the knowing and facile metaphysic which makes man a thing of springs and pivots and cogs, are the notions of old religionists, which attributed human action in large part to preventing, suggesting, and efficient "grace," or those of older poets, who gave Pallas Athene for a counsellor to Odysseus, and Krishna for a teacher to the young Aryan warrior,—which represent human action, that is, as issuing in part out of the Infinite. A thousand times more *philosophical*, as well as ten thousand times more inspiring, I say, are the metaphysics of Imagination,—of scriptures and great poems and the *live* human heart,—than the cut-and-dried sciolisms which explain you a man in five minutes, and make everything in him as obvious as the movements of a jumping-jack.

To deny, then, the existence of free-will is, in my judgment, a grave error; but to deny it on the ground of its identity with chance is more than an ordinary error, however grave; it is a poison in the blood of one's thought, conveying its vice to every part and function of the system. And herewith we pass to the next head.

2. *Consciousness*. It has been the persuasion of wise men in various ages, and is the persuasion of many, as wise, doubtless,

as their neighbors, now, that the soul has a native sense of its quality and perpetual relations. By Plato this sense, in some of its aspects, was named Reminiscence; by modern speakers of English it is denoted as Consciousness. This, according to its grades and applications, is qualified as personal, moral, intellectual, or, including all its higher functions, as intuitive or spiritual. Of this high spiritual sense, this self-recognition of soul, all the master-words of the language—God, Immortality, Life, Love, Duty—are either wholly, or in all their grander suggestions, the product. Nothing, indeed, is there which confers dignity upon human life and labor, that is not primarily due to the same source. In union with popular and unconscious imagination, it generates mythology; in union with imagination and reason, it gives birth to theology and cosmogony; in union with imagination, reason, and experience, it is the source of philosophy; in union with the same, together with the artistic sense and high degrees of imaginative sympathy, it creates epic poetry and art. Its total outcome, however, may be included under the term Belief. And it results from an assumed validity of consciousness, that universal belief is always an indication of universal truth. At the same time, since this master-power finds expression through faculties various in kind and still more various in grade of development, its outcome assumes many shapes and hues,—just as crystallized alumina becomes here ruby and there sapphire, by minute admixtures of different coloring substances.

We assume the validity of this prime source of belief. Why

not? Here is a great natural product, human belief; we treat it precisely as we do other natural products; we judge, that, like these, it has its law and justification. We assume that it is to be studied as Lyell studies the earth's crust, or Agassiz its life, or Müller its languages. As our author shuns metaphysical, so do we shun metapsychical inquiries. We do not presume to go behind universal fact, and inquire whether it has any business to be fact; we simply endeavor to see it in its largest and most interior aspect, and then accept it without question.

But M. Comte made the discovery that this great product of man's spiritual nature is nothing but the spawn of his self-conceit: that it is purely gratuitous, groundless, superfluous, and therefore in the deepest possible sense lawless, Mr. Buckle follows his master, for such Comte really is. Proclaiming Law everywhere else, and, from his extreme partiality to the word, often lugging it in, as it were, by the ears, he no sooner arrives at these provinces than he instantly faces the other way, and denies all that he has before advocated. Of a quadruped he will question not a hair, of a fish not a scale; everywhere else he will accept facts and seek to coördinate them; but when he arrives at the great natural outcome and manifestation of man's spirit, then it is in an opposite way that he will not question; he simply lifts his eyebrows. The fact has no business to be there! It signifies nothing!

Why this reversal of position? First, because, if consciousness be allowed, free-will must be admitted; since the universal consciousness is that of freedom to choose. But there is a larger

reason. In accordance with his general notions, personality must be degraded, denuded, impoverished,—that so the individual may lie passive in the arms of that society whose laws he is ambitious to expound. Having robbed the soul of choice, he now deprives it of sight; having denied that it is an originating source of will, he now makes the complementary denial, that it is a like source of knowledge; having first made it helpless, he now proceeds to make it senseless. And, indeed, the two denials belong together. If it be true that the soul is helpless, pray let us have some kind drug to make it senseless also. Nature has dealt thus equally with the stone; and surely she must design a like equality in her dealings with man. Power and perceiving she will either give together, or together withhold.

But how does our author support this denial? By pointing to the great varieties in the outcome of consciousness. There is no unity, he says, in its determinations: one believes this, another that, a third somewhat different from both; and the faith that one is ready to die for, another is ready to kill him for. And true it is that the diversities of human belief are many and great; let not the fact be denied nor diminished.

But does such diversity disprove a fundamental unity? All modern science answers, No. How much of outward resemblance is there between a fish and a philosopher? Is not the difference here as wide as the widest unlikenesses in human belief? Yet Comparative Anatomy, with none to deny its right, includes philosopher and fish in one category: they both belong

to the vertebrate sub-kingdom. See what vast dissimilarities are included in the unity of this vertebrate structure: creatures that swim, creep, walk, fly; creatures with two feet, with four feet, with no feet, with feet and hands, with hands only, with neither feet nor hands; creatures that live in air only, or in water only, or that die at once in water or air; creatures, in fine, more various and diverse than imagination, before the fact, could conceive. Yet, throughout this astonishing, inconceivable variety, science walks in steady perception of a unity extending far toward details of structure. The boor laughs, when told that the forefoot of his horse and his own hand are essentially the same member. A "Positive Philosopher" laughs, when told that through Fetichism and Lutheranism there runs a thread of unity,—that human belief has its law, and may be studied in the spirit of science. But it is more than questionable whether the laugh is on their side.[1]

But our author does not quit this subject without attempting

[1] Comte did, indeed, profess to furnish a central law of belief. It is due, he said, to the tendency of man to flatter his own personality by foisting its image upon the universe. This, however, is but one way of saying that it is wholly gratuitous,—that it has no root in the truth of the world. But universal truth and universal law are the same; and therefore that which arises without having any root in eternal verity is lawless in the deepest possible sense,—lawless not merely as being irregular in its action, but in the deeper and more terrible sense of being in the universe without belonging there. To believe, however, that any product of universal dimensions can be generated, not by the truth of the universe, but by somewhat else, is to believe in a Devil more thoroughly than the creed of any Calvinist allows. But this is quite in character. Comte was perhaps the most superstitious man of his time; superstition runs in the blood of his "philosophy"; and Mr. Buckle, in my opinion, escapes and denounces the black superstitions of ignorance only to fall into the whited superstitions of sciolism.

to adduce a specific instance wherein consciousness proves fallacious. Success, however, could hardly be worse; he fails to establish his point, but succeeds in discrediting either his candor or his discrimination. "Are we not," he says, "in certain circumstances, conscious of the existence of spectres and phantoms; and yet is it not generally admitted that such beings have no existence at all?" Now I should be ashamed to charge a scholar, like Mr. Buckle, with being unaware that consciousness does not apply to any matter which comes properly under the cognizance of the senses, and that the word can be honestly used in such applications only by the last extreme of ignorant or inadvertent latitude. *Conscious* of the existence of spectres! One might as lawfully say he is "conscious" that there is a man in the moon, or that the color of his neighbor's hair is due to a dye. Mr. Buckle is undoubtedly honest. How, then, could he, in strict philosophical discussion, employ the cardinal word in a sense flagrantly and even ludicrously false, in order to carry his point? It is partly to be attributed to his controversial ardor, which is not only a heat, but a blaze, and frequently dazzles the eye of his understanding; but partly it is attributable also to an infirmity in the understanding itself. He shows, indeed, a singular combination of intellectual qualities. He has great external precision, and great inward looseness and slipperiness of mind: so that, if you follow his words, no man's thought can be clearer, no man's logic more firm and rapid in its march; but if you follow strictly the *conceptions*, the clearness vanishes,

and the logic limps, nay, sprawls. It is not merely that he writes better than he thinks, though this is true of him; but the more characteristic fact is that he is a master in the forms of thought and an apprentice in the substance. Read his pages, and you will find much to admire; read under his pages, and you will find much not to admire.

It appears from the foregoing what Mr. Buckle aims to accomplish at the outset. His purpose is to effect a thorough degradation of Personality. Till this is done, he finds no clear field for the action of social law. To discrown and degrade Personality by taking away its two grand prerogatives,—this is his preliminary labor, this is his way of procuring a site for that edifice of scientific history which he proposes to build.

But what an enormous price to pay for the purchase! If there is no kingdom for social law, if there is no place for a science of history, till man is made unroyal, till the glory is taken from his brow, the sceptre from his right hand, and the regal hopes from his heart, till he is made a mere serf and an appanage of that ground and territory of circumstance whereon he lives and labors,—why, then a science of history means much the same with an extinction of history, an extinction of all that in history which makes it inspiring. The history of rats and mice is interesting, but not to themselves,—interesting only to man, and this because he is man; but if men are nothing but rats and mice, pray let them look for cheese, and look out for the cat, and let goose-quills and history alone.

But the truth is that Person and Society are mutually supporting facts, each weakened by any impoverishment of its reciprocal term. Whenever a *real* history of human civilization is written, they will thus appear. And Mr. Buckle, in seeking to empty one term in order to obtain room for the other, was yielding concessions, not to the pure necessities of truth, but to his own infirmity as a thinker.

Having, however, taken the crown and kingdom from Personality, our philosophical Warwick proceeds to the coronation of his favorite autocrat, Society. His final proposition, which indeed is made obscurely, and as far as possible by implication, is this:—

3. *That Society is the Real Source of Individual Action*. A proposition made obscurely, but argued strenuously, and altogether necessary for the completion of his foundation. He attempts proof by reference to the following facts:—that in a given kingdom there occur, year after year, nearly the same number of murders, suicides, and letters mailed without direction, and that marriages are more frequent when food is low and wages high, and so conversely. This is the sum total of the argument on which he relies here and throughout his work: if this proves his point, it is proven; if otherwise, otherwise.

To begin with, I admit the facts alleged. They are overstated; there *is* considerable departure from an exact average: but let this pass. I will go farther, and admit, what no one has attempted to show, that an average in these common and outward matters

proves the like regularity in all that men do and think and feel. This to concentrate attention upon the main question.

And the main question is, What do these regular averages signify? Do they denote the dominancy of a social fate? "Yea, yea," cry loudly the French fatalists; and "Yea, yea," respond with firm assurance Buckle & Co. in England; and "Yea," there are many to say in our own land. Even Mr. Emerson must summon his courage to confront "the terrible statistics of the French statisticians." But I live in the persuasion that these statistics are extremely innocent, and threaten no man's liberty. Let us see.

Take first the instance of forgetfulness. In the United Kingdom some millions of letters are annually mailed; and of these, one in a certain number of thousands, "making allowance," as our author innocently says, "for variation of circumstances," is found to be mailed without a superscription. Now provision for a forgetting is made in every man's individual constitution. Partly for permanent and final forgetting; in this way we get rid of vast quantities of trash, which would suffocate us, if we could not obtain riddance. Partly also for temporary forgetting; by means of which we become oblivious to everything but the matter in hand, and, by a sole concentration upon that, act intensely and efficaciously. Then, as all particular constitutions have their debilities, this provision for temporary obliviousness may become an infirmity, and in some is an habitual and chronic infirmity.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.