

The Enquirer

Reflections On Education, Manners, And Literature. In A Series Of Essays.

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Part I.

Essay I. Of Awakening the Mind

The true object of education, like that of every other moral process, is the generation of happiness.

Happiness to the individual in the first place. If individuals were universally happy, the species would be happy.

Man is a social being. In society the interests of individuals are interwisted with each other, and cannot be separated. Men should be taught to assist each other. The first object should be to train a man to be happy; the second to train him to be useful, that is, to be virtuous.

There is a further reason for this. Virtue is essential to individual happiness. There is no transport equal to that of the performance of virtue. All other happiness, which is not connected with self-approbation and sympathy, is unsatisfactory and frigid.

To make a man virtuous we must make him wise. All virtue is a compromise between opposite motives and inducements. The man of genuine virtue, is a man of vigorous comprehension and long views. He who would be imminently useful, must be eminently instructed. He must be endowed with a sagacious judgment and ardent zeal.

The argument in favour of wisdom or a cultivated intellect, like the argument in favour of virtue, when closely considered, shows itself to be twofold. Wisdom is not only directly a means to virtue; it is also directly a means to happiness. The man of enlightened understanding and persevering ardour, has many sources of enjoyment which the ignorant man cannot reach; and it may at least be suspected that these sources are more exquisite, more solid, more durable and more constantly accessible, than any which the wise man and the ignorant man possess in common.

Thus it appears that there are three leading objects of a just education, happiness, virtue, wisdom, including under the term wisdom both extent of information and energy of pursuit.

When a child is born, one of the earliest purposes of his institution ought to be, to awaken his mind, to breathe a soul into the, as yet, unformed mass.

What may be the precise degree of difference with respect to capacity that children generally bring into the world with them, is a problem that it is perhaps impossible completely to solve.

But, if education cannot do every thing, it can do much. To the attainment of any accomplishment what is principally necessary, is that the accomplishment should be ardently desired. How many instances is it reasonable to suppose there are, where this ardent desire exists, and the means of attainment are clearly and skillfully pointed out, where yet the accomplishment remains finally unattained? Give but sufficient motive, and you have given every thing. Whether the object be to shoot at a mark, or to master a science, this observation is equally applicable.

The means of exciting desire are obvious. Has the proposed object desirably qualities? Exhibit them. Delineate them with perspicuity, and delineate them with ardour. Show your object from time to time under every point of view which is calculated to demonstrate its loveliness. Criticise, commend, exemplify. Nothing is more common than for a master to fail in infusing the passions

into his pupil that he purposes to infuse; but who is there that refuses to confess, that the failure is to be ascribed to the indolence or unskillfulness of the master, to the impossibility of success?

The more inexperienced and immature is the mind of the infant, the greater is its pliability. It is not to be told how early, habits, pernicious or otherwise, are acquired. Children bring some qualities, favourable or adverse to cultivation, into the world with them. But they speedily acquire other qualities in addition to these, and which are probably of more moment than they. Thus a diseased state of body, and still more an improper treatment, the rendering the child, in any considerable degree, either the tyrant or the slave of those around him, my in the first twelve months implant feeds of an ill temper, which in some instances may accompany him through life.

Reasoning from the principles already delivered, it would be a gross mistake to suppose, that the sole object to be attended in the first part of education, is to provide for the present ease and happiness of the individual. An awakened mind is one of the most important purposes of education, and it is a purpose that cannot too soon enter into the views of the preceptor.

It seems probable that early instruction is a thing, in itself considered, of very inferior value. Many of those things which we learn in our youth, it is necessary, if we would well understand, that we should learn over again in our riper years. Many things that, in the dark and unapprehensive period of youth, are attained with infinite labour, may, by a ripe and judicious understanding, be acquired with an effort inexpressibly inferior. He who should affirm, that the true object of juvenile education was to teach no one thing in particular, but to provide against the age of five and twenty a mind well regulated, active, and prepared to learn, would certainly not obtrude upon us the absurdest of paradoxes.

The purpose therefore of early instruction is not absolute. It is of less importance, generally speaking, that a child should acquire this or that species of knowledge, than that, through the medium of instruction, he should acquire habits of intellectual activity. It is not so much for the direct consideration of what he learns, that his mind must not be suffered to lie idle. The preceptor in this respect is like the incloser of uncultivated land; his first crops are not valued for their intrinsic excellence; they are sown that the land may be brought to order. The springs of the mind, like the joints of the body, are apt to grow stiff for want of employment. They must be exercised in various directions and with unabating perseverance. In a word, the first lesson of a judicious education is, Learn to think, to discriminate, to remember and to enquire.

Essay II. Of the Utility of Talents

Doubts have sometimes been suggested as to the desirableness of talents. "Give to a child," it has been frequently said, "good sense and a virtuous propensity; I desire no more. Talents are often rather an injury than a benefit to their possessor. They are a sort of ignis fatuus leading us astray; a fever of the mind incompatible with the sober dictates of prudence. They tempt a man to the perpetration of bold, bad deeds; and qualify him rather to excite the admiration, than promote the interests of society."

This may be affirmed to be a popular doctrine; yet where almost is the affectionate parent who would seriously say, "Take care that my child do not turn out a lad of too much capacity?"

The capacity which it is in the power of education to bestow, must consist principally in information. Is it to be feared that a man should know too much for his happiness? Knowledge for the most part consists in added means of pleasure or enjoyment, and added discernment to select those means.

It ????? be partial, not extensive, information, ????? calculated to lead us astray. The twilight of knowledge bewilders and infuses a false confidence; ????? and perfect day must exhibit things in their true colours and dimensions. The proper cure of mistake, must be to afford me more information; not to take away that which I have.

Talents in general, notwithstanding the exception mentioned in the outset, hold a higher estimation among mankind, than virtues. There are few men who had not rather you should say of them, that they are knaves, than that they are fools. But folly and wisdom are to a great degree relative terms. He who passes for the oracle of an obscure club, would perhaps appear ignorant and confused and vapid and tedious in a circle of men of genius. The only complete protection against the appellation of fool, is to be the possessor of uncommon capacity. A self-satisfied, half-witted fellow, is the most ridiculous of all things.

The decision of common fame, in favour of talents in preference to virtues, is not so absurd as has sometimes been imagined. Talents are the instruments of usefulness. He that has them, is capable of producing uncommon benefit; he that has them not, is destitute even of the power. A tool with a fine edge may do mischief; but a tool that neither has an edge nor can receive it, is merely lumber. Again; the virtues of a weak and ignorant man scarcely deserve the name. They possess it by way of courtesy only. I call such a man good, somewhat in the same as I would call my dog good. My dog seems attached to me; but change his condition, and he would be as much attached to the stupidest dunce, or the most cankered villain. His attachment has no discrimination in it; it is merely the creature of habit. Just so human virtues without discrimination, are no virtues. The weak man neither knows whom he ought to approve nor whom to disapprove. Dazzled by the lustre of uncommon excellence, he is frequently one of the first to defame it. He wishes me well. But he does not know how to benefit me. He does not know what benefit is. He does not understand the nature of happiness or good. He cannot therefore be very zealous to promote it. He applies as much ardour to the thought of giving me a trinket, as to the thought of giving me liberty, magnanimity and independence.

The idea of withholding from me capacity, left I should abuse it, is just as rational, as it would be to shut me up in prison, left by going at large I should be led into mischief.

I like better to be a man than a brute; and my preference is just. A man is capable of giving more and enjoying more. By parity of reason I had rather be a man with talent than a man without. I shall be so much more a man, and less a brute. If it lie in my own choice, I shall undoubtedly say, Give me at least the chance of doing uncommon good, and enjoying pleasures uncommonly various and exquisite. The affairs of man in society are not of so simple a texture, that they require only common talents to guide them. Tyranny grows up by a kind of necessity of nature; oppression discovers itself; poverty, fraud, violence, murder, and a thousand evils follow in the rear. These cannot be extirpated without great discernment and great energies. Men of genius must rise up, to show their brethren that these evils, though familiar, are not therefore the less dreadful, to analyse the machine of human society, to demonstrate how the parts are connected together, to explain the immense chain of events and consequences, to point out the defects and the remedy. It is thus only that important reforms can be produced. Without talents, despotism would be endless, and public misery incessant. Hence it follows, that he who is a friend to general happiness, will neglect no chance of producing in his pupil or his child, one of the long-looked-for favours of the human race.

Essay III. Of the Sources of Genius.

It is a question which has but lately entered into disquisition, whether genius be born with a man or may be subsequently infused. Hitherto it was considered as a proposition too obvious for controversy, that it was born and could not be infused. This is however by no means obvious.

That some differences are born with children cannot be denied. But to what do these differences amount? Look at a newborn infant. How unformed and plastic is his body; how simple the features of his mind!

The features of the mind depend upon perceptions, sensations, pleasure and pain. But the perceptions, the pleasures and pains of a child previous to his birth must make a very insignificant catalogue. If his habits at a subsequent period can be changed and corrected by opposite impressions, it is not probable that the habits generated previous to birth can be inaccessible to alteration.

If therefore there be any essential and decisive difference in children at the period of birth, it must consist in the structure of their bodies, not in the effects already produced upon their minds. The senses or sensibility of one body may be radically more acute than those of another. We do not find however that genius is inseparably connected with any particular structure of the organs of sense. The man of genius is not unfrequently deficient in one or more of these organs; and a very ordinary man may be perfect in them all. Genius however may be connected with a certain state of nervous sensibility originally existing in the frame. Yet the analogy from the external organs is rather unfavourable to this supposition. Dissect a man of genius, and you cannot point out those differences in his structure which constitute him such; still less can you point out original and immutable differences. The whole therefore seems to be a gratuitous assumption.

Genius appears to signify little more in the first instance than a spirit of prying observation and incessant curiosity. But it is reasonable to suppose that these qualities are capable of being generated. Incidents of a certain sort in early infancy will produce them; nay, may create them in a great degree even at a more advanced period. If nothing occur to excite the mind, it will become torpid; if it be frequently and strongly excited, unless in a manner that, while it excites, engenders aversion to effort, it will become active, mobile and turbulent. Hence it follows, that an adequate cause for the phenomenon of genius may be found, in the incidents that occur to us subsequent to birth. Genius, it should seem, may be produced after this method; have we any sufficient reason to doubt of its being always thus produced?

All the events of the physical and intellectual world happen in a train, take place in a certain order. The voluntary actions of men are as the motives which instigate them. Give me all the motives that have excited another man, and all the external advantages he has had to boast, and I shall arrive at an excellence no inferior to his.

This view of the nature of the human mind, is of the utmost importance in the science of education. According to the notions formerly received, education was a lottery. The case would be parallel, if, when we went into battle in defence of our liberties and possessions, ninety-nine in a hundred of the enemy were musket-proof.

It would be instructive speculation to enquire, under what circumstances genius is generated, and whether, and under what circumstances, it may be extinguished.

It should seem that the first indications of genius ordinarily disclose themselves at least as early, as at the age of five years. As far therefore as genius is susceptible of being produced by education, the production of it requires a very early care.

In infancy the mind is peculiarly ductile. We bring into the world with us nothing that deserves the name of habit; are neither virtuous nor vicious, active nor idle, inattentive nor curious. The infant comes into our hands a subject, capable of certain impressions and of being led on to a certain degree of improvement. His mind is like his body. What at first was cartilage, gradually becomes bone. Just so the mind acquires it solidity; and what might originally have been bent in a thousand directions, becomes stiff, unmanageable and unimpressible.

This change however takes place by degrees and probably is never complete. The mind is probably never absolutely incapable of any impressions and habits we might desire to produce. The production grows more and more difficult, till the effecting it becomes a task too great for human strength, and exceeds perhaps the powers and contrivance of the wisest man that ever existed. These remarks may contribute to explain the case of genius breaking out at a late period in an unpromising subject. If genius be nothing more in the first instance than a spirit of prying observation and incessant curiosity, there seems to be no impossibility, though there may be a greatly increased difficulty, in generating it after the period above assigned.

There seems to be a case, more frequent than that of the post-dated genius, though not so much remarked; and not dissimilar to it in its circumstances. This is the case of genius, manifesting itself, and afterwards become extinct. There is one appearance of this kind that has not escaped notice; the degradation of powers of mind sometimes produced in a man for the remainder of his life, by severe indisposition.

But the case is probably an affair of very usual occurrence. Examine the children of peasants. Nothing is more common than to find in them a promise, of understanding, a quickness of observation, an ingenuousness of character, and a delicacy of tact, at the age of seven years, the very traces of which are obliterated at the age of fourteen. The cares of the world fall upon them. They are enlisted at the crimping-house of oppression. They are brutified by immoderate and unintermitted labour. Their hearts are hardened, and their spirits broken, by all that they see, all that they feel, and all that they look forward to. This is one of the most interesting points of view in which we can consider the present order of society. It is the greatest slaughter-house of genius and of mind. It is the unrelenting murderer of hope and gaiety, of the love of reflection and the love of life.

Genius requires great care in the training, and the most favourable circumstances to bring it to perfection. Why should it not be supposed that, where circumstances are eminently hostile, it will languish, sicken, and die?

There is only one remark to be added here, to guard against misapprehension. Genius, it seems to appear from the preceding speculations, is not born with us, but generated subsequent to birth. It by no means follows from hence, that it is the produce of education, or ever was the work of the preceptor. Thousands of impressions are made upon us, for one that is designedly produced. The child receives twenty ideas per diem perhaps from the preceptor; it is not impossible that he may have a million of perceptions in that period, with which the preceptor has no concern. We learn, it may be, a routine of barren lesson from our masters; a circumstance occurs perhaps, in

the intercourse of our companions, or in our commerce with nature, that makes its way directly to the heart, and becomes a fruitful parent of a thousand projects and contemplations.

Essay IV. Of the Sources of Genius.

True philosophy is probably the highest improvement and most defiable condition of human understanding.

But there is an insanity among philosopher, that has brought philosophy itself into discredit. There is nothing in which this insanity more evidently displays itself, than in the rage of accounting for every thing.

Nature well known, no prodigies remain,

Comets are regular, and Wharton plain.

It may be granted that there is much of system in the universe; or, in other words, it must be admitted that a careful observer of nature will be enabled by his experience in many cases, from an acquaintance with the antecedent, to foretel the consequent.

The one billiard-ball strike another in a particular manner, we have a great reason to suppose that the result will be similar to what we have already observed in like instances. If fire be applied to gunpowder, we have great reason to expect an explosion. If the gunpowder be compressed in a tube, and a ball of lead be placed over it nearer the mouth of the tube, we have great reason to suppose that the explosion will expel the ball, and cause it to move in the air in a certain curve. If the event does not follow in the manner we expected, we have great reason to suppose that, upon further examination, we shall find a difference in the antecedents correspondent to the difference in the consequents.

This uniformity of events and power of prediction constitute the entire basis of human knowledge.

But there is a regularity and system in the speculations of philosophers, exceeding any that is to be found in the operations of nature. We are too confident in our own skill, and imagine our science to be greater than it is.

We perceive that the succession of events, but we are never acquainted with any secret virtue, by means of which two events are bound to each other.

If any man were to tell me that, if I pull the trigger of my gun, a swift and beautiful horse will immediately appear starting from the mouth of the tube; I can only answer that I do not expect it, and that it is contrary to the tenor of my former experience. But I can assign no reason, why this is an event intrinsically more absurd, or less likely, than the event I have been accustomed to witness.

This is well known to those who are acquainted with the latest speculations and discoveries of philosophers. It may be familiarly illustrated to the unlearned reader by remarking, that the process of generatino, in consequence of which men and horses are born, has obviously no more perceivable correspondence with that event, than it would have, for me to pull the trigger of a gun.

It was probably this false confidence and presumption among philosophers, that led them indiscriminately to reject the doctrine of instinct among the animal tribes. There is a uniformity in some of the spontaneous actions of animals, and a promptitude in others, which nothing that

has yet been observed in the preceding circumstances would have taught us to expect. In this proposition, that the term instinct, accurately considered, is calculated to express. Instinct is a general name for the species of actions in the animal world, that does not fall under any series of intellectual processes with which we are acquainted.

Innumerable events are in like manner daily taking place in the universe, that do not fall under any of those rules of succession that human science has yet delineated.

The world, instead of being, as the vanity of some men has taught them to assert, a labyrinth of which they hold the clue, is in reality full enigmas which no penetration of man has hitherto been able to solve.

The principles mentioned, which affirms that we are never acquainted with any secret virtue by means of which two events are bound to each other, is calculated to impress upon us a becoming humility in this respect.

It teaches us that we ought not to be surprised, when we see one event regularly succeeding another, where we suspected least of what is apprehended by the vulgar as a link of connection between them. If our eyes were open, and our prejudices dismissed, we should perpetually advert to an experience of this sort.

That the accidents of body and mind should regularly descend from father to son, is a thing that daily occurs, yet is little in correspondence with the systems of our philosophers.

How small a share, accurately speaking, has the father in the production of the son? How many particles is it possible should proceed from him, and constitute a part of the body of the child descended from him? Yet how many circumstances they possess in common?

It has sometimes been supposed that the resemblance is produced by the intercourse which takes place between them after their birth. But this is an opinion which the facts by no means authorise us to entertain.

The first thing which may be mentioned as descending from father to son in his complexion; fair, if a European; swarthy or black, if a negro. Next, the son frequently inherits a strong resemblance to his father's distinguishing features. He inherits diseases.

He often resembles him in stature. Persons of the same family are frequently found to live to about the same age. Lastly, there is often a striking similarity in their temper and disposition.

It is easy to perceive how these observations will apply to the question of genius. If so many other things be heritable, why may not talents so also? They have a connection with many of the particulars above enumerated; and especially there is a very intimate relation between a man's disposition and his portion of understanding. Again; whatever is heritable, a man must bring into the world with him, either actually, or in the seminal germ from which it is afterwards to be unfolded. Putting therefore the notion of inheritance out of the question, it should seem that complexion, features, diseases, stature, age, and temper, may be, and frequently are, born with a man. Why may not then his talents in the same sense be born with him?

Is this argument decisive against the generability of talents in the human subject, after the period of birth?

It is the madness of philosophy only, that would undertake to account for every thing, and to trace out the process by which every event in the world is generated. But let us beware of falling into the opposite extreme. It will often happen that events, which at first sight appear least to associate with that regularity and that precise system to which we are accustomed, will be found upon a minuter and more patient inspection really to belong to it. It is the madness of philosophy to circumscribe the universe within the bounds of our narrow system; it is the

madness of ignorance to suppose that ever thing is new, and of a species totally dissimilar from what we have already observed.

That a man brings a certain character into the world with him, is a point that must readily be conceded. The mistake is to suppose that he brings an immutable character.

Genius is wisdom; the possessing a great store of ideas, together with a facility in calling them up, and a peculiar discernment in their selection or rejection. In what sense can a new born child be esteemed wise?

He may have a certain predisposition for wisdom. But it can scarcely be doubted that every child, not peculiarly defective in his make, is susceptible of the communication of wisdom, and consequently, if the above definition be just, of genius.

The character of a man is incessantly changing.

One of the principal reasons why we are so apt to impute the intellectual differences of men to some cause operating prior to their birth, is that we are so little acquainted with the history of the early years of men of talents. Slight circumstances at first determined their propensities to this or that pursuit. These circumstances are irrevocably forgotten, and we reason upon a supposition as if they never existed.

When the early life of a man of talents can be accurately traced, these circumstances generally present themselves to our observation.

The private memoirs of Gibbon the historian have just been published. In them we are able to trace the considerable accuracy the progress of his mind. While he was at college, he became reconciled to the Roman Catholic faith. By this circumstance he incurred his father's displeasure, who banished him to an obscure situation in Switzerland, where he was obliged to live upon a scanty provision, and was far removed from all the customary amusements of men of birth and fortune. If this train of circumstances had not taken place, would he ever have been the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire? Yet how unusual were his attainments in consequence of these events, in learning, in acuteness of research, and intuition of genius!

Circumstances decide the pursuits in which we shall engage. These pursuits again generate the talents that discover themselves in our progress.

We are accustomed to suppose something mysterious and supernatural in the case of men of genius.

But, if we will dismiss the first astonishment of ignorance, and descend to the patience of investigation, we shall probably find that it falls within the ordinary established course of human events.

If a man produce a work of uncommon talents, it is immediately supposed that he has been through life an extraordinary creature, that the stamp of divinity was upon him, that a circle of glory, invisible to profane eyes, surrounded his head, and that every accent he breathed contained an indication of his elevated destiny.

It is no such thing.

When a man writes a book of methodical investigation, he does not write because he understands the subject, but he understands the subject because he has written. He was an uninstructed tyro, exposed to a thousand foolish and miserable mistakes, when he began his work, compared with the degree of proficiency to which he has attained, when he has finished it.

He who is now an eminent philosopher or a sublime poet, was formerly neither the one nor the other. Many a man has been overtaken by a premature death, and left nothing behind him but compositions worthy of ridicule and contempt, who, if he had lived, would perhaps have risen

to the highest literary eminence. If we could examine the school-exercises of men who have afterwards done honour to mankind, we should often find them inferior to those of their ordinary competitors. If we could dive into the portfolios of their early youth, we should meet with abundant matter for laughter at their senseless incongruities, and for contemptuous astonishment.

There is no "divinity that hedges" the man of genius. There is no guardian spirit that accompanies him through life. If you tell me that you are one of those who are qualified to instruct and guide mankind, it may be that I admit it; but I may reasonably ask, When did you become so, and how long has this been your character?

There is no man knows better than the man of talents, that he was a fool for there is no man that finds in the records of his memory such astonishing disparities to contract with each other. He can recollect up to what period he was jejune, and, and up to what period he was dull. He can call to mind the innumerable errors of speculation he has committed, that would almost disgrace an idiot. His life divides itself in his conception into distinct periods, and he has said to himself ten times in his course, From such a time I began to live ; the mass of what went before, was too poor to be recollected with complacence. In reality each of these stages was an improvement upon that which went before; and it is perhaps only at the last of them that he became, what the ignorant vulgar supposed he was from the moment of his birth.

Essay V. Of an Early Taste for Reading.

The first indications of genius disclose themselves at a very early period. A sagacious observer of the varieties of intellect, will frequently be able to pronounce with some confidence upon a child of tender years, that he exhibits marks of future eminence in eloquence, invention or judgment.

The embryon seed that contains in it the promise of talent, if not born with a man, ordinarily takes its station in him at no great distance from the period of birth. The mind is then, but rarely afterwards, in a state to receive and to foster it.

The talents of the mind, like the herbs of the ground, seem to distribute themselves at random. The winds disperse from one spot to another the invisible germs; they take root in many cases without a planter; and grow up without care or observation.

It would be truly worthy of regret, if chance, so to speak, could do that, which all the sagacity of man was unable to effect * ; if the distribution of the noblest ornament of our nature, could be subjected to no rules, and reduced to no system.

He that would extend in this respect the province of education, must proceed, like the improvers of other sciences, by experiment and observation. He must watch the progress of the dawning mind, and discover what it is that gives it its first determination.

The sower of seed cannot foretell which seed shall fall useless to the ground, destined to wither and to perish, and which shall take root, and display the most exuberant fertility. As among the seeds of the earth, so among the perceptions of the human mind, some are reserved, as it were, for instant and entire oblivion, and some, undying and immortal, assume an importance never to be superseded. For the first we ought not to torment ourselves with an irrational anxiety; the last cannot obtain from us an attention superior to their worth.

There is perhaps nothing that has a greater tendency to decide favourably or unfavourably respecting a man's future intellect, than the question whether or not he be impressed with an early taste for reading.

Books are the depositary of every thing that is most honourable to man. Literature, taken in all its bearings, forms the grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal kingdoms. He that loves reading, has every thing within his reach. He has but to desire ; and he may possess himself of every species of wisdom to judge, and power to perform.

The chief point of difference between the man of talent and the man without, consists in the different ways in which their minds are employed during the same interval. They are obliged, let us suppose, to walk from Temple-Bar to Hyde-Park-Corner. The dull man goes straight forward ; he has so many furlongs to traverse. He observes if he meets any of his acquaintance; he enquires respecting their health and their family. He glances perhaps the shops as he passes; he admires the fashion of a buckle, and the metal of a tea-urn. If he experience any flights of fancy, they are of a short extent; of the same nature as the flights of a forest-bird, clipped of his wings, and condemned to pass the rest of his life in a farm-yard. On the other hand the man of talent gives full scope to his imagination. He laughs and cries. Unindebted to the suggestions of surrounding objects,

his whole soul is employed. He enters into nice calculations; he digests sagacious reasonings. In imagination he declaims or describes, impressed with the deepest sympathy, or elevated to the loftiest rapture. He makes a thousand new and admirable combinations. He passes through a thousand imaginary scenes, tries his courage, tasks his ingenuity, and thus becomes gradually prepared to meet almost any of the many-coloured events of human life. He consults by the aid of memory the books he has read, and projects others for the future instruction and delight of mankind. If he observe the passengers, he reads their countenances; conjecture their past history, and forms a superficial notion of their wisdom or folly, their virtue or vice, their satisfaction or misery. If he observe the scenes that occur, it is with the eye of a connoisseur or an artist. Every object is capable of suggesting to him a volume of reflections. The time of these two persons in one respect resembles; it has brought them both to Hyde-Park-Corner. In almost every other respect it is dissimilar.

What is it that tends to generate these very opposite habits of mind?

Probably nothing has contributed more than an early taste for reading. Books gratify and excite our curiosity in innumerable ways. They force us to reflect. They hurry us from point to point. They present direct ideas of various kinds, and they suggest indirect ones. In a well-written book we are presented with the maturest reflections, or the happiest flights, of a mind of uncommon excellence. It is impossible that we can be much accustomed to such companions, without attaining some resemblance of them. When I read Thomson, I become Thomson; when I read Milton, I become Milton. I find myself a sort of intellectual camelion, assuming the colour of the substances on which I rest. He that revels in a well-chosen library, has innumerable dishes, and all of admirable flavour. His taste is rendered so acute, as easily to distinguish the nicest shades of difference. His mind becomes ductile, susceptible to every impression, and gaining new refinement from them all. His varieties of thinking baffle calculation, and his powers, whether of reason or fancy, become eminently vigorous.

Much seems to depend in this case upon the period at which the taste for reading has commenced. If it be late, the mind seems frequently to have acquired a previous obstinacy and untractableness. The late reader makes a superficial acquaintance with his author, but is never admitted into the familiarity of a friend. Stiffness and formality are always visible between them. He does not become the creature of his author; neither bends with all his caprices, nor sympathises with all his sensations. This mode of reading, upon which we depend for the consummation of our improvement, can scarcely be acquired, unless we begin to read with pleasure at a period too early for memory to record, lisp the numbers of the poet, and in our unpractised imagination adhere to the letter of the moralising allegorist. In that case we shall soon be induced ourselves to “build” the unpolished “rhyme*,” and shall act over in fond imitation the scenes we have reviewed.

An early taste for reading, though a most promising indication, must not be exclusively depended on. It must be aided by favourable circumstances, or the early reader may degenerate into an unproductive pedant, or a literary idler. It seemed to appear in a preceding essay, that genius, when ripened to the birth, may yet be extinguished. Much more may the materials of genius suffer an untimely blight and terminate in an abortion. But what is most to be feared, is that some adverse gale should hurry the adventurer a thousand miles athwart into the chaos of laborious slavery, removing him from the genial influence of a tranquil leisure, or transporting him to a dreary climate where the half-formed blossoms of hope shall be irremediably destroyed
*. That the mind may expatiate in its true element, it is necessary that it should become neither

the victim of labour, nor the slave of terror, discouragement, and disgust. This is the true danger ; as to pedantry, it may be questioned whether it is the offspring of early reading, or not rather of a taste for reading taken up at a late and inauspicious period.

Essay VI. Of the Study of the Classics.

A Question which has of late given rise to considerable discussion, is, whether the study of the classics ought to form a part of the education of youth? In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the very proposal of such a question would have been regarded as a sort of blasphemy; classical learning was regarded as the first of all literary accomplishments. But in the present day inquisitive and active spirits are little inclined to take any thing upon trust; prescription is not admitted as giving any sanction in matters of opinion ; no practice, that is not fastened upon us by decrees and penalties, can hope to maintain its full measure of influence in civil society, except so far as it can be supported by irrefragable arguments.

An obvious ground of presumption in favour of classical learning will suggest itself in tracing its history. The study of the Latin and Greek authors will scarcely be thought to deserve this appellation, so long as their language was the vernacular tongue of those who studied them. Classical learning then may be said to have taken its rise in the fifteenth century, at which time the human mind awoke from a slumber that threatened to be little less than eternal. The principal cause of this auspicious event was the study of the classics. Suddenly men were seized with the desire of rescuing them from the oblivion into which they had fallen. It seemed as if this desire had arisen just in time to render its gratification not impracticable. Some of the most valuable remains of antiquity now in our possession, were upon the point of being utterly lost. Kings and princes considered their recovery as the most important task in which they could be engaged; scholars travelled without intermission, drawn from country to country by the faintest hope of encountering a classical manuscript; and the success of their search afforded a more guiltless, but not a less envied triumph, than the defeat of armies and the plunder of millions. The most honoured task of the literati of that day, was the illustration of an ancient author; commentator rose upon commentator ; obscurities were removed; precision acquired ; the Greek and Roman writers were understood and relished in a degree scarcely inferior to the improvement and pleasure derived from them by their contemporaries; nor were they only perused with avidity, their purity and their beauties were almost rivalled at the distance of almost fifteen hundred years.

Such is the history of one of the most interesting areas in the annals of mankind. We are indebted to the zeal, perhaps a little extravagant and enthusiastic, of the revivers of letters, for more than we can express. If there be in the present age any wisdom, any powers of reasoning, any acquaintance with the secrets of nature, any refinement of language, any elegance of composition, any love of all that can adorn and benefit the human race, this is the source from which they ultimately flowed. From the Greek and Roman authors the moderns learned to thin. While they investigated with unconquerable perseverance the ideas and sentiments of antiquity, the seculence of their own understanding subsided. The shackles of superstition loosened. Men were no longer shut up in so narrow boundaries; nor benumbed in their faculties by the sound of one eternal monotony. They saw; they examined; they compared. Intellect assumed new courage,

shook its daring wings, and essayed a bolder flight. Patience of investigation was acquired. The love of truth displayed itself, and the love of liberty.

Shall we then discard that, to which our ancestors owed every thing they possessed? Do we not fear lest, by removing the foundations of intellect, we should sacrifice intellect itself? Do we not fear lest, by imperceptible degrees, we should bring back the dark ages, and once again plunge our species in eternal night?

This however, though a plausible, is not a strict and logical argument in favour of classical learning; and if unsupported by direct reasoning, ought not probably to be considered as deciding the controversy. The strongest direct arguments are probably as follow.

They will be found to apply with the most force to the study of Latin.

The Latin authors are possessed of uncommon excellence. One kind of excellence they possess, which is not to be found in an equal degree in the writers of any other country: an exquisite skill in the use of language; a happy selection of words; a beautiful structure of phrase; a transparency of style; a precision by which they communicate the strongest sentiments in the directest form in a word, every thing that relates to the most admirable polish of manner. Other writers have taken more licentious flights, and produced greater astonishment in their readers. Other writers have ventured more fearlessly into unexplored regions, and cropped those beauties which hang over the brink of the precipice of deformity. But it is the appropriate praise of the best Roman authors, that they scarcely present us with one idle and excrescent clause, that they continually convey their meaning in the choicest words. Their lines dwell upon our memory; their sentences have the force of maxims, every part vigorous, and seldom any thing that can be changed but for the worse. We wander in a scene where every thing is luxuriant, yet every thing vivid, graceful and correct.

It is commonly said, that you may read the works of foreign authors in translations. But the excellencies above enumerated are incapable of being transfused. A diffuse and voluminous author, whose merit consists chiefly in his thoughts, and little in the manner of attiring them, may be translated. But who can translate Horace? who endure to read the translation? Who is there, acquainted with him only through this medium, but listens with astonishment and incredulity to the encomiums he has received from the hour his poems were produced?

The Roman historians are the best that ever existed. The dramatic merit and the eloquence of Livy; the profound philosophy of Sallust; the rich and solemn pencil of Tacitus, all ages of the world will admire; but no historian of any other country has ever been able to rival.

Add to this, that the best ages of Rome afford the purest models of virtue that are any where to be met with. Mankind are too apt to lose sight of all that is heroic, magnanimous and public-spirited. Modern ages have formed to themselves a virtue, rather polished, than sublime, that consists in petty courtesies, rather than in the tranquil grandeur of an elevated mind. It is by turning to Fabricius, and men like Fabricius, that we are brought to recollect what human nature is, and of what we are capable. Left to ourselves, we are apt to sink into effeminacy and apathy.

But, if such are the men with whose actions it is most our interest to familiarise ourselves, we cannot do this so successfully as by studying them in the works of their countrymen. To know them truly, we must not content ourselves with viewing them from a distance, and reading them in abridgment. We must watch their minutest actions, we must dwell upon their every word. We must gain admission among their confidants, and penetrate into their secret souls. Nothing is so wretched a waste of time as the study of abridgments.

If it be allowable to elucidate the insufficiency of the modern writers of ancient history by instances, it might be remarked, that Rollin takes care repeatedly to remind his reader that the virtues of the heathens were only so many specious vices, and interlards his history with an exposition of the prophecies of Daniel; that Hooke calumniates all the greatest characters of Rome to exalt the reputation of Caesar; and that Mitford and Gillies are at all times ready to suspend their narrative for a panegyric upon modern despotism. No persons seem to have been more utter strangers to that republican spirit which is the source of our noblest virtues, than those moderns who have assumed to be the historiographers of the ancient republics.

A second argument in favour of the study of the Latin classics may be thus stated. Language is the great medium of communication among mankind. He that desires to instruct others, or to gain personal reputation, must be able to express himself with perspicuity and propriety. Most of the misunderstandings which have existed, in sentiment or in science, may be traced to some obscurity or looseness of expression as their source. Add to this, that the taste of mankind is so far refined, that they will not accept an uncouth and disgustful lesson, but require elegance and ornament. One of the arts that tend most to the improvement of human intellect, is the art of language; and he is no true friend to his species, who would suffer them from neglect to fall back, from their present state of advancement in this respect, into a barbarous and undisciplined jargon.

But it is perhaps impossible to understand one language, unless we are acquainted with more than one. It is by comparison only that we can enter into the philosophy of language. It is by comparison only that we separate ideas, and the words by which those ideas are ordinarily conveyed. It is by collating one language with another, that we detect all the shades of meaning through the various inflections of words, and all the minuter degradations of sense which the same word suffers, as it shall happen to be connected with different topics. He that is acquainted with only one language, will probably always remain in some degree the slave of language. From the imperfectness of his knowledge, he will feel himself at one time seduced to say the thing he did not mean, and at another time will fall into errors of this sort without being aware of it. It is impossible he should understand the full force of words. He will sometimes produce ridicule, where he intended to produce passion. He will search in vain for the hidden treasures of his native tongue. He will never be able to employ it in the most advantageous manner. He cannot be well acquainted with its strength and its weakness. He is uninformed respecting its true genius and discriminating characteristics. But the man who is competent to and exercised in the comparison of languages, has attained to his proper elevation. Language is not his master, but he is the master of language. Things hold their just order in his mind, ideas first, and then words. Words therefore are used by him as the means of communicating or giving permanence to his sentiments; and the whole magazine of his native tongue is subjected at his feet.

The science of etymology has been earnestly recommended, as the only adequate instrument for effecting the purpose here described; and undoubtedly it is of high importance for the purpose of enabling us more accurately to judge of the value of the words we have occasion to employ. But the necessity and the use of etymology have perhaps been exaggerated. However extensive are own researches, we must stop somewhere; and he that has traced a word halfway to its source, is subject to a portion of the same imperfection, as he that knows nothing of it beyond the language in which he has occasion to use it. It is here perhaps as in many other intellectual acquisitions; the habit of investigating, distinguishing and subtilising, is of more importance than any individual portions of knowledge we may chance to have accumulated. Add to which, that the immediate

concern of the speaker or writer, is not with the meaning his words bore at some distant period or the materials of which they are compounded, but with the meaning that properly belongs to them according to the purest standard of the language he uses. Words are perpetually fluctuating in this respect. The gradations by which they change their sense are ordinarily imperceptible; but from age to age their variations are often the most memorable and surprising. The true mode therefore of becoming acquainted with their exact force, is to listen to them in the best speakers, and consider them as they occur in the best writers that have yet appeared.

Latin is indeed a language that will furnish you with the etymology of many of our own words; but it has perhaps peculiar recommendations as praxis in the habits of investigation and analysis. Its words undergo an uncommon number of variations and inflections. Those inflections are more philosophically appropriated, and more distinct in their meaning, than the inflections of any language of a more ancient date. As the words in Latin composition are not arranged in a philosophical or natural order, the mind is obliged to exert itself to disentangle the chaos, and is compelled to yield an unintermitted attention to the inflections. It is therefore probable that the philosophy of language is best acquired by studying this language. Practice is superior to theory., and this science will perhaps be more successfully learned, and more deeply imprinted, by the perusal of Virgil and Horace, than by reading a thousand treatises on universal grammar.

Example seems to correspond to what is here stated. Few men have written English with force and propriety, who have been wholly unacquainted with the learned languages. Our finest writers and speakers have been men who amused themselves during the whole of their lives with the perusal of the classics. Nothing is generally more easy than to discover by his style, whether a man has been deprived of the advantages of a literary education.

A further argument in favour of the study of the Latin language, may be deduced from the nature of logic, or the art of thinking. Words are of the utmost importance to human understanding. Almost all the ideas employed by us in matters of reasoning have been acquired by words. In our most retired contemplations we think for the most part in words; and upon recollection can in most cases easily tell in what language we have been thinking. Without words, uttered, or thought upon, we could not probably carry on any long train of deduction. The science of thinking therefore is little else than the science of words. He that has not been accustomed to refine upon words, and discriminate their shades of meaning, will think and reason after a very inaccurate and slovenly manner. He that is not able to call his idea by various names, borrowed from various languages, will scarcely be able to conceive his idea in a way precise, clear and unconfused. If therefore a man were confined in a desert island, and would never again have occasion so much as to hear the sound of his own voice, yet if at the same time he would successfully cultivate his understanding, he must apply himself to a minute and persevering study of words and language.

Lastly, there is reason to believe that the study of Latin would constitute a valuable part of education, though it were applied to no practical use, and were to be regarded as an affair of intellectual discipline only.

There are two qualities especially necessary to any considerable improvement of human understanding; an ardent temper, and a habit of thinking with precision and order. The study of the Latin language is particularly conducive to the production of the last of these qualities.

In this respect the study of Latin and of geometry might perhaps be recommended for a similar reason. Geometry it should seem would always form a part of a liberal course of studies* It has its direct uses and its indirect. It is of great importance for the improvement of mechanics and the

arts of life. It is essential to the just mastery of astronomy and various other eminent sciences. But its indirect uses are perhaps of more worth than its direct. It cultivates the powers of the mind, and generates the most excellent habits. It eminently conduces to the making man a rational being, and accustoms him to a closeness of deduction, that is not easily made the dupe of ambiguity, and carries on an eternal war against prejudice and imposition.

A similar benefit seems to result from the study of language and its inflections. All here is in order. Every thing is subjected to the most inflexible laws. The mind therefore which is accustomed to it, acquires habits of order, and of regarding things in a state of clearness, discrimination and arrangement.

The discipline of mind here described is of inestimable value. He that is not initiated in the practice of close investigation, is constantly exposed to the danger of being deceived. His opinions have no standard; but are entirely at the mercy of his age, his country, the books he chances to read, or the company he happens to frequent. His mind is a wilderness.

It may contain excellent materials, but they are of no use. They oppress and choak one another. He is subject to a partial madness. He is unable to regulate his mind, and sails at the mercy of every breath of accident or caprice. Such a person is ordinarily found incapable of application or perseverance. He may form brilliant projects; but he has neither the resolution nor the power to carry any of them to its completion.

All talent may perhaps be affirmed to consist in analysis and dissection, the turning a thing on all sides, and examining it in all its variety of views. An ordinary man sees an object just as it happens to be presented to him, and sees no more. But a man of genius takes it to pieces, enquires into its cause and effects, remarks its internal structure, and considers what would have been the result, if its members had been combined in a different way, or subjected to different influences. The man of genius gains a whole magazine of thought, where the ordinary man has received only one idea; and his powers are multiplied in proportion to the number of ideas upon which they are to be employed. Now there is perhaps nothing that contributes more eminently to this subtilising and multiplication of mind, than an attention to the structure of language.

In matters of science and the cultivation of the human mind it is not always sufficiently attended to, that men are often essentially benefited by processes, through which they have themselves never actually passed, but which have been performed by their companions and contemporaries. The literary world is an immense community, the intercourse of whose members is incessant; and it is very common for a man to derive eminent advantage from studies in which he was himself never engaged. Those inhabitants of any of the enlightened countries of Europe, who are accustomed to intellectual action, if they are not themselves scholars, frequent the society of scholars, and thus become familiar with ideas, the primary source of which is only to be found in an acquaintance with the learned languages. If therefore we would make a just estimate of the loss that would be incurred by the abolition of classical learning, we must not build our estimate upon persons of talent among ourselves who have been deprived of that benefit. We “must suppose the indirect, as well as the direct improvement that arises from this species of study, wholly banished from the face of the earth.

Let it be taken for granted that the above arguments sufficiently establish the utility of classical learning; it remains to be determined whether it is necessary that it should form a part of the education of youth. It may be alleged, that, if it be a desirable acquisition, it may with more propriety be made when a man is arrived at years of discretion, that it will then be made with less expence of labour and time, that the period of youth ought not to be burdened with so

vexatious a task, and that our early years may be more advantageously spent in acquiring the knowledge of things, than of words.

In answer to these objections it may however be remarked, that it is not certain that, if the acquisition of the rudiments of classical learning be deferred to our riper years, it will ever be made. It will require strong inclination and considerable leisure. A few active and determined spirits will surmount the difficulty; but many who would derive great benefit from the acquisition, will certainly never arrive at it.

Our early years, it is said, may be more advantageously spent in acquiring the knowledge of things, than of words. But this is by no means so certain as at first sight it may appear. If you attempt to teach children science, commonly so called, it will perhaps be found in the sequel that you have taught them nothing. You may teach them, like parrots, to repeat, but you can scarcely make them able to weigh the respective merits of contending hypotheses. Many things that we go over in our youth, we find ourselves compelled to recommence in our riper years under peculiar disadvantages. The grace of novelty they have for ever lost. We are encumbered with prejudices with respect to them; and, before we begin to learn, we must set ourselves with a determined mind to unlearn the crude mass of opinions concerning them that were once laboriously inculcated on us. But in the rudiments of language, it can scarcely be supposed that we shall have any thing that we shall see reason to wish obliterated from our minds.

The period of youth seems particularly adapted to the learning of words. The judgment is then small; but the memory is retentive. In our riper years we remember passions, facts and arguments; but it is for the most part in youth only that we retain the very words in which they are conveyed. Youth easily contents itself with this species of employment, especially where it is not inforced with particular severity. Acquisitions, that are insupportably disgusting in riper years, are often found to afford to young persons no contemptible amusement.

It is not perhaps true that, in teaching languages to youth, we are imposing on them an unnecessary burthen. If we would produce right habits in the mind, it must be employed. Our early years must not be spent in lethargic indolence. An active maturity must be preceded by a busy childhood. Let us not from a mistaken compassion to infant years, suffer the mind to grow up in habits of inattention and irresolution.

If the study of the classics have the effect above ascribed to it, of refining and multiplying the intellectual powers, it will have this effect in a greater degree, the earlier it is introduced, and the more pliable and ductile is the mind that is employed on it. After a certain time the mind that was neglected in the beginning, grows awkward and unwieldy. Its attempts at alertness and grace are abortive. There is a certain slowness and stupidity that grow upon it. He therefore that would enlarge the mind and add to its quantity of existence, must enter upon his task at an early period.

The benefits of classical learning would perhaps never have been controverted, if they had not been accompanied with unnecessary rigours. Children learn to dance and to fence, they learn French and Italian and music, without its being found necessary to beat them for that purpose. A reasonable man will not easily be persuaded that there is some mysterious quality in classical learning that should make it an exception to all other instances.

There is one observation arising from the view here taken on the subject, that probably deserves to be stated. It has often been said that classical learning is an excellent accomplishment in men devoted to letters, but that it is ridiculous, in parents whose children are destined to more ordinary occupations, to desire to give them a superficial acquaintance with Latin, which in the

sequel will infallibly fall into neglect. A conclusion opposite to this, is dictated by the preceding reflections. We can never certainly foresee the future destination and propensities of our children. But let them be taken for granted in the present argument, yet, if there be any truth in the above reasonings, no portion of classical instruction, however small, need be wholly lost. Some refinement of mind and some clearness of thinking will almost infallibly result from grammatical studies. Though the language itself should ever after be neglected, some portion of a general science has thus been acquired, which can scarcely be forgotten. Though our children should be destined to the humblest occupation, that does not seem to

be a sufficient reason for our denying them the acquisition of some of the most fundamental documents of human understanding.

Essay VII. Of Public and Private Education.

Innumerable are the discussions that have originated in the comparative advantages of public and private education. The chief benefit attendant on private instruction seems to be the following.

There is no motive more powerful in its operations upon the human mind, than that which originates in sympathy. A child must labour under peculiar disadvantages, who is turned loose among a multitude of other children, and left to make his way as he can, with no one strongly to interest himself about his joys or his sorrows, and no one eminently concerned as to whether he makes any improvement or not. In this unanimating situation, alone in the midst of a crowd, there is great danger that he should become sullen and selfish. Knowing nothing of his species, but from the austerity of discipline or the shock of contention, he must be expected to acquire a desperate sort of firmness and inflexibility. The social affections are the chief awakeners of man. It is difficult for me to feel much eagerness in the pursuit of that, by which I expect to contribute to no man's gratification or enjoyment. I cannot entertain a generous complacency in myself, unless I find that there are others that set a value on me. I shall feel little temptation to the cultivation of faculties in which no one appears to take an interest. The first thing that gives spring and expansion to the infant learner, is praise; not so much perhaps because it gratifies the appetite of vanity, as from a liberal satisfaction in communicated and reciprocal pleasure. To give pleasure to another produces in me the most animated and unequivocal consciousness of existence. Not only the passions of men, but their very judgments, are to a great degree the creatures of sympathy. Who ever thought highly of his own talents, till he found those talents obtaining the approbation of his neighbour? Who ever was satisfied with his own exertions, till they had been sanctioned by the suffrage of a bystander? And, if this skepticism occur in our maturest years, how much more may it be expected to attend upon inexperienced childhood? The greatest stimulus to ambition is for me to conceive that I am fitted for extraordinary things ; and the only mode perhaps to inspire me with self-value, is for me to perceive that I am regarded as extraordinary by another. Those things which are censured in a child, he learns to be ashamed of; those things for which he is commended, he contemplates in himself with pleasure. If therefore you would have him eagerly desirous of any attainment, you must thoroughly convince him that it is regarded by you with delight.

This advantage however of private education it is by no means impossible in a great degree to combine with public. Your child may be treated with esteem and distinction in the intervals of his school education, though perhaps these can scarcely follow him when he returns to the roof of instruction. Praise, to produce its just effect, ought not to be administered in too frequent doses.

On the other hand, there is an advantage in public education similar in its tendency to that just described. Private education is almost necessarily deficient in excitements. Society is the true awakener of man ; and there can be little true society, where the disparity of disposition is so great as between a boy and his preceptor. A kind of lethargy and languor creeps upon this species

of studies. Why should he study? He has neither rival to surpass, nor companion with whom to associate his progress. Praise loses its greatest charm when given in solitude. It has not the pomp and enchantment, that under other circumstances would accompany it. It has the appearance of a cold and concerted stratagem, to entice him to industry by indirect considerations. A boy, educated apart from boys, is a sort of unripened hermit, with all the gloom and lazy-pacing blood incident to that character.

A second advantage attendant upon public education, will be explained by the observation, that a real scholar is seldom found to be produced in any other way. This is principally owing to the circumstance that, in private education, the rudiments are scarcely ever so much dwelt upon ; the inglorious and unglittering foundations are seldom laid with sufficient care. A private pupil is too much of a man. He dwells on those things which can be made subjects of reasoning or sources of amusement; and escapes from the task of endless repetition. But public education is less attentive and complaisant to this species of impatience. Society cheers the rugged path, and beguiles the tediousness of the way. It renders the mechanical part of literature supportable.

Thirdly, public education is best adapted for the generation of a robust and healthful mind. All education is despotism. It is perhaps impossible for the young to be conducted without introducing in many cases the tyranny of implicit obedience. Go there; do that; read ; write; rise ; lie down ; will perhaps for ever be the language addressed to youth by age. In private education there is danger that this superintendence should extend to too many particulars. The anxiety of individual affection watches the boy too narrowly, controls him too much, renders him too poor a slave. In public education there is comparative liberty. The boy knows how much of his time is subjected to his task-master, and how much is sacredly his own. "Slavery, disguise it as we will, is a bitter draught;" and will always excite a mutinous and indignant spirit. But the most wretched of all slaveries is that which I endure alone; the whole weight of which falls upon my own shoulders, and in which I have no fellow-sufferer to share with me a particle of my burthen. Under this slavery the mind pusillanimously shrinks. I am left alone with my tyrant, and am utterly hopeless and forlorn. But, when I have companions in the house of my labour, my mind begins to erect itself. I place some glory in bearing my sufferings with an equal mind. I do not feel annihilated by my condition, but find that I also am something. I adjust the account in my own mind with my task-master, and say, Thus far you may proceed; but there is a conquest that you cannot achieve. The control exercised in private education is a contention of the passions; and I feel all the bitterness of being obliged unmurmuring to submit the turbulence of my own passions to the turbulence of the passions of my preceptor. Anger glows in the breast of both the contending parties; my heart pants with indignation against the injustice, real or imaginary, that I endure; in the final triumph of my Brobdingnagian persecutor I recognise the indulgence of hatred and revenge. But in the discipline of a public school I submit to the inflexible laws of nature and necessity, in the administration of which the passions have little share. The master is an object placed in too distant a sphere for me to enter into contention with him. I live in a little world of my own of which he is no member; and I scarcely think more of quarrelling with him, than a sailor does of bearing malice against a tempest.

The consequences of these two modes of education are usually eminently conspicuous, when the scholar is grown up into a man. The pupil of private education is commonly either awkward and silent, or pert, presumptuous and pedantical. In either case he is out of his element, embarrassed with himself, and chiefly anxious about how he shall appear. On the contrary, the pupil of public education usually knows himself, and rests upon his proper centre. He is easy and frank,

neither eager to show himself, nor afraid of being observed. His spirits are gay and uniform. His imagination is playful, and his limbs are active. Not engrossed by a continual attention to himself, his generosity is ever ready to break out; he is eager to fly to the assistance of others, and intrepid and bold in the face of danger. He has been used to contend only upon a footing of equality; or to endure suffering with equanimity and courage. His spirit therefore is unbroken; while the man, who has been privately educated, too often continues for the remainder of his life timid, incapable of a ready self-possession, and ever prone to prognosticate ill of the contentions in which he may unavoidably be engaged.

We shall perhaps perceive a still further advantage in public education, if we reflect that the scene which is to prepare us for the world, should have some resemblance to the world. It is desirable that we should be brought in early life to experience human events, to suffer human adversities, and to observe human passions. To practise upon a smaller theatre the business of the world, must be one of the most desirable sources of instruction and improvement. Morals cannot be effectually taught, but where the topics and occasions of moral conduct offer themselves.

A false tenderness for their children sometimes induces parents to wish to keep them wholly unacquainted with the vices, the irregularities and injustice of their species. But this mode of proceeding seems to have a fatal effect. They are introduced to temptation unprepared, just in that tumultuous season of human life when temptation has the greatest power. They find men treacherous, deceitful and selfish; they find the most destructive and hateful purposes every where pursued; while their minds, unwarned of the truth, expected universal honesty. They come into the world, as ignorant of every thing it contains, as uninstructed in the scenes they have to encounter, as if they had passed their early years in a desert island. Surely the advantages we possess for a gradual initiation of our youth in the economy of human life, ought not to be neglected. Surely we ought to anticipate and break the shock, which might otherwise persuade them that the lessons of education are an antiquated legend, and the practices of the sensual and corrupt the only practices proper to men.

The objections to both the modes of education here discussed are of great magnitude. It is unavoidable to enquire, whether a middle way might not be selected, neither entirely public, nor entirely private, avoiding the mischiefs of each, and embracing the advantages of both. This however is perhaps a subordinate question, and of an importance purely temporary. We have here considered only the modes of education at this time in practice. Perhaps an adventurous and undaunted philosophy would lead to the rejecting them altogether, and pursuing the investigation of a mode totally dissimilar. There is nothing so fascinating in either, as should in reason check the further excursions of our understanding*.

Essay VIII. Of the Happiness of Youth.

A Subject upon which the poets of all ages have delighted to expatiate, is the happiness of youth.

This is a topic which has usually been handled by persons advanced in life. I do not recollect that it has been selected as a theme for description by the young themselves.

It is easy to perceive why the opinion upon which it proceeds, has been so generally entertained.

The appearance of young persons is essentially gratifying to the eye. Their countenances are usually smooth; unmarked “with wrinkles, unfurrowed by time. Their eye is sprightly and roving. Their limbs elastic and active. Their temper kind, and easy of attachment. They are frank and inartificial; and their frankness shows itself in their very voice. Their gaiety is noisy and obtrusive. Their spirits are inexhaustible; and their sorrows and their cares are speedily dismissed. Such is frequently the appearance of youth. Are they happy? Probably not.

A reasonable man will entertain a suspicion of that eulogium of a condition, which is always made by persons at a distance from it, never by the person himself.

I never was told, when a boy, of the superior felicity of youth, but my heart revolted from the assertion. Give me at least to be a man!

Children, it is said, are free from the cares of the world. Are they without their cares? Of all cares those that bring with them the greatest consolation, are the cares of independence.

There is no more certain source of exultation, than the consciousness that I am of some importance in the world. A child usually feels that he is nobody. Parents, in the abundance of their providence, take good care to administer to them the bitter recollection. How suddenly does a child rise to an enviable degree of happiness, who feels that he has the honour to be trusted and consulted by his superiors?

But of all the sources of unhappiness to a young person the greatest is a sense of slavery. How grievous the insult, or how contemptible the ignorance, that tells a child that youth is the true season of felicity, when he feels himself checked, controled, and tyrannised over in a thousand ways? I am rebuked; and my heart is ready to burst with indignation. A consciousness of the power assumed over me, and of the unsparing manner in which it is used, is intolerable. There is no moment free from the danger of harsh and dictatorial interruption ; the periods, when my thoughtless heart began to lose the sense of its dependence, seem of all others most exposed to it. There is no equality, no reasoning, between me and my task-master. If I attempt it, it is considered as mutiny. If it be seemingly conceded, it is only the more cutting mockery. He is always in the right; right and power in these trials are found to be inseparable companions. I despise myself for having forgotten my misery, and suffered my heart to be deluded into a transitory joy. Dearly indeed, by twenty years of bondage, do I purchase the scanty portion of liberty, which the government of my country happens to concede to its adult subjects !

The condition of a negro-slave in the West Indies, is in many respects preferable to that of the youthful son of a free-born European. The slave is purchased upon a view of mercantile

speculation; and, when he has finished his daily portion of labour, his master concerns himself no further about him. But the watchful care of the parent is endless. The youth is never free from the danger of its grating interference.

If he be treated with particular indulgence, and made what is called a spoiled child, this serves in some respects to aggravate the misery of occasional control. Deluded with the phantom of independence, he feels with double bitterness that he is only bound in fetters of gold.

Pain is always more vividly remembered than pleasure, and constitutes something more substantial in my recollections, when I come to cast up the sum of my life.

But not only are the pains of youth more frequent and galling, their pleasures also are comparatively slight and worthless. The greatest pleasures of which the human mind is susceptible, are the pleasures of consciousness and sympathy. Youth knows nothing of the delights of a refined taste; the softest scenes of nature and art, are but lines and angles to him. He rarely experiences either self-complacency or self-approbation. His friendships have for the most part no ardour, and are the mere shadows and mimicry of friendship. His pleasures are like the frisking and frolic of a calf.

These pleasures however, which have so often been the subject of lying exaggeration, deserve to be stated with simplicity and truth. The organs of sense are probably in a state of the greatest sensibility in an early period of life. Many of their perceptions are heightened at years of maturity, by means of the association of ideas, and of the manner in which ideas of sense and ideas of intellect are melted into a common mass. But the simple pleasures of sense, that is, as many of them as are within the reach of youth, are at that age most exquisitely felt. This is particularly obvious in the pleasures of the palate. The case is the same with simple sounds, light, colours, and every thing that agreeably impresses the organs of sight.

Another circumstance conducive to the pleasures of youth, is the pliability and variableness of their minds.

In the case of the adult, circumstances make a durable impression. The incidents that happen in the morning, modify my temper through the whole course of the evening. Grief does not easily yield its place to joy. If I have suffered today from the influence of unjust control, my temper becomes embittered. I sit down in thoughtful silence, and abhor to be amused. What has once strongly seized the affections, either of exultation or sorrow, does not easily loosen its grasp, but pertinaciously retains its seat upon my heart.

In young persons it is otherwise. Theirs is the tear, in many instances at least, "forgot as soon as shed." Their minds are like a sheet of white paper, which takes any impression that it is proposed to make upon it. Their pleasures therefore are, to a great degree, pure and unadulterated. This is a circumstance considerably enviable.

The drawbacks to which it is subject, are, first, that their pleasures are superficial and worthless. They scarcely ever swell and elevate the mind. Secondly, they are pleasures which cannot, to a child of any sagacity, when reflected upon and summed together, constitute happiness. He sees that he was pleased, only because he was seduced to forget himself. ^When his thoughts return home, he is pleased no longer. He is perhaps indignant against himself for having suffered so gross a delusion. He abhors the slavery that constitutes his lot, and loaths the nothingness of his condition.

Those persons have made a satire of life, but a satire impotent and nugatory, who have represented youth as the proper season of joy. Though the world is a scene full of mixture and alloy, it is yet not so completely an abortion as this sentiment would represent it. If you ask men in

general, whether they regard life as a blessing, they will perhaps hesitate: but they will recollect some feelings of exultation, some moments in which they felt with internal pride what it was to 'exist, and many of them will hereby be induced to pronounce in favour of life. But who can suppose himself a child, and look with exultation upon that species of existence? The principal sources of manly pleasure probably are, the feeling that we also are of some importance and account, the conscious power of conforming our actions to the dictates of our own understanding, an approving sense of the rectitude of our determinations, and an affectionate and heroic sympathy in the welfare of others. To every one of these young persons are almost uniformly strangers.

This is probably a fair and impartial view of the pleasures and pains of the young. It would be highly unjust to suppose that the adult who inflict these pains, are generally actuated by malignity. In some instances, where the miscarriage has been most complete, the kindness and disinterested zeal of its author has been eminent. But kindness and disinterested zeal must be in a great measure nugatory, where the methods pursued are founded in error. If the condition of the young is to be pitied, the condition of those who superintend them, is sometimes equally worthy of compassion. The object of true philosophy will never be to generate the hateful passions ; it enters impartially into the miseries of the tyrant and the slave. The intention therefore of these speculations, ought to be considered as that of relieving, at once, the well-meaning, but misguided oppressor, and the unfortunate and helpless oppressed.

Considerations, such as we are here discussing, may indeed terrify the timid and cowardly parent or instructor; they will not have that effect upon the generous and the wise. Such is the condition of terrestrial existence. We cannot move a limb without the risk of destroying animal life, and, which is worse, producing animal torture. We cannot exist without generating evil. The more active and earnest we are, the more mischief shall we effect. The wisest legislator, the most admirable and exemplary author, has probably, by his errors, occasioned a greater sum of private misery, than ever flowed from the agency of any supine and torpid, however worthless, individual. We must therefore steel ourselves against this inevitable circumstance of our lot; and exert our understandings in sober deliberation, to discover how we may be made authors of the greatest overbalance of good.

But, some will say, this depressing condition of human life, ought carefully to be concealed from us, not obtruded upon our view.

The brave man will never shrink from a calm and rational responsibility. Let us put him in the place of the instructor in question; he will say to his pupil, I know I shall occasion you many calamities ; this with all my diligence and good will I cannot avoid. But I will endeavour to procure for you a greater sum of happiness than it is probable any other person, who should be substituted in my place, would do; I will endeavour ultimately to render you wise, and virtuous, and active, and independent, and self-approving, and contented.

There is a very obvious reason why such discussions as that in which we are engaged, if pursued with an adventurous and scrutinising spirit, should have an appearance of partiality, and seem to espouse the cause of the young against the adult. There are certain modes of education established in society; these are open to our inspection ; we may investigate them with accuracy and minuteness. The hypothetical modes which appear in speculation to have some advantages over them, are for the most part yet untried; we cannot follow them in their detail; we have often but an imperfect view of their great outline. Defects therefore we can point out with confidence, while it is only in an obscure and ambiguous style that we can discourse of their remedies.

In treating on the subject of education, it must of course be against the instructor, not his pupil, that we must direct our animadversions. The pupil is the clay in the hands of the artificer; I must expostulate with him, not with his materials. Books of education are not written to instruct the young how they are to form their seniors, but to assist the adult in discovering how to fashion the youthful mind.

It would be peculiarly unfortunate, if documents, the object of which is to improve education, and consequently to inspire the adult with new ardour, should be judged to have a discouraging tendency. Instructors indeed, as we now find them, are too often unworthy and unamiable; but instruction is not on that account a less generous and lofty task. It is incident alike to the professors of every art to enumerate difficulties and unfold them; to show how "Alps on Alps arise," in opposition to the daring adventurer. Having done so, they must always in a considerable degree leave him to surmount the obstacles for himself. Language is adequate to the first of these objects ; it sinks under the delicacy and individualities of the second. The groveling and feeble-hearted are consequently discouraged; they desert the vocation they hastily chose. But the courage of the generously ambitious is by this means elevated to its noblest height.

Essay IX. Of the Communication of Knowledge.

In what manner would reason, independently of the received modes and practices of the world, teach us to communicate knowledge?

Liberty is one of the most desirable of all sublunary advantages. I would willingly therefore communicate knowledge, without infringing, or with as little as possible violence to, the volition and individual judgment of the person to be instructed.

Again; I desire to excite a given individual to the acquisition of knowledge. The only possible method in which I can excite a sensitive being to the performance of a voluntary action, is by the exhibition of motive.

Motives are of two sorts, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motives are those which arise from the inherent nature of the thing recommended. Extrinsic motives are those which have no constant and unalterable connection with the thing recommended, but are combined with it by accident or at the pleasure of some individual.

Thus, I may recommend some species of knowledge by a display of the advantages which will necessarily attend upon its acquisition, or flow from its possession. Or, on the other hand, I may recommend it despotically, by allurements or menaces, by showing that the pursuit of it will be attended with my approbation, and that the neglect of it will be regarded by me with displeasure.

The first of these classes of motives is unquestionably the best. To be governed by such motives is the pure and genuine condition of a rational being. By exercise it strengthens the judgment. It elevates us with a sense of independence. It causes a man to stand alone, and is the only method by which he can be rendered truly an individual, the creature, not of implicit faith, but of his own understanding.

If a thing be really good, it can be shown to be such. If you cannot demonstrate its excellence, it may well be suspected that you are no proper judge of it. Why should not I be admitted to decide, upon that which is to be acquired by the application of my labor?

Is it necessary that a child should learn a thing before it can have any idea of its value? It is probable that there is no one thing that it is of eminent importance for a child to learn. The true object of juvenile education, is to provide, against the age of five and twenty, a mind well regulated, active, and prepared to learn¹. Whatever will inspire habits of industry and observation, will sufficiently answer this purpose. Is it not possible to find something that will fulfill these conditions, the benefit of which a child shall understand, and the acquisition of which he may be taught to desire? Study with desire is real activity: without desire it is but the semblance and mockery of activity. Let us not, in the eagerness of our haste to educate, forget all the ends of education.

The most desirable mode of education therefore, in all instances where it shall be found sufficiently practicable, is that which is careful that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded

¹ See the close of Essay I

and accompanied by desire. The best motive to learn, is a perception of the value of the thing learned. The worst motive, without deciding whether or not it be necessary to have recourse to it, may well be affirmed to be constraint and fear. There is a motive between these, less pure than the first, but not so displeasing as the last, which the teacher may have annexed to it.

According to the received modes of education, the master goes first, and the pupil follows. According to the method here recommended, it is probable that the pupil should go first, and the master follow².

If I learn nothing but what I desire to learn, what should hinder me from being my own preceptor?

The first object of a system of instructing, is to give the pupil a motive to learn. We have seen how far the established systems fail in this office.

The second object is to smooth the difficulties which present themselves in the acquisition of knowledge.

The method of education here suggested is incomparably the best adapted to the first of these objects. Its is sufficiently competent to answer the purposes of the last.

Nothing can be more happily adapted to remove the difficulties of instruction, than that the pupil should first be excited to desire knowledge, and next that his difficulties should be solved for him, and his path cleared, as often and as soon as he thinks proper to desire it.

This plan is calculated entirely to change the face of education. The whole formidable apparatus which has hitherto attended it, is swept away. Strictly speaking, no such characters are left upon the scene as either preceptor or pupil. The boy, like the man, studies, because he desires it. He proceeds upon a plan of his own. Every thing bespeaks independence and equality. The man, as well as the boy, would be glad in cases of difficulty to consult a person more informed than himself. That the boy is accustomed almost always to consult the man, and not the man the boy, is to be regarded rather as an accident, than anything essential. Much even of this would be removed, if we remembered that the most inferior judge may often, by the varieties of his apprehension, give valuable information to the most enlightened. The boy, however, should be consulted by the man unaffectedly, not according to any preconcerted scheme, or for the purpose of persuading him that he is what he is not.

There are three considerable advantages which would attend upon this species of education.

First, liberty. Three fourths of the slavery and restraint that are now imposed upon young persons would be annihilated at a stroke.

Secondly, the judgment would be strengthened by continual exercise. Boys would no longer learn their lessons after the manner of parrots. No one would learn without a reason, satisfactory to himself, why he learned; and it would perhaps be well, if he were frequently prompted to assign his reasons. Boys would then consider for themselves, whether they understood what they read. To know when and how to ask a question is no contemptible part of learning. Sometimes they would pass over difficulties, and neglect essential preliminaries; but then the nature of the thing would speedily recall them, and induce them to return to examine the tracts which before had been overlooked. For this purpose it would be well that the subjects of their juvenile studies

² To some persons this expression may be ambiguous. The sort of "going first" and "following" here censured, may be compared to one person's treading over a portion of ground, and another's coming immediately after, treading in his footsteps. The adult must undoubtedly be supposed to have acquired their information before the young; and they may at proper intervals incite and conduct their diligence, but not so as to supersede in them the exercise of their own discretion.

should often be discussed, and that one boy should compare his progress and his competence to decide in certain points with those of another. There is nothing that more strongly excites our inquiries than this mode of detecting our ignorance.

Thirdly, to study for ourselves is the true method of acquiring habits of activity. The horse that goes round a mill, and the boy that is anticipated and led by the hand in all his acquirements, are not active. I do not call a wheel that turns round fifty times in a minute, active. Activity is a mental quality. If therefore you would generate habits of activity, turn the boy loose in the fields of science. Let him explore the path for himself. Without increasing his difficulties, you may venture to leave him for a moment, and suffer him to ask himself the question before he receives the information. Far be it from the system here laid down, to increase the difficulties to youth. No, it diminishes them a hundred fold. Its office is to produce inclination; and a willing temper makes every burthen a light.

Lastly, it is the tendency of this system to produce in the young, when they are grown up to the stature of men, a love of literature. The established modes of education produce the opposite effect, unless in a fortunate few, who by the celerity of their progress, and the distinctions they obtain, perhaps escape from the general influence. But in the majority of cases, the memory of our slavery becomes associated with the studies we pursued, and it is not till after repeated struggles, that those things can be rendered the objects of our choice, which were for so long a time the themes of compulsion. This is particularly unfortunate, that we should conquer with much labor and application the difficulties that beset the entrance of literature, and then should quit it when perhaps, but for this unfortunate association, the obstacles were all smoothed, and the improvement to be made was attended through all its steps with unequivocal delight.

There is but one considerable objection that seems to oppose all these advantages. The preceptor is terrified at the outset, and says, How shall I render the labors of literature an object of desire, and still more how shall I maintain this desire in all its vigor, in spite of the discouragements that will daily occur, and in spite of the quality incident to almost every human passion, that its fervor disappears in proportion as the novelty of the object subsides?

But let us not hastily admit this for an insuperable objection. If the plan here proposed augments the difficulties of the teacher in one particular point, let it be remembered that it relieves him from an insufferable burthen in other respects.

Nothing can be more pitiable than the condition of the instructor in the present modes of education. He is the worst of slaves. He is consigned to the severest of imprisonments. He is condemned to be perpetually engaged in handling and rehandling the foundations of science. Like the unfortunate wretch upon whom the lot has fallen in a city reduced to extremities, he is destroyed, that others may live. Among all the hardships he is compelled to suffer, he endeavors to console himself with the recollection that his office is useful and patriotic. But even this consolation is a slender one. He is regarded as a tyrant by those under his jurisdiction, and he is a tyrant. He mars their pleasures. He appoints to each his portion of loathed labor. He watches their irregularities and their errors. He is accustomed to speak to them in tones of dictation and censure. He is the beadle to chastise their follies. He lives alone in the midst of a multitude. His manners, even when he goes into the world, are spoiled with the precision of pedantry and the insolence of despotism. His usefulness and his patriotism therefore, have some resemblance to those of a chimney-sweeper and a scavenger, who, if their existence is of any benefit to mankind, are however rather tolerated in the world, than thought entitled to the testimonies of our gratitude and esteem.

[missing essays X-XVI of Part 1]

Part II.

Essay I. Of Riches and Poverty.

There is nothing that deserves to be more minutely watched, than may be styled an intemperate spirit of philosophy.

The sect that carried this spirit to the most ridiculous extreme among the ancients, were the stoics.

One of the decisions of this spirit is, that riches are no benefit, and poverty no evil.

If this maxim were true, particularly the latter member, in its utmost extent, the chief amendment in favour of political reform and amendment would be utterly false.

The reverse of this maxim, it should seem, ought to be received. Poverty is an enormous evil. By poverty I understand the state of a man possessing no permanent property, in a country where wealth and luxury have already gained a secure establishment.

He then that is born to poverty, may be said, under another name, to be born a slave.

A boy of a thoughtful and reflecting turn, will frequently look forward in this respect to the state of a manhood, with an aching heart. Now, he will exclaim, I am maintained by the industry of others; I am freed from all solicitude about the supply of tomorrow. But hereafter I shall be told, you shall not have necessaries of the day without the labour of the day; "He that will not work, neither shall he eat¹." His state in several respects resembles the prophetic denunciation of Jesus Christ to the apostle Peter: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."² In reality however, the child and the adult are both slaves in different ways: when we put on the manly gown we only change one species of despot for another.

But, it will be asked, is not the complaint here recited, unreasonable and unjust? Is any man entitled to claim through life, that he should be maintained by the industry of others?

Certainly not. The injustice I suffer is not in the actual labour, but in the quantity of that labour. If no man were absolutely compelled to perform a greater share of labour than, multiplied by the number of members in the community, was necessary for the subsistence of the community, he would have no right to complain on that account. But the labour then required, would be diminished to a tenth, perhaps a twentieth part of the labour now imposed upon the husbandman and artificer.³

The evil of poverty particularly consists of the following particulars: leaving out of the enumeration the frequently experienced insufficiency of labour to maintain the poor; the usual accident of men's being thrust out of their customary train (sic) of industry and resource for bread by the fluctuations of society; and the want of a suitable provision for the sickness, infirmity and age.

We will confine ourselves to points of more universal application.

¹ II Thes. Chap. iii, ver. 10.

² John, Chap. xi, ver. 18.

³ Political Justice, Book VIII, Chap. VI, octavo edition.

First, the abridgment of life, and the privation of the enjoyment of life.

As to the abridgment of life we are scarcely competent judges, since wealth, expended in sensuality and indulgence, is scarcely less inimical to the protraction of existence. Every one can see however, that inordinate labour produces untimely decrepitude. Everyone can conceive of the varieties of pain and disease, which accrue from the restraint of our limbs, the intemperate exercise of the muscles, and a continual exposure to the inclemency of the seasons.

That the poor are peculiarly subjected to a privation of the enjoyments of life, and obliged to content themselves for the greater part of their existence with that negative happiness which consists in the absence of pain, is a point too evident to need illustration.

Secondly, the poor are condemned to a want of that leisure which is necessary for the improvement of the mind. They are the predestined victims of ignorance and prejudice. They are compelled for the most part to rank with those creatures, that exist only for a few years, and then are as if they had never been. They merely vegetate. The whole of the powers they possess, is engaged in the pursuit of the miserable expedients to protract their existence. Whatever be the prejudice, the weakness of the superstition of their age and country, they have scarcely any chance to escape from it. It is melancholy to reflect, how few moments they can have complacency, of exultation, of honest pride, or of joy. Theirs is a neutral existence. They go forward with their heads bowed down to the earth, in a mournful state of inanity and torpor. Yet, like the victims of Circe, they have the understanding left ever and anon to afford them a glimpse of what they might have been. In this respect they are more unfortunate than the beasts.

Thirdly, even those who escape from the general sentence of ignorance, are haunted with the ills of poverty in another shape. Leisure well employed is the most invaluable benefit than can fall to the lot of man. If they have had leisure to accumulate the rudiments of knowledge, they have not the leisure to construct them. Even if their immediate avocation have something in it analogous to the cultivation of intellect still they are not carried whither they would, but whither they would not. Wherever almost we find the records of talents and genius, we find a man impelled by accident, hurried by necessity and the noblest conceptions of his mind rendered abortive by the ills of fortune. There is no plant that requires to be so assiduously tended, and so much favoured by every incidental and subordinate circumstance, as the effusions of fancy, and the divorces of science.

While such appear to me the genuine effects of poverty, never will I insult the sacred preference of its victims, by telling them that poverty is no evil!

Hence also we may be led to perceive the mistake of those persons who affirm, that the wants which are of the first necessity, are inconsiderable, and are easily supplied.

No; that is not the inconsiderable, which cannot be purchased but by the sacrifice of the best part of my time, and the first fruit of my labours.

This is the state of society at the period in which I am born into the world. I cannot remedy the evil and therefore must submit to it. I ought to work up my mind to endure it with courage; I should yield with a cheerful and active temper to the inequality of my burthen; but it is neither necessary nor desirable that I should be indefensible to the true state of the case.

Addison ludicrously exclaims in his tragedy of Cato:

What pity 'tis

That we can die but once to serve our country!

If the condition of human life corresponded indeed with this patriotic wish, a man might content himself to pass through (sic) one of its repetitions under the pressure of great disadvantages. But, when we recollect that we appear but once upon this theatre, that our life is short and precarious, that we rise out of nothing, and that, when we die, we “pass a bourne from which no traveller returns⁴,” we cannot but deeply regret, that our exertions are so many ways fettered and drawn aside from their true direction, and that the life we would improve for happiness or for honour, is almost inevitably rendered in a great degree abortive.

The genuine wealth of man is leisure, when it meets with a disposition to improve it. All other riches are of petty and inconsiderable value.

Is there not a state of society practicable, in which leisure shall be made the inheritance of every one of its members?

⁴ Shakespeare.

Essay II. Of Avarice and Profusion.

Which character deserves our preference, the man of avaricious habits, or of profuse ones? Which of the two conducts himself in the manner most beneficial to society? Which of the two is actuated by motives the most consonant to justice and virute?

Riches and poverty are in some degree necessarily incidental to the social existence of man. There is no alternative, but that men must either have their portion of labour assigned them by the society at large, and the produce collected into a common flock; or that each man must be left to exert the portion of industry, and cultivate the habits of economy, to which his mind shall prompt him.

The first of these modes of existence deserves our fised disapprobation.¹ It is a state of slavery and imbecility. It reduces the exertions of a human being to the level of a piece of mechanism, prompted by no personal motives, compensated and alleviated by no genuine passions. It puts an end to that independence and individuality, which are the genuine characteristics of an intellectual existence, and without which nothing eminently honourable, generous or delightful can in any degree subsist.

Inequality therefore being to a certain extent unavoidable, it is the provinces of justice and virtue to counteract the practical evils which inequality has a tendency to produce. It is certain that men will differ from each other in their degrees of industry and economy. But it is not less certain, that the wants of one man are similar to the wants of another, and that the same things will conduce to the improvement and happiness of each, except so far as either is corrupted by the oppressive and tyrannical condition of the society in which he is born. The nature of man requires, that each man should be trusted with a discretionary power. The principles of virtue require, that the advantages existing in any community should be equally administered; or that the inequalities which inevitably arise, should be repressed, and kept down within as narrow limits as possible.

Does the conduct of the avaricious man, or of the man of profusion, best contribute to this end?

That we may try the question in the most impartial manner, we will set out of the view the man who subjects himself to the expences which he is unable to discharge. We will suppose it is admitted, that the conduct of the man, whose proceedings tend to a continual accumulation of debt, in eminently pernicious. It does not contribute to his own happiness. It drives him to the perpetual practice of subterfuges. It obliges him to treat men, not according to their wants or their merits, but according to their importunity. It fixes on him an ever gnawing anxiety that poisons all his pleasures. He is altogether a stranger to that genuine lightness of heart, which characterises the man at ease, and that man of virtue. Care has placed her brand conspicuous (sic) on his brow. He is subject to occasional paroxysms of anguish which no luxuries or splendour

¹ Political Justice, Book VIII, Chap. II octavo edition.

can compensate. He accuses the system of nature of poisonous infection, but the evil is in his own system of conduct.

The pains he suffers in himself are the obvious counterpart of the evils he inflicts upon others. He might have foreseen the effects of his own conduct, and that foresight might have taught him to avoid it. But foresight was in many instances to them impracticable. They suffer, not in consequence of their own extravagance. They cannot take to themselves the miserable consolation, that, if now they are distressed, they have at least lavished their money themselves, and had their period of profusion and riot.

There is no reason to be found in the code of impartial justice, why one man should work, while another man is idle. Mechanical and daily labour is the deadliest foe to all that is great and admirable in the human mind. But the Spedthrift is not merely content, that other men should labour, while he is idle. They have reconciled themselves to that. They have found that, though unjust in itself, they cannot change the system of political society; and they submit to their lot. They console themselves with recollection of the stipulated compensation of their labours. But he is not satisfied that they should labour for his gratification: he obliges them to do this gratuitously; he trifles with their expectations; he baffles their hopes; he subjects them to a long succession of tormenting uncertainties. They labour indeed; but they do not consume the commodities they produce, nor derive the smallest advantage from their industry. "We have laboured; and other men have entered into the fruits of our labours."²

Setting therefore out of the question the man

[missing 172–239]

² John, Chap. iv. ver. 38

Essay VI. Of Self-Denial.

The greatest of all human benefits, that at least without which no other benefit can be truly enjoyed, is independence.

He who lives upon the kindness of another; must always have a greater or less portion of a servile spirit. He has not yet come to feel what man is. He has not yet essayed the muscles of his mind, and observed the sublimity of his nature. True energy, the self-conscious dignity of the man, who thinks not of himself otherwise than he ought to think, but enjoys in sober perception the certainty of his faculties, are sentiments to which he is a stranger. He knows not what shall happen tomorrow, for his resources are out of himself. But the man that is not provided for tomorrow, cannot enjoy today. He must either have a trembling apprehension of sublunary vicissitude, or he must be indebted for his repose to the lethargy of his soul.

The question relative to the establishment and maintenance of independence, is intimately connected with the question relative to our taste for, and indulgence in, the luxuries of human life.

Various are the opinions that have been held upon the latter of these topics.

One of these opinions has been carried to its furthest extreme by certain sects of religionists.

Their doctrine is commonly known by the appellation of self-denial. The postulate upon which it principally proceeds, is that of the superiority of the mind to the body. There is an obvious distinction between intellectual pleasures and sensible ones. Either of them taken, in any great degree, tends to exclude the other. The man who is engrossed in contemplation, will, without expressly intending it, somewhat macerate his body. The man who studies without restraint the gratifications of appetite, will be in danger of losing the activity of his minds the delicacy of his intellectual tact, and the generosity of his spirit.

There must be a superiority in favour, either of intellectual pleasures, or of sensible ones. But that man's mind must surely be of an unfortunate construction, who can hesitate to prefer the former to the latter. That which we possess in common with the brutes, is not of so great value, as that which we possess distinctively to ourselves. That man must possess the surest, the most extensive and the most resined sources of happiness, whose intellect is cultivated with science, and purified by taste, is warmed with the ardour of genius, and exalted by a spirit of liberality and benevolence. There can be no comparison between this man, and the glutton, the epicure or the debauchee¹.

The inference drawn from these premises by the persons whose system we are here considering, is as follows. Sensible pleasures are to be avoided, when they tend to impair the corporeal faculties. They are to be avoided when they tend to the injury of our neighbours, or are calculated to produce in ourselves habits of stratagem and deceit. Thus far all systems of morality and rational conduct are agreed. But the preachers of self-denial add to these limitations, a prohibition to the frequent indulgence of sensible pleasures, from the danger of suffering ourselves, to set too

¹ Political Justice, Book IV, Chap. XI, octavo edition.

great a value upon them, and to postpone the best and most elevated, to the meanest, part of our natures.

Having assumed this new principle of limitation, there is no visionary and repulsive extreme to which these sectaries have not in some instances proceeded. They have regarded all sensible pleasure as a deduction from the purity and dignity of the mind, and they have not abstained from invective against intellectual pleasure itself. They have taught men to court persecution and calamity. They have delighted to plant thorns in the path of human life. They have represented sorrow, anguish and mortification as the ornaments and honour of our existence. They have preached the vanity and emptiness of all earthly things, and have maintained that it was unworthy of a good man and a wife to feel complacency in any of the sensations they can afford.

These notions may sufficiently accord with the system of those who are willing to part with all the benefits of the present scene of existence, in exchange for certain speculations upon the chances of a world to come. But they cannot enter into any liberal and enlightened system of morality. Pleasure or happiness is the sole end of morality. A less pleasure is not to be bartered but for a greater, either to ourselves or others, nor a scheme attended with the certainty or probability of considerable pleasure for an air-built speculation. Dismissing therefore these extravagant dogmas, it remains to enquire how far we ought to sacrifice or restrain the empire of sensible pleasures, for the sake of contributing to the substantial improvement of the better part of our nature.

There are obvious reasons why this restraint is not to be too severely imposed.

It is a mistake to suppose that sensible pleasures and intellectual ones are by any means incompatible. He that would have great energy, cannot perhaps do better than to busy himself in various directions, and to cultivate every part of his nature. Man is a little world within himself, and every portion of that world is entitled to attention. A wise man would wish to have a sound body, as well as a sound mind. He would wish to be a man at all points. For this purpose he would exercise and strengthen the muscles of every part of his frame. He would prepare his body to endure hardship and vicissitude. He would exercise his digestic powers. He would cultivate the delicacy of the organs of taste. He would not neglect the sensations, the affociaions, and the involuntary processes and animal economy annexed to the commerce of the sexes. There is a harmony and a sympathy through every part of the human machine. A vigorous and animated tone of body contributes to the advantage, of the intellect, and an improved state of intellect heightens and refines our sensible pleasures. A modern physician of great character², has maintained life to be an unnatural state, and death the genuine condition of man. If this thesis is to be admitted, it seems to follow, that true wisdom would direct us to that proceeding, which tended most to inform with life, and to maintain in activity, every portion of our frame and every branch of our nature. It is thus that we shall most effectually counterwork an enemy who is ever in wait for us.

Another argument in favour of a certain degree of attention to be paid to, and cultivation, to be bestowed upon, sensible pleasures, is, that the sensations of our animal frame make an important part of the materials of our knowledge. It is from sense that we must derive those images which so eminently elucidate every department of science. One of the great objects both of natural science and morality, is to judge of our sensible impressions. The man who had not yielded a due attention to them, would, in vain attempt to form an enlightened judgment in the very question

² Brown.

we are here attempting to discuss. There is a vast variety of topics that he would be disqualified to treat of or to estimate.

Add to this, that all our resined and abstracted notions are compounded from ideas of sense. There is nothing so elevated and pure, but it was indebted to this source for its materials. He therefore who would obtain vividness in his ideas of intellect, ought probably to maintain with care the freshness and vigour of his ideas of sense.

It seems to be owing to this that we find, for the most part, the rustic, flow of apprehension, and unsusceptible of discernment; while it is only from the man who maintains, not only the health of his body, but the delicacy and vividness of his corporeal tact, that we ordinarily expect delicacy of taste, brilliancy of imagination, or profoundness of intellectual discussion.

Having endeavoured to ascertain the benefits to be derived from delicacy and activity in our external senses, let us recur to the direct part of the question, how far the improvement of the better part of our nature, demands from us a sacrifice of, or a restraint to be improved on, sensible pleasure. In the first place, if, as we have already endeavoured to prove, intellectual pleasures are entitled to a preference over sensible ones, they are of course also entitled to be first considered in the arrangement of our time, and to occupy the choicest part of our life. Nothing can be more contemptible, than the man who dedicates all, the energies of his mind to the indulgence of his appetites. They may, comparatively speaking, if we may be allowed the expression, be thrust, up in a corner, and yet enjoy scope enough for every valuable purpose. It is more necessary that we should not proscribe them, than that we should make them one of the eminent pursuits of our lives.

Secondly, we ought not only to confine them within limits considerably narrow, as to the time they should occupy, but should also be careful that they do not confound and inebriate our understandings. This is indeed necessary, in order to the keeping them in due subordination in the respect last mentioned. If they be not held in subjection as to their place in our thoughts, they will speedily usurp upon all other subjects, and convert the mind into a scene of tumult and confusion. Intellectual and elevated pursuits demand from us a certain calmness of temper; that the mind should rest upon its proper centre, that it should look round with steadiness and freedom, that it should be undisturbed by the intrusion of thoughts foreign to the present object of its attention, and that it should be capable of a severe and obstinate investigation of the point under review.

A further reason for moderation in our appetite for sensible pleasure, not less important than any other that can possibly be assigned is that which was alluded to in the commencement of this essay, the preservation of our independence.

The man who is anxious to maintain his independence, ought steadily to, bear in mind how few are the wants of a human being. It is by our wants that we are held down, and linked in a thousand ways, to human society. They render the man who is devoted to them, the slave of every creature that breathes. They make all the difference between the hero and the coward. The man of true courage is he who, when duty and public good demand it, can cheerfully dispense with innumerable gratifications. The coward is he who, wedded to particular indulgences and a certain mode of life, is not able so, much as to think with equanimity of the being deprived of them.

*Hunc folem, et stellas, & decedentia certis
Tempora momentis, funt qui, formidine nulla,
Imbuti, spectent,*³.

HOR.

POPE.

Such undoubtedly is the characteristic of genuine virtue. It teaches us to look upon events, not absolutely with indifference, but at least with tranquillity. It instructs us to enjoy the benefits which we have, and prepares us for what is to follow. It smiles upon us in the midst of poverty and adverse circumstances. It enables us to collect and combine the comforts which a just observer may extract from the most untoward situation, and to be content.

The weakness which too many are subject to in regard to the goods of fortune, puts them to a certain degree in every man's power. It is of little consequence how virtuous may be a man's personal inclinations, if he be inordinately sensible to the presence or absence of the accommodations and luxuries of life. This man is not his own master. If he have not been seduced to the commission of base and dishonourable actions, he may thank accident for his escape, not the strength of his virtue. He is truly a slave. Any man, possessing the command of a certain portion of the goods of life, may order him this way or that at his pleasure. He is like those brute animals, that are allured to the learning innumerable postures and ridiculous tricks, by the attraction of a morsel of meat. He knows not whether he shall end his life with a virtue, plausible, hollow, and ever on the brink of dissolution; or whether, on the contrary, his character shall be hated and contemned, as long as his story endures.

He that desires to be, virtuous, and to remain so, must learn to be content with a little; to, use the recreations of sense for the purposes of living, and not to live for the sake of these recreations.

Summuft credet nefas animam preferre pudori Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas⁴.

JUV.

STEPNEY

How far then is it requisite that he, who would not be the slave of appetite, should rigidly restrain himself in the indulgence of appetite? There have been men who, living in the midst of luxury and inordinate indulgence, have yet, when an adequate occasion presented itself to rouse their virtue, shown that they were superior to these trivial accessories of human life, and that they could stoop with a cheerful spirit to calamity and penury. He however, who would desire to have reason to depend upon his fortitude, ought not probably to expose himself to so doubtful an experiment. It has often happened that those who, in the outset of their career, have been full of a gallant spirit, have been insensibly subdued by a course of unexpected gratification. There is something particularly dangerous in this situation. The man remembers with how much cheerfulness he formerly submitted to inconvenience, and he does not feel, and cannot persuade himself,

³ This vault of air, this congregated ball,
Self-center'd fun, and stars that rife and fall,
There are, my friend! whose philosophic eyes
Look thro', —
And view this dreadful All without a fear.

⁴ He'd rather chuse
To guard his Honour, and his Life to lose,
Rather than let his Virtue be betray'd;
Virtue, the Noble Cause for which he's made.

that he is worse than he was. He does not advert to the way in which luxury is undermining all the energies of his soul. He does not see that it is twining itself about his heart, and will not be torn away but with life. This is unfortunately one of the peculiar characteristics of degeneracy, that it invades us in a secret and crafty manner, and is less easily perceived by its victim, than by the least sagacious of the bystanders.

[missing 252–350]

Essay XI. Of Learning.

If we examine with a curious and attentive eye those individuals who may be said to have in any degree exerted themselves for the improvement of their intellectual faculties, we shall find ourselves easily able to distinguish those who are usually denominated the self-educated, from every other description of mentally industrious persons.

By the self-educated in this place I would understand, not merely those who have not passed through the regular forms of a liberal education; I include, in addition to this, the notion of their not having engaged in any methodical and persevering course of reading, but devoted themselves rather to the labour of investigating their own thoughts, than the thoughts of others.

These persons are well worthy of the intercourse and careful observation of men who are desirous of embracing every means of adding to their own stock of knowledge. There is a striking independence of mind about them. There is a sort of audaciousness of thinking, that has a most happy tendency to counteract that stationariness and sacredness of opinion which is too apt to insinuate itself among mankind. New thoughts, daring opinions, intrepid enquiries, are thus set afloat, upon which more disciplined minds would perhaps scarcely have ventured. There is frequently a happiness in their reflections, that flashes light and conviction upon us at once.

Yet such persons are often wholly, perhaps always very considerably, deficient in the art of reasoning. There is no sufficient arrangement in their arguments, or lucidness in their order. Often they assign reasons wholly foreign to the question; often they omit in silence, steps the most material to their demonstration, and which none but the acutest auditor can supply; and this, not because they forgot them, but because they never at any time occurred to their minds. They strain words and phrases in so novel a manner as altogether to calumniate their meaning, and their discourse must be translated into the vernacular tongue, before we can fairly make trial of its merits. Their ideas, if I may be allowed the expression, are so Pindarical and unmethodised, that our chief wonder is at the felicity and wisdom which mixes itself among them. They furnish however rather materials of thinking, than proofs of the truth or falshood of any proposition; and, if we adopt any of their assertions, we are often obliged to reject, their imaginary demonstrations, and invent demonstrations of our own altogether different.

In the mean time this is the favourable side of the picture. Many of the self-educated study themselves into a sort of infanity. They are not only incoherent in their thoughts, and wild in their language: often they adopt opinions the most unequivocally visionary, and talk a language, not merely unintelligible to others, but which is put together in so fantastic and mystical a way, that it is impossible it should be the representative of wisdom in themselves.

There is another feature peculiarly characteristic of, the self-educated. Reflecting men of a different description, are frequently sceptical in their opinions. They have so carefully entered into the very souls of the authors they read, and so minutely followed out the whole train of their reasonings, as to enable them to do full justice to an antagonist's argument. But this to a self-educated man is impossible. He has therefore no doubts. If he is tolerant, it is less in consequence of feeling the weakness of human understanding and the inevitable varieties of human opinion,

than through the medium of an abstract speculation, or a generous consciousness, leaning to the side of toleration. It will be strange if, so far as relates to conversation and the ordinary intercourse of human life, he be not frequently betrayed into intolerance. It will be strange, if he do not prove in many instances, impatient of contradiction, and inurbane and ungenerous in his censures of those by whom he is opposed.

It is too common a feature with all disputants, that they think, only of their own arguments, and listen, in the strictest sense of the word, only to themselves. It is not their purpose to try whether they may not themselves be convicted of error; they are merely intent upon convincing and changing the mind of the person who differs from them. This, which is too frequent a fault with all men, is peculiarly incident to the self-educated. The generality of men of talent and reflection, were taught first by listening to other men's ideas, and studying other men's writings. The wildness of their nature, and the stubbornness of their minds, have by long practice been broken into a capacity of candid attention. If I talk to such men, I do not talk in vain. But, if I talk to a self-educated man, it too often happens that I am talking to the air. He has no suspicion that I may possibly be in the right, and therefore no curiosity to know what is capable of being alleged in favour of my opinion. A truly ludicrous spectacle would be to see two such men talking together, each hearing himself only, and each, however he may cover it with an exterior politeness, deaf to the pretensions of his antagonist.

From this description of a self-educated man it may falsely be inferred, that I ought to wish any young person in whose future eminence I interest myself, rather occasionally to associate with individuals of this description, than to be one of their body himself.

It ought however to be remarked that, whatever rank the self-educated man may hold among persons who have exerted themselves for the improvement of their intellectual faculties, he will always, if judicious and able, be regarded by the discerning with peculiar respect, in as much as there has been much more of voluntary in his acquisitions, than can well have fallen to the share of those who have enjoyed every advantage of institution and scientific incitement.

There is a kind of declamation very generally afloat in the world, which, if it could be taken as just and well founded, would prove that the self-educated, educated, instead of labouring under the important disadvantages here enumerated, were the most fortunate of men, and those upon whom the hopes of their species, whether for instruction or delight, should principally be fixed.

How much eloquent invective has been spent in holding up to ridicule the generation of book-worms! We have been told, that a persevering habit of reading, kills the imagination, and narrows the understanding; that it overloads the intellect with the notions of others and prevents its digesting them, and, by a still stronger reason, prevents it from unfolding its native powers; that the man who would be original and impressive, must meditate rather than hear, and walk rather than read. He that devotes himself to a methodical prosecution of his studies, is perhaps allowed some praise for his industry and good intention; but it is at the same time insinuated, that the only result to be expected from, such ill-placed industry, is a plentiful harvest of laborious dulness.

It is no wonder that this sort of declamation has been generally popular. It favours one of the most fundamental passions, of the human mind, our indolence. To acquaint ourselves profoundly with what other men have thought in different ages of the world, is an arduous task; the ascent of the hill of knowledge is steep, and it demands the most unalterable resolution to be able to conquer it. But this declamation presents to us every discouragement, and severs all the nerves

of the soul. He that is infected by it, no longer “girds up the loins of his mind¹,” but surrenders his days to unenterprising indulgence. Its effect is like that of a certain religious creed, which, disclaiming the connection between motives and action, and between one action and another, instructs its votaries to wait, with pious resignation, for the influx of a supernatural strength which is to supersede the benefit of our vigilance and exertions.

Nothing however can be more ill founded than this imputed hostility between learning and genius. If it were true, it is among savages only that we ought to seek for the genuine expansion of the human mind. They are, of all their kind, the most undebauched by learning, and the least broken in upon by any regular habits of attention. In civilised society, and especially among that class in civilised society who pay any attention to intellectual pursuits, those who have the greatest antipathy to books, are yet modified in a thousand ways by the actual state of literature.

¹ I Peter, Chap. I, ver. 13. Aa3

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