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ESSAYS

ON

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

AND ON THE

PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE.

BY

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"ESSAYS ON THE FORMATION AND PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS;"

"A REVIEW OF BERKELEY'S THEORY OF VISION,"

&c. &c.

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PREFACE

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

The Volume in which the two following Essays first appeared, in the year 1829, was on the whole favourably received; so much so, at least, as to be out of print in two or three years. The Author has since been repeatedly urged, in various quarters, by strangers as well as friends, to publish another edition; a step which he has hitherto declined, partly on account of the tardy and limited encouragement extended to such works, but chiefly because he was dissatisfied with the principal Essay, as a less adequate view of the subject than he was capable of presenting, and he did not wish it to re-appear without such a complete revision as other studies prevented him for a season from bestowing upon it.

Within the last year, however, he has had an opportunity of performing this task. He has en-

larged the Essay by additional considerations and arguments, and thrown the whole into a more systematic form, so as to be less unworthy, he trusts, of the great questions which it ventures to discuss.

In the second Essay, which is of inferior importance, he has not found it requisite to make any other alteration or addition worth notice than appending to it a few Notes.

Besides these two Essays, the original volume contained another, "On the Fundamental Principle of all Evidence and Expectation," not here reprinted. The reasons for the omission are, that it is a Treatise calculated for a different class of readers; and, more especially, that the Author has not at present either the leisure or the inclination to give it that deliberate revisal which he conceives it to require. He may probably publish it hereafter, in an improved and expanded form, either alone or in company with other treatises more congruous with it in character than the two Essays which this brief explanation is intended to introduce.

January 29. 1844.

PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

Few words will be necessary in introducing the present Volume to the Public.

Some of those who did the Author the honour of pronouncing a favourable judgment upon a former Essay of his on the Formation of Opinions, expressed at the same time a regret that he had passed too lightly over one very important part of the subject; namely, the conduct of men in the application of their means and faculties to the investigation of truth. While he had explained more or less to their satisfaction in what manner the mind is affected by the circumstances in which it is placed, and the inevitable determination of its views by the evidence presented to it, they thought that he had indicated in too cursory a way the duties of mankind in the collection and examination of that evidence, the effect of which, when once brought

before the understanding, is so completely uncontrollable by the will.

In consequence of these suggestions, he applied himself to the subject, and produced the treatise on the Pursuit of Truth, which stands first in the Volume, and which he presents to those who took an interest in his former Essay, in the hope that it may prove a not unacceptable companion to it.

In respect to the second Essay, he has only to offer a remark on its external appearance. It is, as the reader will observe, in Dialogue, a form not very frequently used by modern writers in the exposition of philosophical views, and adopted on the present occasion rather by way of experiment than from any opinion of its preferableness. After considering what has been said by Hurd and others on the employment of real or fictitious, ancient or modern names, he has preferred designating his speakers by simple letters, as being less repulsive to the taste than any other expedient, except that of using the names of eminent characters of past days, which he was precluded from adopting, because the opinions expressed in these conversations have reference to the actual times in which we live. This is a point after all of little importance in philosophical discussions, since the parts of the dialogue assigned to the different speakers are intended to exhibit opinions rather than character, and may be considered as only embodying in language the various views which successively present

themselves to the same mind in reflecting on the subject selected.

The Third Essay * embraces topics which the Author can scarcely hope will attract attention, except from that small number of intellectual men who have turned their thoughts to the consideration of the foundations of human knowledge, a subject included along with many others of vital, although unappreciated importance to Society, under the repulsive appellation of metaphysics. By these few, however, he ventures to hope that the treatise will be found of some interest, if not from the absolute originality of its views (on which it is not for him to pronounce), yet from the novelty and regularity of the order in which they are exhibited.

With regard to the whole of the Essays, he may venture to offer them to the Public, and particularly to the friends who have expressed so indulgent an opinion of his former volumes, as the result of long continued, if not always successful reflection. The greater part of the Volume indeed was written out for the press four or five years ago, since which it has had the benefit of repeated scrutiny and revision. He mentions these circumstances, not to disarm criticism or to preclude ani-

* This Essay is omitted in the present edition as already stated in the new Preface, but the author did not conceive it needful to suppress this short notice of it.

madversion, but as establishing a title to a careful and candid examination from his readers, especially from those who may see reason to differ from the conclusions at which he has arrived.

March, 1829.

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CHAPTER I.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH, AND OF OUR MORAL SENTIMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF IT.

Truth, by which term is implied accuracy of knowledge and of inference, is necessarily conducive to the happiness of the human race. This is an assertion scarcely requiring in the present day to be either enforced or illustrated. That mankind are deeply concerned, not only in clearly understanding the properties of the material world, and of their own physical constitution, but in an accurate acquaintance with the operations of the human mind, the consequences of human actions, the results of social regulations, the effects of political institutions, the relations in which they themselves stand

to other beings, and their real position in the universe, is a proposition so undeniable, when clearly expressed, as barely to escape the character of a truism.

The transcendant importance of this fulness and accuracy of knowledge is attested by the sad tale of error and suffering presented to the eye in every page of history. What possible problem can mankind have to solve in their mutual intercourse but one? What is it, but to make themselves conjointly as happy, and, for that purpose, as noble-minded and virtuous as they can, during the short term of their mortal existence? And how have they hitherto solved this problem? In what numerous ways have they not proved themselves totally blind to their real interests, perverted their capabilities, wasted their resources, exasperated the unavoidable evils of their condition, and inflicted gratuitous wretchedness on each other and on themselves? It is clear that men can have no interest in suffering, no taste for misery, no preference for unhappiness in itself; and wherever they are found in a regular and systematic career after it, they must be labouring under an impression that they are in pursuit of a different object. It is error, therefore, it is ignorance, it is illusion, it is an incapacity on their part to see the real consequences of actions, the real issues of events, that gives rise to all those evils which desolate the world, except such as can be traced to irresistible impulse or to

the physical circumstances of man's nature and condition.* "Error is the universal cause of the misery of mankind," are the first words of a distinguished philosopher †, in his treatise on the Search after Truth; and they are scarcely too unmeasured.

The various modes in which this consummation is effected meet us everywhere. In the rapid glance we are now taking we can hardly pause for particular illustrations; but perhaps a few instances may indicate the nature of the evil in less compass, and with far greater suggestive power, than any general description. We are told by a high authority that amongst the superstitions of the Shetlanders, one is, or was, that he who saves a drowning man will receive at his hands some deep wrong or injury ‡,— a prejudice manifestly fatal to one of the noblest and most universal impulses of the human heart, and inevitably leading to acts of cowardly selfishness and cruelty.

A still more deadly prepossession exists among the Bechuanas in South Africa and all the Caffer tribes. They have no idea of the possibility of death except from hunger, or violence, or witch-

* For a more extended discussion of the utility of truth and the mischievousness of error, the author would beg to refer to a former work of his, viz. "Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions."

† Malebranche.

‡ Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott, vol. iii. p. 155.

craft. If a man die, even at the extreme age of ninety, without any appearance of perishing from hunger or violence, his death is imputed to sorcery; and blood is required to expiate or avenge it. "This circumstance," says the narrator, "gives rise to indescribable scenes of slaughter and misery."* It is reported by travellers that the superstition of the *evil-eye* prevails to a great extent in the present day, even amongst the highest classes, in Naples, where it occasions perpetual discord, insults, revenge, and even murder.†

These instances are undoubtedly extreme cases, and, being alien from our own prejudices and habits, strike us all as palpable proofs of the connection between error and suffering; but if we look around us in our own community we shall find the connection as strongly illustrated by circumstances in which familiarity alone has prevented us from observing it.

The prevalence of misery, as the consequence of error and ignorance, proclaims the paramount importance of accurate knowledge. To discover truth is in reality to do good on a grand scale. The detection of an error, the dissipation of a doubt, the extirpation of a prejudice, the establishment of a fact, the deduction of a new inference, the deve-

* Researches in South Africa, by Rev. John Philip, D.D., vol. ii. p. 120.

† See, among other testimonies, that of Sir David Wilkie, in the Memoirs of his Life by A. Cunningham, vol. ii. p. 260.

lopment of a latent principle, may diffuse its beneficial consequences over every region of the world, and may be the means of lessening the misery or increasing the happiness of myriads of unborn generations.* The great interests of the human race, then, demand that the way of discovery should be open, that there should be no obstructions to inquiry, that every possible facility and encouragement should be afforded to efforts addressed to the detection of error and to the attainment of truth, — nay, that every human being, as far as he is capable, should actively assist in the pursuit; and yet one of the greatest discouragements to such efforts at present existing amongst mankind is the state of their own moral sentiments. Although he who has achieved the discovery of a truth in a matter of importance, or rescued an admitted truth from insignificance and neglect†, may justly indulge the reflection that he has conferred a benefit on his fellow men, to which even time itself can prescribe no limits, he will do well to prepare for the odium and persecution with which the benefit will be resisted,

* "Revolutions of ages," says Milton, "do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse." — *Areopagitica.*

† "In philosophy, equally as in poetry, genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the stalest and most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission." — *Coleridge's Friend,* vol. i. p. 184.

and console himself with a prospective reliance on the gratitude and sympathy of a future age.

It is impossible to deny the fact, that in some of the most important departments of knowledge the bulk of mankind regard novelties of doctrine — a description under which all detections of error and acquisitions of truth must come — as acts of moral turpitude or reprehensible arrogance, which they are ready to resent on the head of the promulgator.

A state of things in which the real interests and the moral sentiments of the human race are thus placed in strong opposition cannot fail to be fruitful of evil; and whoever should be fortunate enough to hasten its termination would perform no slight service to his species. On this point the past history of the world, although it affords little ground for vehement exultation, teaches no lesson of despair. In the progress of society men's moral sentiments inevitably change, both from those alterations in circumstances which enhance or depress the value of certain qualities of conduct, and from that acuter insight or correcter appreciation of the tendencies of action which accompanies an advance of civilisation. From one or other of these causes, modes of conduct formerly regarded as of trivial moment grow into importance, qualities at one time extolled sink into dubious virtues, or even positive vices, acts once shunned are zealously performed and warmly approved, new duties are

evolved from the novel situations in which men are placed, and the code of morality is amplified with rules which would have been unintelligible or undervalued at a previous period, because the circumstances to which they are applicable either had not then arisen or were wholly unregarded. Such changes may be seen by comparing either past times with present or savage with civilised communities. The dexterous horse-stealer, an ignominious felon in England, is the consummate hero of the Crow Indians.* How large the stride in moral sentiment from the blind and selfish superstition of the Shetlander, who runs away from the drowning seaman, to the enlightened benevolence which plants the life-boat on the sea-beach to succour the stranded ship, and stimulates such men as the noble-minded Pellew to plunge into the very midst of peril in order to rescue their fellow-creatures from destruction! †

In reference to that class of actions which are connected with the pursuit of truth, both these causes of change in moral sentiment have been in operation.

* Astoria, by Washington Irving, vol. ii. p. 79. — "Horse-stealing is their glory and delight."

† This is an allusion to the magnanimous conduct of the late Lord Exmouth, on repeated occasions, and more especially in the case of the Dutton. There is something so ennobling in even the mere reading of such instances, which cannot be too widely known, that I have quoted the account in the Appendix, Note A.

In the first place, circumstances have occurred which have greatly raised in importance the consequences of inquiry, and of course the consequences of the conduct exhibited in prosecuting it. So long as science and civilisation had no existence, as mankind were solely occupied with providing for their physical wants, or were continually engaged in the rougher work of mutual depredation and hostility, the cultivation of knowledge as a separate sphere of exertion, and indeed any semblance of regular investigation even in practical concerns, would be almost unknown, and consequently the virtues and vices connected with the pursuit of truth would not be called forth. Gradually, however, as civilisation advanced, as the interests of society growing more complicated required more careful discrimination, as wealth and the exemption from occupation accompanying wealth became diffused, and curiosity was at leisure to speculate on the nature and destiny of man and other beings, to investigate surrounding objects, and to scrutinise passing events, it became manifest that the results of this mental activity would have important bearings on the fortunes of mankind. What we term inquiry must always have place and possess importance in a certain degree, inasmuch as it is mixed up with ordinary conduct; but it is not so immediately apparent that, when pushed beyond the point of direct applicability, it has an extensive influence on human affairs.

The speculations of thoughtful men might na-

turally be regarded for a while as vain dreams or visionary theories, having little connection with the hard and pressing realities of life; but they were found in process of time to penetrate everywhere, to permeate morals, manners, education, government, religion: and when investigation was successfully turned into the paths of physical science, the relation of systematic knowledge to human welfare was brought home to mankind in its most irresistible form.

The happiness of the world has thus proved itself to be in various ways deeply implicated in the establishment of truth and the rectification of error even in subjects apparently remote from ordinary life; and in consequence the conduct both of communities and individuals in every thing relating to inquiry has risen to an importance of which earlier ages never dreamed, and has become more extensively the object of our moral sentiments.

In the second place, concurrently with this change produced by the growing importance of the pursuit of truth, and of all conduct connected with it, the moral sentiments of mankind on the subject have also undergone progressive alteration from a more and more accurate appreciation of the tendencies of human actions, and a nicer discrimination of complicated moral phenomena. On this point, nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that we have greater reason to look forward with hope than

around us with complacency, or backward with exultation.

In a matter so greatly enhanced in importance it was hardly to be expected that the good and evil qualities of conduct should be all at once appreciated with distinctness and precision; and, accordingly, a very cursory examination is sufficient to show that mankind have hitherto lamentably erred, and still continue to err, in apportioning their approbation and disapprobation to the qualities displayed in reference to the prosecution of inquiry. Their moral sentiments have been roused indeed, but have at the same time been grossly misdirected. They have too frequently bestowed their smiles on conduct destitute of merit or even fundamentally vicious, and poured their indignation on acts most truly deserving their admiration and applause. Nor as to this misdirection of their feelings can the major part of the human race, even in what are termed by courtesy civilised communities, be truly said to have radically improved. Such mistakes as these are by no means easily rectified. The morality of the subject, besides having been hitherto neglected and still remaining beset with prejudices, involves some nice distinctions, which cannot fail to be generally overlooked or confounded till they have been clearly exhibited and rendered plain and familiar by repeated expositions.

We must expect that here, as well as in other matters, the moral sentiments of mankind will prove

tenacious of their accustomed course—reluctant to take a new direction. When men have once been habituated to look upon any quality or any system of action with approbation or the reverse they can scarcely divest themselves of the feeling, even though they discover the object no longer to deserve it; and they are slow in bestowing the same sentiment on conduct by which it has not been familiarly excited. Thus (to take an obvious illustration) the barbarian glare anciently flung over warlike qualities and military achievements still continues to dazzle the world into an admiration of actions manifestly destructive to human happiness. On this subject mankind have yet attained to no sound feeling; their moral sentiments lag behind existing knowledge and established conclusions: and it will require the reiterated efforts of moralists and philosophers to work into their minds the only sentiments to be entertained by rational beings towards the vulgar heroes and pageants of history.

The same process of distinctly pointing out and repeatedly exhibiting the clear tendencies of action, is required to rectify the moral feelings of the world in all that regards the pursuit of truth; and we may venture to hope it will be applied with eventual, although not immediate success. Tardy as mankind evince themselves in all changes of moral sentiment, they cannot permanently continue to bestow their approbation on qualities clearly proved to be pernicious, nor withhold it from

actions shown to be undeniably calculated for their welfare.

A retrospect of the three last centuries alone leads us to anticipate that any improvement in the discrimination of good and evil in the various paths of human life must eventually find its way from the meditative few to the less reflecting many. Amongst these few, in the present day, the fundamental principles, without which a code of morality in reference to the pursuit of truth cannot exist, are universally held. Philosophers unite in regarding truth as inseparably allied with human happiness, and error as essentially hostile to it. It was otherwise with the sages of antiquity, amongst whom there was a prevalent dissociation of the utility from the truth of a doctrine. It was supposed that a dogma might be advantageous and even necessary to society, to morality, and to political institutions, although it were false, and that it ought in this case to be strenuously supported and shielded from scrutiny even by those who were aware of its character. With such a notion there could not co-exist any conscious obligation, or any inducement but sheer curiosity, to enter upon the search after truth, and faithfully pursue it. On the contrary, it unavoidably led to the employment of fallacious arguments, hollow pretexts, disingenuous connivance, and violent oppression, in order to maintain the authority of established doctrines. It could not fail to be fruitful in falsehood, hypocrisy, fraud,

and despotic intolerance.* The same policy of a double doctrine was inculcated by Machiavel, and was, indeed, long acted upon in Europe prior to the reformation; it has been well characterised by Mr. Stewart as the policy of "enlightening the few and hoodwinking the many."

If similar views are yet occasionally entertained amongst the ignorant or half informed, they are seldom avowed. Even the hardly less revolting, but certainly less consistent, principle of more recent times, and maintained even by many of the early teachers of the Christian Church†, that a true doctrine may be rightly supported by false representations, and by what are called pious frauds, is discarded professedly, if not always really, by every party, every sect, and every individual with the slightest pretensions to a name in philosophy or literature, or even to a reputable standing in society. "Nothing," it has been well remarked, "can be more irrational in the pretended children of light than to enlist themselves under the banners

* "It seems," says Dr. Whately, in an instructive dissertation on this subject, "to have been the settled conviction of most of those who had the sincerest desire of attaining truth themselves, that to the mass of mankind truth was in many points inexpedient, and unfit to be communicated; that, however desirable it might be for the leading personages in the world to be instructed in the true nature of things, there were many popular delusions which were essential to the well-being of society." — *Essays on the Writings of St. Paul*, p. 3.

† Ibid. Also Middleton's Free Inquiry, *passim*.

of Truth, and yet rest their hopes on an alliance with Delusion."*

There is, happily, a growing disposition in the world, amongst the intelligent part of it at least, to prize truth of doctrine and veracity of statement; to look with disdain on all artifice, disingenuity, and disguise, both in speculation and practice; to regard the business of life no longer as an affair which demands unremitted intrigue and perpetual deceit; to consider the great interests of humanity as not requiring to be supported by ignorance, hypocrisy, and superstition; to believe that the suppression and concealment of facts and arguments can be of no service except to the few at the expense of the many; and that it is for the benefit of mankind, as well as essential to their progress in all which is virtuous and high-minded, that every important question should be freely and boldly examined.† This state of feeling, on the part of men of cultivated minds, seems highly favourable to an impartial discussion of the conduct which we ought to observe, or, in other words, the moral sentiments

* Coleridge's Friend, vol. i. p. 53.

† "From the whole deduction which has now been made," says an able writer, "it appears that superstition is useless; that truth and reason are alone to be depended on in giving a regular and safe determination to human actions; and that the idea of managing mankind by means of prejudices and by arts of deception is false philosophy, as unwise as it is immoral." — Dr. HARDY *on the Progress of the Christian Religion, quoted in Mill's translation of Villers on the Reformation,* p. 58.

we ought to cherish, in relation to the pursuit of truth; and even if the present endeavour to trace the duties connected with it shall fail of yielding that entire satisfaction which it is seldom the destiny of any thing human to give, it may animate the conscientious inquirer, and serve as a groundwork for more successful efforts.

Little has yet been effected in this part of ethical philosophy; at all events, the subject has never, as far as the author knows, been systematically treated in the point of view here described: it is a department of moral exposition yet to be created. Locke, indeed, in his Conduct of the Understanding, and in his Letters on Toleration, has thrown out excellent remarks on some of the topics which it embraces; and these treatises, which cannot be too warmly recommended, breathe an admirable spirit of right feeling and sound judgment in relation to the pursuit of truth.*

Malebranche, too, in his celebrated work, "De la Recherche de la Vérité," abounds with instructive observations, encumbered nevertheless with anti-

* Since the first edition of the present Essay was published many works have appeared in which correct and ennobling sentiments concerning the morality of investigation are incidentally expressed, some of which the author has had the satisfaction of tracing, or fancying he traced, to the influence of his own inadequate exposition of the subject. The Essays and Discourses of the late Dr. Channing may be particularly cited, as abounding in fervent and forcible lessons on this great theme. Occasional use of them is made in the following pages.

quated matter and exploded doctrines, through which few in the present day will venture to toil.

Neither of these distinguished writers, however, looked at the subject in the particular light in which it is the object of the following pages to place it; and even if they had, the lapse of a century and a half may be presumed to have brought us into a more favourable position for viewing it in its most important relations.

CHAP. II.

THE DUTY OF ENTERING UPON INQUIRY.

To inquire is simply to endeavour to obtain a knowledge of something we are ignorant of. Inquiries are therefore of all kinds, trivial and important, easy and difficult; they may be directed to the properties of matter or of mind, to the concerns of individuals, or of communities, or of mankind at large, to what at present exists, or to what has formerly happened; they vary, from the casual question regarding events of the day, to the laborious researches of the historian, and to the long series of observations and experiments by which the philosopher interrogates nature.

What people usually have in their minds, however, when speaking in general terms of the pursuit of truth and duty of inquiry, seems to be that sort of investigation which has no direct reference to ordinary exigencies, but goes beyond what the immediate necessities and unimportant occurrences of life require. Few would probably think it needful to discuss the advantages or the obligation of seeking to know whatever is directly requisite for guiding their individual conduct on common occasions.

Systematic, or scientific, or speculative investigation is generally implied when the interesting topics

just mentioned are in question, and perhaps there is usually a further implication that the inquiry, whatever it may be, is one that concerns society or mankind.

On coming, nevertheless, to consider the subject closely, it does not appear that any strict line can be drawn between the different kinds of investigation referred to. They pass into each other by insensible degrees, are frequently intermingled, and sometimes interchange characters; nor even, if they could be clearly discriminated, would it be found that the moral obligation to enter upon any researches depends on such distinctions. It is the circumstances in which a man is placed that must determine (chiefly at least) how far it is incumbent on him to engage in any investigation.

That there are duties to be performed in reference to this matter, no one will be hardy enough to deny. If truth is so important to mankind, as we have shown it to be, there can scarcely fail to be circumstances which render it imperative on human beings to strive to attain it, or which in other words bring the pursuit of it under the cognizance of morality. The problem before us is to determine what those circumstances are.

Section I.

In what Circumstances Inquiry is a Duty.

Although it may be universally admitted that there are cases in which it is incumbent on mankind

to engage in the pursuit of truth, those cases may appear on a first view too various and complicated to be definitively classified. On further reflection, nevertheless, it will be found that the most important, if not the whole of them, may be comprehended in a few general propositions.

The duty of inquiry will be generally acknowledged to be obligatory upon every one in proportion to his capacity and opportunities in the following circumstances:

1. When any direct means are within his reach of obtaining additional or more accurate knowledge of the relation in which he stands, and the duty which he owes to God.

2. When the extent and accuracy of his knowledge on any subject must have an important and direct effect on his conduct in life, public or private, professional or unofficial, and consequently on the happiness of his fellow-creatures.

3. When he takes upon himself the office of instructing others; a case included, indeed, in the preceding, but of such peculiar distinction from any other, as to deserve a separate consideration.

4. When he possesses opportunities and abilities for prosecuting historical, scientific, or philosophical investigations, so as to enlarge the bounds of human knowledge.

These four cases appear to comprise all the great circumstances which can be considered by any class of moralists, as rendering it the duty of mankind to

enter upon any regular and express inquiry; and they are all fruitful of important suggestions, deserving the deep consideration, not only of the moralist and philosopher, but of every human being.

1. Let us advert, in the first place, to the duty of availing ourselves of any direct means within our reach to increase and correct our knowledge of the relation in which we stand, and the duty we owe to the Great Author of the universe. In this are obviously included both the study of his attributes as displayed in the works of nature, and an investigation of the authenticity and import of any alleged communication from him to human beings.

If we admit that there are any moral relations at all between us and the Supreme Being, we cannot but conclude that our ideas of his attributes must be pleasing to him and beneficial to ourselves, in proportion as they are worthy of their object, or, in other words, in proportion as they are accurate; whence it evidently becomes a general duty to exalt our conceptions of the Deity, by making ourselves acquainted with the real constitution of nature, as well as by correcting and enlarging our views of moral and intellectual excellence. If it were not incumbent upon us on other accounts to neglect no accessible means of acquiring a knowledge of the universe around us, and of our own sensitive and rational nature, this consideration alone would render it obligatory to seize every opportunity of escaping

from ignorance and error. The conceptions of an uninstructed, although a virtuous man, or of an individual, however conversant with physical science, who has never investigated his own mental constitution and the true nature of morality, must inevitably be far less worthy of the Great Author of the universe than the human mind is capable of forming; and such unworthy conceptions cannot possibly be raised or rectified in the slightest degree by any other means than the removal of that ignorance to which they owe their imperfections.

The effect, too, of wrong ideas of God on man himself must not be overlooked: it is, in truth, a consideration of the highest moment. "The Deity," says an able writer, "is proposed as the object, not merely of our belief, but of our practical adoration and love—in the imitation, limited and imperfect as it must be, of His moral perfections. Hence the vital practical importance of the most unimpeachable conception of those attributes, and of removing any thing like a limitation on their infinite moral excellence."*

The pernicious consequences of erroneous and degrading conceptions of the Deity on the moral conduct of mankind, have seldom been sufficiently considered. To every man, the ideas which he forms of God must constitute a model to which he will naturally tend to conform himself, and accord-

* The Connection of Natural and Divine Truth, by the Rev. Baden Powell, p. 212.

ing to which he will consider himself obliged in many cases to shape his own actions. If, therefore, he represents in his own imagination this Almighty Being as of an arbitrary, malevolent, selfish, and revengeful character (which are too often the actual notions lurking in the minds of the unenlightened, while the attributes of good and just and merciful are on their lips), he will insensibly and without any compunction become cruel, capricious, and tyrannical in his own social sphere. Or, perhaps, in many cases, it would be more correct to say that he would remain so. For barbarous and ignorant man first forms his notions of the Deity from his own low standard of what an All-powerful Being would do (beyond which, in fact, it is impossible for him to go); and then having consecrated his crude ideas by fixing upon them the imaginary stamp of divinity, he fears to depart from them, and it is with difficulty that he advances to more accurate and enlightened views of moral excellence than are warranted by the model of his own creation.

The slow progress of the race in true morality is to be ascribed in a great measure to these consecrated crudities of former ages. The ideas of mankind, naturally progressive on this as on all other subjects, are continually called back to the venerated model while they have an irresistible tendency to depart from it. To borrow an expressive phrase from a modern writer, "they are tethered

to the stump of old superstitions." Thus the morality of a nation may long remain rude, vacillating, and inconsistent amidst the wonders of mechanical art, the achievements of physical science, and the refinements of taste.

Looking then both at the relation in which mankind stand to God, and at their own social claims and personal interests, it is unquestionably a general duty on their part, according to their means and opportunities, to enlarge and purify their conceptions of the Great Author of Nature, by making themselves acquainted, as accurately and extensively as possible, with his works, and investigating the truths of morality. To observe, to inquire, to examine, to reason, to meditate,—these are the only means which they can employ to elevate their minds on this great subject—the noblest homage which they can render at the throne of the universe.

"Much earnest, patient, laborious thought," says an eminent writer, "is required to see this Infinite Being as he is, to rise above the low gross notions of the Divinity, which rush in upon us from our passions, from our selfish partialities, and from the low-minded world around us." "Every man's elevation," observes the same writer, "is to be measured first, and chiefly by his conception of this Great Being."*

* Lecture on the Elevation of the Labouring Classes, by Dr. Channing.

Not less imperative reasons exist why we should diligently apply ourselves to the examination of the authenticity and import of any alleged communication from God to mankind, that wears the least semblance of credibility. To neglect inquiry under these circumstances, would not only be a breach of the manifest duty arising out of the relation of a creature to his Creator, but it would be to plunge ourselves into those evils which an unacquaintance with accessible knowledge, and, much more, any positive errors on so momentous a subject, would be sure to bring, as well as to sacrifice all those benefits which would necessarily flow from the possession of the truth. The disastrous consequences which have arisen to mankind from mistakes on this great question, are alone sufficient to teach us the imperative obligation of entering upon the inquiry—an obligation under which every human being lies according to his means and opportunities, not (let it be borne in mind) to his fellow-creatures, but to that Omniscient Being who is alone competent to judge how far it has in any instance been fulfilled.

Surely, if there is any one course of conduct more than another which common sense and conscience unite in pointing out as imperative upon us, it is to devote ourselves to an investigation of the genuineness and the meaning of a communication, asserting itself with any shadow of plausibility

to be a message from the great Author of Nature.* In what way such an investigation, in common with all others, ought to be prosecuted, will be shown in a subsequent part of this essay.

2. It will be readily admitted that it is likewise imperative on every one to undergo the labour of inquiry according to his means and opportunities in regard to all subjects which have an important and direct bearing on his social conduct; which, in other words, furnish grounds for determining what that conduct shall be. Not to inquire in these cases, would be to take steps involving the happiness of our fellow-creatures, as well as of ourselves, without knowing or doing all in our power to learn the consequences of those steps: it would be staking, in fact, the welfare of others and our own on the mere chance of being ignorantly in the right. How extensive and momentous this branch of duty is, will appear to any one who reflects that reputation, fortune, morals, health, life, are daily committed to the statesman, the judge, the lawyer, the physician, and the navigator, and must be placed in jeopardy, not only by their neglecting to investigate each particular case as it arises, but by professional error or

* For a more adequate exposition of this part of the subject, on which it would be here out of place to do more than briefly touch, the reader may consult "Letters of an Egyptian Kafir in search of a Religion," to which the present revised Essay must acknowledge considerable obligations; and which will be quoted on several occasions in the sequel.

ignorance, which proper inquiry would have removed. Nor is it a less powerful consideration that the destiny of a family, as well as of a community, is dependent on the due prosecution of inquiries connected with its welfare, and especially that the physical and moral being of a child may be irremediably depraved for want of knowledge accessible but neglected by the parent.

But there is a more general duty than any of these, which comes under this head — the important duty too little adverted to, if not wholly overlooked, of investigating the accuracy of our moral sentiments and the justness of our application of them. Obliged every day to mingle in the conflicting pursuits and interests of mankind, where there is constant opportunity for the exercise of every virtue and vice incident to human nature, — called also to pronounce sentence upon others, to shape our behaviour to them accordingly, and thus to affect their happiness by our words and deeds, it behoves us to make ourselves well acquainted with the real tendencies of human actions, to ascertain with the utmost accuracy what is really worthy of approval or censure, as well as to satisfy ourselves that the action which we praise or condemn comes under the class to which we refer it.

It is painful to see how grossly this maxim is contravened — to witness the negligence of the greater part of mankind in regard to a just appreciation of social duties — to mark the arrogant spirit

in which moral verdicts are flung about at random, when it is manifest that the self-constituted judges have never investigated the grounds on which such verdicts are pronounced, never taken the trouble to inquire whether the actions which they applaud or stigmatise are really beneficial or injurious to the happiness of mankind, or even whether there is evidence that they have been actually committed.

We shall have, hereafter, to bring into view the bitter consequences of such negligence of inquiry, and especially of such rash and ignorant judgments in relation to human conduct in the very subject of our present speculations, namely, the pursuit of truth.

Meanwhile it is sufficiently evident from what has been said, how extensive must be the influence of the accurate or inaccurate direction of moral sentiment both on a man's own conduct, and on his application of the powerful instruments of approbation and censure to the conduct of his neighbours; and how strong, therefore, is the obligation resting upon every individual, in proportion to his opportunities, to acquire the knowledge necessary for the correct discrimination of moral good and evil.

In reference to the general duty of entering upon the task of investigation, as here inculcated, a modern writer makes the following judicious remarks.

"It is much to be feared," he says, "that the

opinions of men in general on subjects of the greatest importance, and on which it most depends whether their influence shall be beneficial or injurious to mankind, are formed without inquiry or consideration, and are the mere prejudices of education; or the effects of caprice; or adopted because they will promote their interest; or because they are in fashion, and propagated by those who have a direct interest in deceiving the world. Very few even think of examining into the truth of the opinions which they find to prevail in the more respectable classes of society; but most men adopt them as sound maxims, and regulate by them their judgment and actions, even in cases in which they must necessarily incur a very heavy responsibility. Yet while they thus take no pains to avoid error, they are always ready, when it turns out that they are in the wrong, to plead their ignorance or error in excuse for their misconduct; though it be manifest that neither ignorance nor error is a valid excuse, where it might have been prevented or remedied by such an attention to the subject, as its importance, honestly considered, would have appeared to require, and by the use of the means which were in their power."*

"The improvement of our judgment," says another writer, "and the increase of our knowledge,

* Introduction to the Study of Moral Evidence, by the Rev. J. E. Gambier, 3d ed. p. 132.

on all subjects included within our sphere of action, are not merely advantages recommended by prudence, but absolute duties imposed on us by conscience."*

Of the lamentable effects of neglecting almost all the duties specified under this head, a striking illustration is furnished by an incident which occurred within the memory of many now living. A young woman, Eliza Fenning, was capitally condemned for the alleged crime of attempting to poison part of her master's family, on evidence of the most inconclusive character, and after a hasty and insufficient trial. Subsequently to her conviction, fresh evidence in her favour calculated to make any wise and good man pause and review his conclusions, even on a less awful occasion, was tendered to the judge; the discrepancies in the testimony of the witnesses on the trial were pointed out by the poor girl herself, not only to that functionary, but to the Lord Chancellor and to the Secretary of State; and other efforts were used to avert the terrible calamity of putting the innocent to death: but all without avail. She perished on the scaffold.

Here the judge had, in the first place, manifestly neglected the duty imperative on all judges, of making themselves acquainted with the obligations imposed upon them by their office and with

* Coleridge's Friend, vol. ii. p. 171.

the principles of evidence, and was therefore professionally unfit for his situation; he showed himself ignorant of the simple principle, that it was his duty to protect the accused from a capital conviction, except on the most unquestionable proof; he seems not even to have attained to the conception of what constitutes a fair trial. During the proceedings he was deaf to the repeated entreaties of the poor victim in his power that a particular witness should be examined; and after this mockery of justice was over, he pertinaciously refused to hear further material evidence which the diligence of some benevolent individuals had collected and offered to his notice.* Thus his professional ignorance, and his obstinacy in rejecting information, were the means of bringing to an ignominious end a young woman, innocent (as far as human sagacity can discover†) of the crime laid to her charge, and notwithstanding her lowly condition, of fine moral and intellectual qualities. Her youth, her interesting personal appearance, her reliance on her own innocence, and on the force of truth for an acquittal, the noble spirit with which she supported the unexpected verdict, and struggled in the dreary de-

* Sir Samuel Romilly in speaking of this unhappy case, stigmatises the conduct of the recorder as savage. — *Memoirs*, vol. iii. p. 235.

† It has been stated in the public papers, that a death-bed confession by the actual perpetrator of the crime has completely vindicated the innocence of this noble but unfortunate girl.

solation of a convict's cell against the unjust sentence, and, finally, the feminine propriety and more than feminine firmness of her demeanour throughout the closing scene, altogether form a picture deeply affecting. The story of Eliza Fenning makes the heart bleed. It is not often that the consequences of neglecting the duty of inquiry, both special and general, are condensed into such intense evil, and can be so plainly exhibited.

3. Many words will not be required to prove that he who takes upon himself the office of instructing others, should previously investigate the subjects he has to explain. Inquiry is the only means in his power of satisfying himself that he is disseminating truth and not falsehood. Nothing can be conceived more absolutely imperative. No obligation can be stronger than that of a teacher to render himself competent to the function of teaching, so that he shall not delude or mislead his disciples. Instruction can have no legitimate object but to teach what is true; and it is a sort of practical contradiction to engage in the office without having bestowed the trouble of ascertaining what the truth is. To mention the schoolmaster, the clergyman, the lecturer, the public speaker, the author, the critic, is sufficient to show how numerous and influential are the classes bound by this obligation, and the important character of the duty resting upon them. The morality of this portion of the subject is so plain, that it would

almost seem a waste of words to elucidate or enforce it, and yet, if we look into actual life, we shall discover few symptoms of an adequate conception of the duty in question.

Subjects requiring disciplined minds, years of study, careful weighing of evidence and nice discrimination, are taught with unhesitating confidence, and not seldom with dogmatical arrogance by men without any qualification for the office, and without even the pretext of a due course of inquiry, as if they laboured under an utter insensibility to the obligations incurred by assuming so important a function. It is, indeed, a lamentable proof of the low state of moral intelligence amongst us, that human beings should rashly engage without preparation in the office of instructing their fellow-creatures upon matters of the highest concern, and not only be perfectly unconscious that they are trespassing against any moral rule, but have an impression that they are performing a valuable service.

It is needless to dwell on the perpetuation of ignorance and error, which must ensue from the neglect of full and sedulous inquiry on the part of a teacher into whatever subject he engages to explain. If every one who takes upon himself this function would faithfully examine his own deficiencies, and exert himself to supply them, or abandon it to others more adequately qualified, it would be impossible that the enlightened views of the pre-

eminent of the race should make their way in the world with so much difficulty as they do, and diffuse their benefits in so small a circle as that to which we see them confined.

The duty of every one in the circumstances described under the three preceding heads, is not only to enter upon investigation, but to pursue his inquiries as far as his capacity and opportunities permit, till he has come to satisfactory conclusions, or feels thoroughly convinced that he has obtained all the light which investigation can supply. It is especially incumbent on men of cultivated minds who understand the process of reasoning and the force of evidence, not to be contented with their opinion on any question of importance till they can trace its connection with indisputable facts or with self-evident principles. The same considerations which render it a duty to commence inquiry, render it a duty to persevere till this satisfactory end has been achieved.

4. We are next to consider the duty of entering upon scientific or philosophical or other systematic investigation with the simple view of enlarging human knowledge, and when investigation is not incumbent upon us from the considerations already specified.

A great majority of mankind struggling for existence, and worn down with labour and anxiety, may obviously in this question be at once set aside: they are exonerated by their position from devoting

attention to the investigation of any problems but such as directly relate to their actual condition, or are forced upon their notice. Doomed to incessant toil or unremitting care, they are rather to be commended when they evince any eagerness for extraneous knowledge, than blamed for indifference to every subject not immediately bearing on their moral and physical well-being.

Upon those who are elevated above this constant attention to the exigencies of ordinary life, the duty of inquiry for the single purpose of adding to the stock of human knowledge presses with varying force according to their station and abilities. Perhaps we can attain to no more precise rule on the subject, than that every one who has powers and opportunities to extend the boundaries of knowledge by systematic research is under a proportionate moral obligation to do so.

There is another consideration which still further abates the precision of the rule. It is obvious that no man, even the ablest and most accomplished, can be expected to pursue every inquiry which his powers may be calculated to solve, or his position may enable him to enter upon.

We are in the present day surrounded on all sides by phenomena pressing on our curiosity. Nature, to the awakened minds of men of the nineteenth century, presents herself as a very different object of investigation from what she appeared a few hundred years ago, and science and history

offer their accumulated instruments and volumes to assist us in the interpretation of her laws. Facts and principles, problems for solution, and fields of inquiry have multiplied on our hands. A single mind is no longer capable of grasping all extant knowledge; and the ablest of us must be content with comprehending a part, and casting a longing look at the rest.

The inquiries of every human being are thus necessarily limited by the multiplicity of objects presenting themselves for investigation. Different individuals, from peculiar inclinations or capacities, will range over different parts of the field of knowledge. Whether they devote their abilities to this or that subject must be frequently a matter of mere personal taste; and it can be only under some peculiar circumstances that the direction of their scientific inquiries will be a matter of duty.*

That such gifted individuals as have been described are nevertheless bound to enter upon some investigations or other for the extension of science, seems manifest. If we suppose a human being to be blessed with the combined opportunities, attain-

* "If it doth not appear," says a learned writer, "precisely into what kind of studies this respect to truth will carry a man preferably to all others, how far it will oblige him to continue his pursuit after knowledge, and when the discontinuance begins to be no offence against truth, he must consult his own opportunities and genius, and judge for himself as well as he can." — WOLLASTON *on the Religion of Nature*, p. 24.

ments, and original genius of a Newton, we feel at once that the pursuit of truth is his appropriate career. In such a man indolence and inertness would be a crime.

Here is an individual endowed with pre-eminent capacity, trained in all human learning, gifted with leisure, animated by companions engaged in similar pursuits, stimulated by novel ideas beaming on his intellectual vision, capable of opening to his fellow-creatures new views of nature and vistas of thought, and yet he refuses to bestow any labour in following out these happy glimpses and brilliant conceptions; he is content with the passive enjoyment of seeing them "come and depart," without making any effort to follow out and perpetuate his discoveries for the good of mankind. He has great objects within his reach, yet refuses to stretch out his hand.

No one requires to be told that such a being so acting would deserve the condemnation of the wise and the good, while he would be casting away some of the highest enjoyments of which human nature is capable. From such inertness, fortunately, the world is in a great measure secured by the irresistible propensity of genius to exert its powers. The issue is not left to the mere influence of a sense of duty, although the moral obligation does not the less exist, and if clearly apprehended, must constitute a valuable incitement in those moments when the ardour of enterprise is chilled by the cold

reception which awaits discovery, or relaxes at the sight of the boundless field that remains to be explored.

Section II.

Objections and Prejudices inimical to the Duty of Inquiry.

It is not easy to imagine how the plain statement of duty presented in the last section can be denied or controverted; yet it frequently happens in actual life, that from indolence, ignorance, misapprehension, prejudice, or fearfulness, the business of inquiry, if not positively repudiated, is really evaded.

One of the first expedients that naturally suggest themselves to stave off so troublesome a task, is to plead the undefined nature of the duty as rendering it impossible for any one to determine either for himself or for others, how far in any circumstances it is obligatory.

In this plea there is doubtless some force. The circumstances described in the preceding section as imposing the duty of investigation, are various in their character and weight, and it is frequently too much to expect from the parties on whom it is incumbent, that they should be fully conscious of their own want of knowledge, and be able to form clear views of what they ought to do, or of the best manner of doing it. There are in fact two classes

of cases which may be readily distinguished. With one class there can be little difficulty. Men must be frequently well aware of their deficiency in such information as their position in the world demands; and in those cases where the knowledge is essential to action, not only must their culpability in not having prosecuted the necessary investigations be clear to their own discernment, but it will often be unequivocally manifest to others. On the other hand, when we quit the sphere of action for that of speculation, when we turn for instance to such subjects as the character and proceedings of the Deity, the truth of historical records, or the correctness of our moral sentiments, or to any branch of science which we may be capable of exploring, the task of satisfying ourselves as to what investigations it is requisite to undertake, is by no means so determinate. In such cases every individual must be necessarily left to his own conscience: the decision, whether he has acted up to the demands of the occasion does not belong to his fellow-creatures, nor can they in general be competent to pronounce sentence. The explanation of the duty insisted upon in the preceding section, has constantly implied that to enter upon inquiry can be considered as obligatory only in proportion to the means which are actually within reach, including the degree of intelligence possessed regarding the duty itself, and can be perfectly so only to such individuals as are fully able to comprehend the position in which they stand to God and their own

species. How far any one approaches to this distinct apprehension, and acts according to the light of his knowledge in availing himself of the means within his power, are evidently points not within the province of humanity to decide. All that can be done is to delineate the course which ought to be followed, the line of conduct which is right in itself, and which would be pursued by any one who clearly saw the obligation imposed by the circumstances described, and was resolved conscientiously to discharge it.

It may be quite practicable to point out a proper line of action in given circumstances, and at the same time exceedingly difficult to determine how far particular individuals come under those circumstances, and are culpable for not observing the prescribed track.

Nevertheless, it will still remain true (and the consideration is a most important one), that if we neglect or omit, whether culpably or innocently, to enter upon the proper investigation demanded by any combination of circumstances, we shall miss all the direct advantages of the right course, and incur the unhappy consequences of error; we shall have no part in the conscious satisfaction, the clearness of view and solidity of principle, the worth of character, the power of beneficial action, the ability to avert or avoid evil arising from diligent and well directed inquiry. These are advantages not to be attained without making the efforts on which they

depend. No purity or uprightness of intention can secure us against the bad consequences of not having taken pains to possess ourselves of the truth.

Besides this objection, there are other phantoms conjured up in the path of investigation by the prejudices of some and the fearfulness of others, which the aid of reason may be required to dissipate, as they are frequently made pretexts to justify inaction.

These pretexts for declining the duty of inquiry are generally masked under vague or metaphorical phrases:—"Inquiry implies the weighing of evidence, and might lead to doubt and perplexity;" "to search into a subject might shake the settled convictions of the understanding;" "to examine opposite arguments and contradictory opinions might contaminate the mind with false views."

Every one who alleges such pretexts as these for declining inquiry, must obviously begin by assuming that his own opinions are unerringly in the right. Nothing could justify any man for declining the investigation of a subject which it is his duty to teach, or on which his opinions necessarily determine his religious or his social conduct, but the possession of an understanding free from liability to error. Not gifted with infallibility, in what way except by diligent inquiry can he obtain any assurance that he is not in the one case disseminating erroneous opinions, or in the other pursuing a course of injurious action? If he holds any opinion, he must

have acquired it, either by examination, or by instillation, rote, or some process which he cannot recollect. On the supposition that he has acquired it by proper examination, the duty on which we are now insisting has been discharged, and the matter is at an end. If he has acquired it in the other manner, if it is fast fixed in his understanding without any consciousness on his own part how it came there, the mere plea that his mind might become unsettled, can be no argument against the duty of investigation. For any thing he can allege to the contrary, his present opinions are wrong; and in that case the disturbance of his blind conviction, instead of being an evil, is an essential step towards arriving at the truth.

There is no foreseeing how far the subtlety of interest and indolence may go; and it may be possibly assigned as a further reason for his declining inquiry, that he may come to some fallacy which he cannot surmount, although convinced of its character. If he is convinced of its character, he must either have grounds for that conviction or not. If he has grounds, let him examine them, draw them out, try if they are valid, and then the fallacy will stand exposed. If he has no grounds for suspecting a fallacy, what an irrational conclusion he confesses himself to have arrived at! But perhaps he will reply — he may be unable to solve the difficulty, his mind may become perplexed, and the issue may prove, after all, that it

would have been much better had he remained in his former strong, though unenlightened conviction. Why better? If he is in perplexity, let him read, think, consult the learned and the wise, and in the result he will probably reach a definite opinion on one side or the other. But if he should still remain in doubt, where is the harm, or rather why is it not to be considered a good? The subject is evidently one which admits strong probabilities on opposite sides. Doubt, therefore, is the proper sentiment for the occasion: it is the result of the best exercise of the faculties; and either positively to believe, or positively to disbelieve, would imply an erroneous appreciation of evidence.

In the minds of some people, a strong prejudice appears to exist against that state of the understanding which is termed doubt. A little reflection, however, will convince any one, that on certain subjects doubt is as appropriate a state of mind as belief, or disbelief on others. There are doctrines, propositions, facts, supported and opposed by every degree of evidence, and many amongst them by that degree of evidence of which the proper effect is to leave the mind in an equipoise between two conclusions. In these cases, either to believe or disbelieve would imply that the understanding was improperly affected. Doubt is the appropriate result, which there can be no reason to shrink from or lament.*

* "One who has an aversion to doubt, and is anxious to

But it is further urged, that inquiry might contaminate the mind with false views; and therefore it is wise and laudable to abstain from it.

We can understand what is meant by contaminating a man's habits, or disposition, or even imagination. If a man read impure books, or works of extravagant fiction and false taste, his imagination will inevitably be coloured by the ideas presented, and the conceptions which subsequently rise up in his mind will partake of the impurity and extravagance thus made familiar to it. But there is no analogy on this point between the understanding and the imagination. There is contamination, there is evil, in preposterous and obscene images crowding before the intellectual vision, notwithstanding a full and distinct perception of their character; but there is no contamination, no evil in a thousand false arguments coming before the mind, if their quality is clearly discerned. The only possible evil in this case is mistaking false for true; but the man who shrinks from investigation, lest he should mistake false for true, can have no reason for supposing himself free from

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make up his mind and to come to *some* conclusion on every question that is discussed, must be content to rest many of his opinions on very slight grounds, since no one individual is competent to investigate fully all disputable points. Such a one, therefore, is no lover of truth; nor is in the right way to attain it on any point."— Archbishop Whately *on the Writings of St. Paul*, p. 25.

that delusion in his actual opinions. To maintain that he would be more likely to escape from error without investigation than with it, is a species of absurdity which requires no exposure.*

On no plea, therefore, can investigation, in the circumstances already stated, be declined. That it should unsettle a man's established convictions, or that it should lead to ultimate doubt, may be a good: the one is the necessary preliminary to passing from error to truth; the other, if ultimately produced, is most likely to be the proper state of his intellect in relation to the particular subject examined. That inquiry should contaminate his mind is also a vain allegation. The only meaning which can be attached to the phrase, implies a misconception of falsehood for truth — a delusion which inquiry is not only the direct means of preventing, but of dissipating if he is already involved in it.

Whoever fears to examine the foundation of his opinions, and enter on the consideration of any train of counter-argument, may rest assured, that he has some latent apprehension of their unsoundness and incapacity of standing investigation. And as a fear of this sort, while it is totally discordant with that spirit of candour and fairness which every one must acknowledge to be the proper disposition for the attainment of truth, is at variance with the

* The way not to be led into error (remarks Hooker) is to be thoroughly instructed. — *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book iii.

positive duty of the occasion, no man should suffer it to prevent him from boldly engaging in the requisite inquiry. A great deal of invective has been levelled at free-thinking. Taking the expression literally as applying to the process of thought, the only distinction worth attending to on this point is that between accurate and inaccurate, true and false. Thinking can never be too free, provided it is just. But construing the phrase as synonymous with free inquiry, it follows from the clearest principles of morality, that the freest inquiry not only is an innocent act, but under certain circumstances becomes an imperative duty.

Section III.

Continuation of the Subject.

Besides the objections to inquiry examined in the last section, there are some other prejudices of a similar character, which, as long as they prevail, must form serious impediments to the attainment of truth.

One of these is a fear that we may search too far, and become chargeable with presumption in prying into things we ought not to know: another prejudice is, that we may contract guilt should we arrive at erroneous conclusions, or conclusions at variance with such as are established; and another, that it is a sort of praiseworthy humility to ac-

quiesce in received opinions, on the authority of others, and refrain from thinking for ourselves.

A brief space will not be ill bestowed in setting these prejudices in their true light.

As to the first, a few words will suffice to prove that nothing can be more irrational and unfounded. It has been shown in another place* that truth is conducive to human happiness; the attainment of it, one of the highest objects of human enterprise; and the free exercise of our faculties on all subjects, the means of securing this invaluable blessing.† If this is a correct representation, the prosecution of inquiry in any possible direction is a process from which there is every thing to hope and nothing to fear, and to which there are no limits but such as the nature of our own faculties prescribes.

It is not easy to conceive with exactness what can possibly be apprehended from investigation; what is the precise danger or difficulty it is expected to involve us in; what is implied in the fear that we may search too far; what are those things which it may be presumptuous to ascertain. Such persons as have imagined that inquiry might conduct us to forbidden truths in the fields of know-

* Essay on the Publication of Opinions, and also the Introductory Chapter to the present Essay.

† "When I see," said Sir George Savile, in a speech seventy years ago, "when I see a rivulet flow to the top of a high rock, and requiring a strong engine to force it back again, then shall I think that freedom of inquiry will be prejudicial to truth."

ledge, seem to have had no determinate notions as to the sort of discoveries we should make, but have been influenced by some loose analogy with human affairs.

As there are secret transactions in society, amongst bodies or individuals, which we should be culpable in prying into; sealed documents circulating in the world, sacred to those whose names they bear, and not to be scrutinised with honour by any of the intermediate agents through whose hands they pass; records of private affairs, kept solely for the use of the parties concerned in them, and which we are not to come upon by stealth, and rifle of their information: and as to infringe the privacy of these matters would be stigmatised as indelicate, meddling, presumptuous, so it seems to be supposed that there are closed documents in nature into which we are forbidden to look, private processes going on into which we have no right to intrude, truths existing which are not to be profaned by our scrutiny, and to attempt to make ourselves acquainted with these is unjustifiable audacity and presumption. If this prejudice does not often assume the definite form here ascribed to it, it may frequently be found exerting an influence without a distinct consciousness in the mind over which it prevails.*

* When the writer penned this passage some twenty years ago, he little thought of the future re-appearance of the prejudice amongst men of education, even in a more palpable form. A

A more striking instance of a completely false analogy could not be adduced. There is not a single point of resemblance throughout the whole field of knowledge to these little secrets, the offspring of human weakness, or the indispensable resources of human imperfection. There is no

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clergyman has in a recent publication denounced geological investigations as not "*subjects of lawful inquiry*," "*shrouded from us by a higher power*," to be reckoned "*a dark art, dangerous and disreputable.*" This statement (for I have not seen the book) is given on the authority of Dr. Pye Smith in his able and valuable work, "On the Relation between the Holy Scriptures and some Parts of Geological Science," p. 193. The cry of danger, it appears, is not confined to interrogating nature, but extends even to researches into historical documents. "Scarcely," says Dr. Wiseman, speaking of the discovery of the key to the hieroglyphical proper names, "scarcely was it announced to Europe, when timid minds took the alarm and reprobated it as tending to lead men to *dangerous investigations.*" — *Lectures on the Connection between Science and Revealed Religion*, vol. ii. p. 76. How strikingly contrasted with the bigotry here noticed is the noble declaration of the present Archbishop of Dublin :—"As we must not dare to withhold or disguise revealed *religious* truth, so we must dread the progress of no other truth. We must not imitate the bigotted Papists who imprisoned Galileo ; and step forward, Bible in hand (like the profane Israelites carrying the ark of God into the field of battle), to check the inquiries of the geologist, the astronomer, or the political economist, from an apprehension that the cause of religion can be endangered by them. Any theory, on whatever subject that is really sound, can never be inimical to a religion founded on truth; and any that is unsound may be refuted by arguments drawn from observation and experiment, without calling in the aid of revelation." — *Essays on St. Paul*, p. 36.

secret in the natural or the moral world, sacred from the investigation of man. Here there can be no presumption, no undue boldness, no counterpart at all to the audaciousness of one person intruding upon the privacy of another. All that man has to guard against, and that simply for his own sake, is error; his vigilance is required only to insure that his facts are properly ascertained, and his inferences correctly deduced. The presumption he has to repress, is not any presumption in relation to other beings in possession of secrets, which he is trying clandestinely to wrest from them, but merely the presumption of drawing positive and ample conclusions from doubtful and slender premises, of supposing that he has discovered what he has not, that he has succeeded where he has only failed, that he has done what still remains to be accomplished; in a word, the presumption of overrating his own achievements. Here indeed a man may err in self-confidence, but an evil cannot obviously arise from searching too far, which is best remedied by searching farther, by closer reasoning and more rigorous investigation.

The strangest absurdities indeed would be involved in the supposition that we could possibly reach to knowledge, which we ought not to attain. We are placed in this world by the Creator of the universe, surrounded with certain objects and endowed with certain faculties. From these objects, with these faculties, it is implied by the hypothesis

under consideration, we may extort secrets which he never designed to be known, extract information which Omnipotence wished to withhold.

The second of the prejudices above enumerated, that we may contract guilt if in the course of our researches we miss the right conclusion, and had therefore better let inquiry alone, is still more prevalent and influential in preventing those investigations which it is our duty to make. On a former occasion* it has been shown, that nothing can be more at variance with reason, than an apprehension of this nature. As our opinions on any subject are not voluntary acts but involuntary effects, in whatever conclusions our researches terminate, they can involve us in no culpability. All that we have to take care of, as will be more largely shown hereafter, is to bestow on every subject an adequate and impartial attention. Having done this we have discharged our duty, and it would be irrational and unmanly to entertain any apprehension for the result.

In fact, there is the grossest inconsistency in the prejudice now under consideration. If we may contract guilt by searching after truth, we may equally do it by remaining in our present state. The reason alleged in the prejudice itself, and the only reason which can be assigned with any plausibility why we may commit an offence by em-

* Essay on the Formation of Opinions.

barking in any inquiry, is that we may by so doing miss the right conclusion, or, in other words, fall into error; for no one would seriously contend that we could incur any moral culpability by an investigation which conducted us to the truth. But it is obvious that we may equally miss the right conclusion by remaining in our actual opinions. It is then incumbent on us to ascertain whether we are committing an offence by remaining in them; in other words, it is necessary to examine whether those opinions are true. Thus the reason assigned for not inquiring, leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to inquire.

Let those, then, who fear lest investigation should lead them astray, reflect that they have no security from deception in their present state; and that if mere error could be a ground of offence, remaining in error, through supineness or needless apprehension, must be a much heavier transgression than falling into error by the discharge of their duty in diligent and faithful inquiry.

A man, indeed, after the best and most dispassionate investigation of an important subject, may naturally feel a degree of anxiety lest he should after all have missed the truth; but in this anxiety there is not, or ought not to be, the slightest admixture of moral uneasiness. It is an anxiety, lest his conclusions, when they come to form the grounds of his actions or of his instructions to others, should lead to consequences which he did not anticipate.

His conclusions may be wrong, and the consequences disastrous; but if he has a proper view of the matter, he will feel none of the stings of remorse, not the faintest accusation of conscience. Having inquired to the best of his power, he has done all that depended on himself, and would exhibit little wisdom were he to torment himself with reproaches for an unfortunate issue.

The third prejudice we have to consider is, that acquiescence in received opinions, or forbearing (according to the common phrase) to think for ourselves, evinces a degree of humility highly proper and commendable.

If we examine the matter closely, nevertheless, we shall find that it usually evinces nothing but a great degree of indolent presumption or intellectual cowardice. There is often, in truth, as great a measure of presumption in this species of acquiescence as in the boldest hypothesis which the human invention can start. That received or established opinions are true, is one of those sweeping conclusions, which would require very strong reasons and often elaborate research to justify it. On what grounds are they considered to be true by one who declines investigation? Because (on the most favourable supposition) they have been handed down to us by our predecessors, and have been held with unhesitating faith by a multitude of illustrious men. But what comprehensive reasons are these? What investigation it would require to

show they were valid! As the whole history of mankind teems with instances of the transmission of the grossest errors from one generation to another, and of their having been countenanced by the concurrence of the most eminent of the race; what a large acquaintance with the peculiarities of the generations preceding us, and with the circumstances of the great men to whom we appeal, it would require to show that this particular instance was an exemption from the general lot!

It is then no humility to refrain from inquiry; on the contrary, it is the proper kind of humility (or if it is not humility, it is the proper feeling for the occasion) to be determined to do all in our power to make ourselves acquainted with every subject on which it is necessary for us to pronounce, or profess, or act upon an opinion.

From the necessity of using our own judgment, or, in other words, of forming a conclusion for ourselves, we cannot be absolved. We must form our opinion either of the doctrine itself, or of the comparative degrees of confidence to which those men who have studied the subject are entitled; and it is evident that in the case of disputed doctrines, the latter may be as difficult, and demand as much investigation, as much knowledge and acuteness of judgment, as to come to a decision on the original question.

Let no one, then, deceive himself by supposing that he is exercising the virtue of humility, or

modesty, or diffidence, when he is in fact resting in a conclusion, which to reach legitimately would require so much knowledge and ability. Nor let any one suppose that such a plea will exonerate him, in certain circumstances, from the imperative duty of entering upon a rigorous examination of all the evidence within his reach. Far from being a virtue, this kind of acquiescence is in most cases a positive vice, tending to stop all advancement in knowledge and all improvement in practice.

From the preceding review it appears that all these prejudices are equally unfounded; that there are no forbidden truths, to which inquiry may conduct us, no secret fields of knowledge on which we can possibly trespass; that the result of inquiry, whatever it may be, can involve us in no criminality; and, lastly, that it is no true humility to refrain from investigation in deference to the authority of others.

Let the inquirer, then, enter on his task with full confidence that he is embarking in no criminal, or forbidden, or presumptuous enterprise, but is, on the contrary, engaging in the discharge of a duty. Let him be as circumspect as he pleases in collecting his facts and deducing his conclusions, cautious in the process, but fearless in the result. Let him be fully aware of his liability to error, of the thousand sources of illusion, of the limited powers of the individual, of the paramount importance of truth; but let him dismiss all conscien-

tious apprehensions of the issue of an investigation, conducted with due application of mind and rectitude of purpose.

As there are some prejudices which are hostile to inquiry, so there are some principles of an opposite character, the full and adequate conviction of which essentially conduces to promote it. Amongst these is the truth that knowledge is progressive, and that in this progress every age is placed in a more advantageous position for the comprehension of any subject of science than the last. Every inquirer, therefore, finds himself on higher ground than his predecessors; he can avail himself of their latest acquisitions without the labour of original discovery, and thus with unbroken spirits and unsubdued vigour, he can commence his career at the ultimate boundary of theirs. Hence, without any presumption in the superiority of his faculties, he may hope to attain views more comprehensive and correct, than were enjoyed by men who immeasurably transcended him in capacity.* All the advantage, nevertheless, which he has over his precursors, his successors will have over him. All his

* "We can adopt at the present day," remarks Pascal, "different sentiments and new opinions, without despising the ancients, or treating them with ingratitude, since the elementary knowledge they left us served as steps for our own. We are indebted to them for our superiority; and, standing on an elevation to which they have conducted us, the least effort raises us still higher; and with less toil and less glory too, we find ourselves above them." —*Thoughts*, chap. xxvi.

exertions will tend to place them above him; and the very truths which he discovers, should he be fortunate enough to discover any, will give them the power of detecting the errors with which all truths on their first manifestation in any mind are inevitably conjoined.

In such considerations as these there might be something to deter a man of narrow views and selfish feelings. That his opinions should be thus scrutinised and examined, and their imperfections detected; that in process of time he should lose his rank as an oracle on the subject of his exertions, and be superseded by after-sages, might have any other effect than that of stimulating him to exertion. To a man of real genius, however, a man of large and liberal understanding, and as large and liberal feelings, these considerations are at once replete with satisfaction and encouragement, and destructive of undue self-importance and complacency.

When he looks back on his predecessors, he appreciates the advantages of his position, and can thus, without undue self-estimation, indulge a fair hope that by strenuous exertions his own works may form one of the steps in the intellectual progress of the race, and constitute him the author of benefits to be indefinitely perpetuated. When he looks forward, while he exults in the coming glories of progressive knowledge, and anticipates with delight the development of truths which he is never to

know, he feels a perfect confidence that any real service which he may render to literature or science will be duly appreciated, and rejoices that any errors into which he may unconsciously wander will do little injury, because they will be speedily corrected.

Knowing that were he even the Newton of his age, he must be eventually outstripped, he considers such an incident as nowise derogatory to his talents or reputation: agitated by none of the jealousy which is too common a disgrace to men who ought to rise superior to the weakness of such a passion, he even feels a desire that he may be outstripped in his own lifetime, a curiosity to know by what modifications his own doctrines will be corrected: he is on the watch for new discoveries, because he knows that there are minds which, having mastered preceding knowledge, are in a condition to make them.

It has been frequently stigmatised as presumptuous and overweening vanity in a man of the present day to fancy himself superior to men of past times; but the view of the subject here exhibited annihilates all such imputations. It takes away all colour of disrespect from the closest scrutiny of the efforts of his predecessors. He is conscious that in the most successful controversy, if controversy it may be called, which he may institute with them, the greatest success cannot be considered as any personal superiority on his part

over the object of his remarks; he knows that it is the superiority of the station to which his own times have carried him; and thus the profoundest respect is compatible with the freest examination. What does he admire in the great philosophers of past ages? Not surely their errors, perhaps not one of their unqualified opinions; but he admires the reach of thought which, from the then level of knowledge, could touch on truths the full and perfect mastery of which was to be the work of future ages, the slow result of the successive efforts of persevering and vigorous minds.

Such a view of the progressive character of human knowledge as this, would wonderfully facilitate the pursuit of truth. No single principle with which we are acquainted would have so salutary an influence in promoting candour, liberality, openness to conviction, self-knowledge, proper caution, and proper fearlessness.

CHAP. III.

DUTIES IN THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY.

WHETHER the preceding chapter has succeeded or not in describing the circumstances which render it obligatory upon mankind to undertake the investigation of any subject, it will be allowed by all, that when it is the duty of men to enter upon inquiry, it is also their duty to adopt the best means in their power for bringing it to a successful issue; or, in other words, for arriving at the truth. And even when inquiry is optional and voluntary, no other course can be wisely or consistently pursued.

Now the success of investigation, as far as the inquirer can influence it, depends on two circumstances, the state of mind on which he enters upon the inquiry, and the conduct which he pursues in relation to the evidence accessible to him.

Let us examine what are the duties of the inquirer in reference to each.

SECTION I.

Duties of the Inquirer in relation to the State of his own Mind.

No one who has been accustomed to discriminate the phenomena of the world within him can doubt

that there are certain states of mind favourable to success in the pursuit of truth, while there are others of an opposite character. These, it is necessary for our present purpose to investigate, for unless we clearly understand their nature, we can fully comprehend neither how far they are within our control nor to what extent they are matters of duty. These mental conditions may be classed for convenience under the heads of moral and intellectual, the former comprehending our desires and emotions, the latter, our opinions or modes of thinking.

In entering upon any inquiry, it is obvious that we may be possessed with desires and affections relating to the subject, or to the issue of the investigation, and also with preconceived opinions respecting it, both of which may have a material influence on the result. We may feel, for instance, a lively affection for a doctrine, an irrepressible desire to find it confirmed by examination, and a conviction of its truth, not the less strong for having no dependence on any process of reasoning; or, on the other hand, we may proceed to the investigation with an utter indifference to the issue, and without any decided opinion at all on the subject, or even under the emotions of distaste and antipathy.

So varied, indeed, are the combinations of intellect and feeling under the influence of which we may commence any investigation, that they must

be consigned to the recollection or imagination of the reader; but amidst all this variety it is not difficult to point out, with sufficient precision, both the moral and the intellectual states most favourable to the attainment of truth.

The most favourable moral condition in which the inquirer can be, is, unquestionably, when he is possessed with a simple and fervent desire to arrive at the truth without any predilection in behalf of any opinion whatever, and without any other disturbing emotion of hope or fear, affection or dislike. "To be indifferent," says Locke, "which of two opinions is true, is the right temper of mind that preserves it from being imposed on, and disposes it to examine with that indifferency, till it has done its best to find the truth — and this is the only direct and safe way to it. But to be indifferent whether we embrace falsehood or truth is the great road to error."*

If a man is possessed with a desire to find a given opinion true, or to confirm himself in a doctrine which he already entertains, he will, in all probability, bestow an undue attention on the arguments and evidence in its favour, to the partial or total neglect of opposite considerations; but if he is free from all wishes of this kind, if he has no predilection to gratify, if his desires are directed solely to the attainment of correct views, he will naturally search for information wherever it is likely to pre-

* Conduct of the Understanding, § 12.

sent itself; he will be without motive for partiality, and susceptible of the full force of evidence.

However unaccountable it may at first sight appear, it is a fact, that few human beings, in their moral, religious, and political inquiries, are possessed with this simple desire of attaining truth: their strongest wishes are directed to the discovery of new grounds for adhering to opinions already formed; and they are as deaf to arguments on the opposite side as they are alive to evidence in favour of their own views. The pure wish to arrive at truth is indeed as rare as the integrity which strictly observes the golden rule to act towards others as we would wish others to act towards us.* For this several reasons may be assigned. A principal one is, that men's interests are often indissolubly connected with the prevalence of a certain opinion; they are, therefore, naturally anxious to find out every possible ground why this opinion should be held: their personal consequence, too, is often implicated in its support; they are pledged by their rank or office, or previous declarations, to the maintenance of a determinate line of argument, and they feel that it would be a disparagement to their intellectual powers and to their reputation in the world were it proved to be unsound.

Another reason is, that such opinions are sometimes really objects of affection, and things of habit.

* "The impartial lovers and searchers of truth," says Locke, "are a great deal fewer than one could wish or imagine."— *Letter to Mr. Samuel Bold.* Works, vol. ix. p. 316.

We are accustomed to regard them as true; we love them as the rallying points of pleasant ideas and cherished feelings, and we are troubled and even pained when they are presented to us in a different light.

In addition to all this, men are glad to find in their opinions some excuse for their practices. They naturally, therefore, wish to meet with a confirmation of those doctrines which are conducive to their self-complacency.

These, and other similar circumstances, create in the mind a desire to find some given opinion true; and of course, as far as their influence reaches, extinguish all aspirations and efforts to arrive at the truth.

Even when any one entertains a sincere desire to form correct opinions on any subject, the feelings or emotions associated with it in his own mind may interfere to disturb his intellectual views. It is, perhaps, possible to conceive a man possessed with a genuine wish to arrive at the truth, notwithstanding a feeling of affection or complacency for some particular doctrine; and endued with such self-control as not to allow a feeling of that kind to influence his mode of conducting the investigation; but he cannot prevent it from shedding an influence on his thoughts. Strive as he may, all the considerations favourable to the doctrine in question will spontaneously rise to his view with more frequency and vividness, and remain longer above the

intellectual horizon than those of an opposite character.

The same effect will frequently take place from an apparently contrary cause. A man may feel a dislike for a certain conclusion; he may dread to find it true; and this very sentiment may direct his thoughts upon it so exclusively as to assist in bringing about the conviction which he wishes to shun.*

In both these cases—in that of affection for a doctrine as well as that of dislike—the consequent judgment will probably be wrong, since whatever fixes the whole attention on part of the evidence tends to vitiate the conclusions drawn by the understanding. A signal instance of the power of fear to cause erroneous judgments in this way occurred in the middle of the last century. It happened that in the year 1750, on the 8th of February, the shock of an earthquake was felt in London. Precisely four weeks afterwards, on the 8th of March, a similar shock occurred. The people became alarmed, and their fears jumped to the conclusion (absurdly enough) that a third shock would

* Locke thus vividly describes the despotism of passion: — "Matters that are recommended to our thoughts by any of our passions take possession of our minds with a kind of authority, and will not be kept out or dislodged; but as if the passion that rules were for the time the sheriff of the place, and came with all the posse, the understanding is seized and taken with the object it introduces, as if it had a legal right to be alone considered there." — *Conduct of the Understanding*, § 45.

take place after the lapse of a similar period. Meanwhile an insane life-guardsman, excited no doubt by the prevalent apprehension, went about predicting that the cities of London and Westminster would be utterly destroyed on the 5th of April. If the matter had not appealed to their fears, a prediction from such a person would have been ridiculed, as there could be no grounds for ascribing to him any supernatural powers. As it was, a ready credence was yielded to his prophecy. Before the dreaded hour arrived, thousands fled from the apprehended catastrophe into the country. Some passed the night in their carriages, not being able to procure accommodations in the neighbouring towns; others betook themselves to the river, and lay all night in boats, while crowds waited for the dawn of the eventful day in the open fields.* The shame and mortification which these parties felt when the day had passed without the expected convulsion proved how egregiously their fears had misled their judgment. Being able now to view, dispassionately, the very same evidence which they had previously had before them, but which they

* The affair is thus mentioned by Horace Walpole, in one of his Letters, dated Wednesday, April 4. 1750. "I return to the earthquake, which I had mistaken; it is to be to-day. This frantic terror prevails so much, that within these three days 730 coaches have been counted passing Hyde Park Corner, with whole parties removing into the country." — *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 328. ed. 1840.

could not perceive, all the absurdity of their anticipations flashed upon their minds.

The influence of strong feelings in circumscribing the intellectual vision is not the least remarkable when they are habitually associated with a subject, so that whenever the subject enters the mind, the feeling accompanies it. Take, for example, the case of awe. If a man is habitually labouring under this affection, in regard to the subject to be examined, or to the issue of the investigation, it is astonishing how limited will be the scope of his thoughts, how few and how monotonous the conceptions to which the subject will give rise. The accompanying downcast look fixed on a few inches of the ground is an apt emblem of the narrow range of ideas which attends the feeling.

It may be questioned, whether this kind of constraint ever exists in any intensity in a mind which is occupied with a genuine desire after truth; fear of the result of investigation at least can hardly exist there; but if even a fainter tone of the feeling predominate, it will prevent that quickness of conception, comparison, inference, which would otherwise be brought to bear on the inquiry. However this may be, the fact is, that the state of mind in question is generally found attended by a desire to receive confirmation in our habitual opinions. Men are alarmed when, in departments of knowledge over which the solemnity of awe has diffused itself, they alight on any new ground, or, in other

words, on any doctrines at variance with received principles; and their wishes are usually pointed to a corroboration of the views already familiar to their contemplation, and which neither startle their timidity nor task their understandings.

From this brief review it appears that the emotions described produce two effects: they create desires for some result other than the simple attainment of truth; and even when they create no desires of this kind, they suggest ideas which would not have otherwise entered the mind; or what is equally effectual, they prevent ideas from entering which would have otherwise been suggested.

Important as are the favourable and unfavourable moral states of mind of the inquirer in relation to the pursuit of truth, they are not more so than the intellectual. In any given mind, the intellectual state most favourable for the attainment of truth is obviously freedom from preconceived errors. The pre-occupation of the understanding by erroneous opinions is one of the greatest impediments which offer themselves in the pursuit of accurate knowledge. The mere pre-occupancy itself is an obstacle scarcely to be overcome; but as the opinions thus lodged are generally the objects of fondness or veneration, the task of removing them becomes almost hopeless. No language can describe with sufficient force the tenacity with which early received notions are retained: they seem to enter into the very essence of the soul, to weave them-

selves into the tissue of the understanding, till it transcends the power of conception to imagine them erroneous. In those notions especially, which are coeval with our earliest recollections, and the origin of which we cannot trace, we seem incapable of suspecting the slightest error.*

When such notions are combined with that kind of reverential fear which we have already described, there is no degree of absurdity to which they may not rise. A modern writer, in his travels through Mesopotamia, relates that at Orfah (the ancient Ur of the Chaldees), the river and the fish in it are regarded as sacred to Abraham, and the inhabitants firmly believe that if any of the fish were caught, no process of cooking could make any impression on their bodies. Here is a notion which the people might at once put to the test by direct trial; a fact which they have only to stretch out their hands to verify or disprove; yet so thoroughly pre-occupied are their minds by the prejudice instilled in early infancy, and such awe do they feel in relation to it, that they have not, according to the account, the slightest suspicion of its absurdity, and would think it profane to attempt to submit it

* "If the minds of men," says Hobbes, "were all of white paper, they would all most equally be disposed to acknowledge whatsoever should be in right method, and by right ratiocination delivered to them: but when men have once acquiesced in untrue opinions, and registered them as authentical records in their minds, it is no less impossible to speak intelligibly to such men, than to write legibly upon a paper already scribbled over." — *Human Nature,* chap. x.

to the ordeal of actual experiment. Whether the superstition is really so gross as here represented or not, it hardly surpasses in that respect instances nearer home.

Combining the states which we have attempted to describe, we have a union of qualifications which every lover of knowledge, every inquirer into the facts of history and the laws of nature should aim at attaining; a simple desire to arrive at the truth, a freedom from disturbing passion, and a freedom from preconceived erroneous opinions.

Of these qualifications, the genuine desire for truth may be considered the most valuable, while it is not the least rare. If it is not the mark, it is at least the indispensable attribute of a great mind. United with a large and comprehensive understanding, it places a man amongst the most efficient benefactors of his species. "The love of truth," says a writer whom we take a pleasure in quoting, "a deep thirst for it, a deliberate purpose to seek and hold it fast, may be considered as the very foundation of human culture and dignity."*

Were mankind in general possessed with this desire in any great degree of purity and intenseness, many errors might undoubtedly still prevail in the world from the limited powers of the human intellect; but it is easy to see how much the progress of knowledge would be accelerated, and how soon

* Dr. Channing on the Elevation of the Labouring Classes.

the traces of illiberality and intolerance would be swept from social intercourse and civil institutions.

Men, in fact, are usually in the appropriate condition of mind here described when they enter on study of physical and mathematical science: their sole object is to know all that is to be known, they seldom have any passions connected with the truths before them, and in general they are perfectly aware of their own ignorance.

If the states of mind favourable and unfavourable to the pursuit of truth, of which we have now taken a survey, were the result of volition, if, in other words, we had but to exert our will at any time, in order to produce or to put an end to them, the course of our duty in relation to our own mental condition would be plain and simple. We should then be bound by the clearest obligations of morality to dismiss from our minds all hope and fear, affection and hatred, preconceived opinions and habitual associations, and approach the consideration of the subject with that perfect indifference for the issue of the investigation and that single love of truth which form the most effectual security against error. All this has accordingly been sometimes enjoined on the inquirer by the liberal and the enlightened, who, in their anxiety to promote a good cause, have overlooked, for the moment, the nature of their moral and intellectual constitution. They have fallen into the mistake of requiring what cannot be performed.

"If," says a writer of this class, "we heartily desire the purchase of truth, we must shake off the prejudices which custom and education have loaded us with."—"Make it your business, then," he continues, "to extirpate all prejudices, to clear your minds of all sorts of prepossessions, to wipe out all tinctures, and thereby to make way for truth to enter into your souls, and to take possession of them."—"If we would be masters of truth, our best course is to rid our minds for once of all our preconceived opinions, to quit our most beloved representations of things, to destroy our old notices, to cast away our former prejudices, and so to prepare our minds for the reception of truth."*

Such injunctions would be excellent were they practicable. Every one, however, who will take the trouble of reflecting on what passes in his own breast must be sensible from his proper experience

* A Free Discourse concerning Truth and Error, by John Edwards, D.D., pp. 384, 385. Descartes has a passage much to the same effect:—"Itaque ad serio philosophandum veritatemque omnium rerum cognoscibilium indagandum, primo omnia prejudicia sunt deponenda; sive accuratè est cavendum, ne ullis ex opinionibus olim à nobis receptis fidem habeamus, nisi prius, iis ad novum examen revocatis, veras esse comperiamus."—*Princ. Phil., Pars Prima*, § lxxv.

Bacon seems to have contemplated the possibility of such a "deposition" of prejudices in an often-quoted passage:—"No one has yet been found of so constant and severe a mind, as to have determined and tasked himself utterly to abolish theories and common notions, and to apply his intellect altogether smooth and even, to particulars anew."

how impossible it is to suppress or discard any preconceptions and feelings of this nature by a mere effort of the will. No human being has any such power over his understanding and affections.

"Though I might find numerous precedents," says a late eminent writer, "I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudices, or to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present. For, in truth, such requests appear to me not much unlike the advice given to hypochondriacal patients in Dr. Buchan's Domestic Medicine; viz. to preserve themselves uniformly tranquil and in good spirits."*

A man who has been brought up in ardent admiration of certain doctrines, imbued with a strong affection for them, and impressed with a perfect conviction of their truth, has no power to lay down these feelings at pleasure. They have been the slow result of years, the gradual product of innumerable circumstances, and we might as well ask him to divest himself of the recollections of his youth, as of these affections for what he was taught in it.

It is always injurious, always destructive of happiness, to require or to aim at more in the code of morality than can be possibly accomplished, more than depends on a man's self; and it therefore becomes necessary to ascertain what, in this respect,

* Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, vol. i. p. 238.

is really practicable. Although an individual cannot at pleasure lay down his preconceived notions, nor dismiss his hopes and fears by a mere act of volition, nor cast off his attachments or antipathies when he chooses, and it would consequently be idle in him to consider these things as duties on his own part, or to enforce them on others; yet he has in his power one very important means of indirectly attaining the end in view, or, at least, of neutralising in a great measure the sinister influence of his passions and prejudices: he can at all times make himself perfectly acquainted with the state of his own mind. If he has a strong conviction on any subject, he can examine whether it has been the result of regular deduction, or whether the opinion lies in his understanding unconnected with any premises, just as it was placed there by others; if he loves or dislikes a doctrine, self-introspection will show him the extent and the origin of the affection: if he desires or dreads any particular issue of the investigation on which he is called to enter, the intensity and the foundation of this prospective emotion will appear to his "inward eye." By thus making the condition of his own mind the subject of scrutiny, he can scarcely fail to reduce the influence of such moral and intellectual prepossessions as are lodged there. The more closely he examines himself, the freer he will be from the danger of improper bias.

Whatever effect an examination of this kind may

have on his habitual feelings, it seems eminently adapted to loosen the power of all preconceived notions. To be fully aware that the opinions we have hitherto held exist in our understandings, simply because they have been put there by some external agency, and not as the result of any process of reasoning on our own parts; that they are, in fact, as far as we are concerned, mere matters of chance, while it cannot fail to make us eager to rescue ourselves from so unenviable a condition, is almost tantamount to the power of extirpating them from our minds before we commence the proposed investigation. Conceive, for a moment, the effect which must ensue from the inquirer attaining to a clear perception that the opinions he entertains on any given subject lie in his mind unsupported by the slightest evidence. He believes them; he is fond of them; but in vain does he cast about for any reasons on which they repose.

Here, then, is the precise and the only duty of the inquirer in relation to the state of his own mind — to examine closely what that state is with regard to the subject which he is called to investigate. This preliminary task is no doubt sufficiently difficult to all those who have not been accustomed to reflect on the phenomena of consciousness; and to them the duty may not appear very perspicuous or very determinate. It is, nevertheless, incumbent on them as far as their ability reaches; it is also part of that process of inquiry through which they must pass in

order to attain the benefits of truth; and even to be aware that such a self-examination is requisite, is a step in advance to their object.

To men of thought, to philosophers, to those who profess to teach any subject, and especially to all who are avowedly engaged in the pursuit of truth for its own sake, such a close investigation into the state of their own minds is not more an imperative duty, than one of the most beneficial and salutary tasks which they can undertake. Always to commence at this point, will be found an immense advantage, not only in prosecuting the inquiry into which they are to enter, but in showing them how exceedingly few are the subjects on which even the most enlightened minds have any pretensions to being positive and dogmatical.

What is the intellectual condition in which a man of even the most liberal education finds himself on attaining a mature age, and being roused to independent reflection? He awakes in the midst of a chaos of heterogeneous opinions, which have been determined to be what they are by a long series of causes, and have been received into his mind by unconscious adoption, or fixed by assiduous inculcation, as objects of affection and reverence. He finds himself (to use the expressive language of Turgot) in a labyrinth into which he has been conveyed blindfold. Upon the grounds of these opinions he has scarcely bestowed a thought, and yet has probably often contended for them with a

warmth, a resentment at opposition, and positiveness of language, which rational conviction shrinks from assuming.

Placed in this disadvantageous condition, let him invariably make it his first business, when he is required by duty, or led by inclination, to investigate a subject, to examine the origin and grounds of the affections and prejudices of his own mind relating to it. Nothing will more powerfully tend to disenchant him of his delusions, or to save him from that arrogant presumption in himself and condemnation of others, which is one of the commonest failings both of the vulgar and the refined. A dogmatical assertion of opinions will scarcely be the fault of one who continually falls back on his own understanding, to ask whether he holds the positions he is maintaining, from having mastered the evidence in their favour, or from their having been fixed in his belief without any evidence at all.

Section II.

Duties in relation to the Evidence.

However difficult or impracticable it may be for a man to bring himself into the most favourable state of mind for the attainment of truth, before he commences any inquiry to which his duty may summon him; the next thing is largely, if not entirely, in his power, and that is the mode of con-

ducting the examination. Here his path is plain, and his duty, although far from easy, is manifest. The only legitimate end of inquiry is to arrive at the truth; and the most likely means of attaining that end is to pursue it with adequate diligence and rigorous impartiality. This, then, is his simple duty, to examine fully and fairly. The same reasons which require him to enter upon any investigation, demand that it shall be properly and efficiently conducted. As without examination he can have no valid assurance that he is teaching truth, or acting on just principles, so he can have no valid assurance on these points, unless the examination be prosecuted in the likeliest way to bring it to a successful issue. The duty of inquiring at all involves the duty of inquiring in the best practicable manner, and this comprehends the union of adequate application with strict impartiality.

The value of that diligence of examination, which leaves no accessible part of a subject unexplored, is scarcely to be overrated. When we reflect on the various knowledge required to determine any important question, the number of considerations bearing upon it, the subtilty and complexity of the reasonings to which it may give rise, the apparent contradictions and anomalies which the whole inquiry may present, we shall be sensible how indispensably necessary to the attainment of truth is a sedulous application to the task. To perform it effectually, we must not only merely adopt but think

out for ourselves every proposition contained in the chain of argument, as well as satisfy our minds in regard to every alleged fact in the chain of evidence.

No difficult subject (and most subjects likely to call for express investigation are either naturally or factitiously difficult) can be mastered with a cursory attention. It has been well remarked, in reference to the necessity of every one really thinking on these cases for himself, that no complex or very important truth can be transplanted in full maturity from one mind to another ; it must be sown, strike root, and go through the whole process of vegetation before it can have a living connection with the new soil, and flourish in complete vigour and development.*

We are especially apt to be deceived in this respect on subjects relating to morals. The terms

* The exact words of the passage here referred to are as follows : — " No complex or very important truth was ever yet transferred in full development from one mind to another : truth of that kind is not a piece of furniture to be shifted ; it is a seed which must be sown and pass through the several stages of growth." — *Letters to a Young Man whose Education had been neglected.*

Bacon, Locke, and Wollaston, had all, long before, made a similar remark. " An opinion," says the latter, " though ever so true and certain to one man, cannot be transfused into another as true and certain, by any other way but by opening his understanding, and assisting him so to order his conceptions, that he may find the reasonableness of it *within himself*." — *Religion of Nature*, p. 91.

employed are such as are daily used in the common intercourse of life, and we imagine we at once comprehend any doctrines which they are the medium of expressing. In physical science, where at every step we are encountered by the difficulties of a technical phraseology, as well as of practical observations and experiments, we immediately feel the necessity of a regular application and progression, of mastering one principle before we proceed to the next, of carrying our object by detail, working our way by vigorous and reiterated efforts. In moral and political questions, on the contrary, we are too apt to be content with mere cursory reading and hasty examination: no difficulties are presented by the language, no unusual terms arrest our progress, no particular experiments demand a pause to verify them, and we glide smoothly along the pages of the profoundest treatise, with an apparently clear apprehension of the various propositions we meet with, but in reality with a vague conception of their full drift and precise meaning. Hence, people are often deluded into fancying themselves competent, after a superficial survey, to pronounce a decision on questions requiring severe study, great nicety of discrimination, and close logical deduction.* These

* "The habit," says a distinguished writer, "of dwelling upon the verbal expressions of the views of other persons, and of being content with such an apprehension of doctrines as a transient notice can give us, is fatal to firm and clear thought,

results are partly occasioned also by love of ease, and reluctance to intellectual exertion. On difficult subjects, inquiry, it is not to be concealed, is laborious; and the natural indolence of most men induces them to stop short of that vigorous application which difficulties require for their solution.

But the man who stops short of full research, although he may be fair and impartial as far as he goes, although he may entertain no desires adverse to truth, and may draw correct inferences from the imperfect collection of facts he has made, will probably arrive after all at an unsound conclusion. It is obvious, that if he has not before him all those grounds for decision which adequate diligence might have brought together, he cannot possess the utmost attainable certainty that his judgment is right. In proportion to the deficiency of his investigation in fulness will be, *ceteris paribus*, his liability to error, and his failure to fulfil the obligation resting upon him. An incomplete inquiry must be an incomplete discharge of his duty.

To those inquirers in particular who are engaged in researches, which, if successful, will correct or enlarge existing knowledge, diligent and patient attention to every part of their subject is invaluable. Not a single proposition in the doctrines of others,

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it indicates wavering and feeble conceptions which are inconsistent with sound physical speculation."—WHEWELL's *History of the Inductive Sciences*, vol. i. p. 240.

or in their own deductions, should be suffered to pass without the closest scrutiny.

By long-continued meditation, the most obscure and perplexed points will insensibly become clear. Difficulties will every day crumble before resolute and reiterated assaults.

Persevering diligence in the prosecution of the subject is of such powerful efficacy, that it is scarcely a matter of wonder to find Newton overlooking his own genius, and ascribing his most brilliant discoveries to sheer industry and patient thought. "I keep," he said, "the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light."

Impartiality of examination is, if possible, of still higher value than care and diligence. It is of little importance what industry we exert on any subject, if we make all our exertions in one direction, if we sedulously close our minds against all considerations which we dislike, and seek with eagerness for any evidence or argument which will confirm our established or favourite views. A life-long investigation may, in this way, only carry us farther from the truth. What duty and common sense require of us is, that our attention be equally given to both sides of every question, that we make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with all the conflicting arguments, that we be severely impartial in weighing the evidence for each, and suffer no bias to seduce

us into supine omission on the one hand, or inordinate rapacity for proof on the other.

This, too, is any thing but a light and easy task. It can be performed to a certain extent by every honest and sincere inquirer; but perhaps to achieve it in perfection, would require a mind at once enlarged, sagacious, candid, disinterested, and upright. A man who perfectly accomplishes it, however, cannot fail to command the esteem of his fellow-men by the worth and dignity of his conduct. It is painful to think that such an example is rare; that instead of it we usually find the mere partisan, one evidently engaged, not in the pursuit of truth, but in searching for every possible argument to support and confirm a conclusion, predetermined by his interest, his prejudices, or his position in society.

What a contrast do these two present!—one candid, upright, fearless of the issue of the investigation because solely intent on truth, searching on all sides, refusing no evidence, anxious only that every circumstance should be brought out in its true colours and dimensions, and free from anger against opposition; the other directing all his acuteness to one side, prying into those sources of information alone where he imagines he shall find what is agreeable to his wishes, stating every thing both to himself and to others with the art and exaggeration of a hired pleader, sounding forth the immaculate merits of his cause, and filled with rancour against all who do not range themselves under the same banners.

Or, perhaps, instead of this angry partisan, we see (what is equally a humiliating spectacle) the timid inquirer moving cautiously along, as if alarmed at the sound of his own footsteps, shunning every track not palpably well-trodden, and looking at any evidence that may chance to cross his path foreign to his ordinary train of thought, with as much trepidation as he would experience were he to see an apparition rising out of the earth.

The annals of the world abound with instances of the most determined obstinacy, in turning away from sources of information which it was apprehended might subvert established opinions. After the telescope had been invented, some of the followers of Aristotle positively refused to look through the new instrument, because it threatened the overthrow of their master's doctrines and authority, or rather of their own dogmas; and when by means of this great invention Galileo had discovered the satellites of Jupiter, they were infatuated enough to attempt to *write down* these unwelcome additions to the solar system.

From the lenient manner in which the faults of negligent and unfair investigation are generally treated, it might seem that they were of small consequence and light turpitude. To pronounce them so, however, under the circumstances described in a former chapter, would be little better than an express contradiction. When any one is called to the duty of examination at all, whether the subjec

concerns the relation in which he stands to God, or has an important bearing on his conduct to his fellow-creatures, or is a matter on which he has to give instruction to others, the vices of partial and inadequate examination must by the force of the terms be of serious moment. The consequences of bad inquiry will be bad practice. Misery will tread on the heels of ignorance; the conduct of the man will be infected with his errors of thought, and society will suffer from a course which it has not sufficient knowledge or virtue to condemn.

If, quitting single cases and partial inquiries, we raise our views to the effects of these vices in all those great investigations which concern the human race at large, we shall perceive that far from being of trivial consequence they are sources of extensive evil, and that this evil must be prolonged and aggravated by considering them in any other light. They are nothing less, in fact, than impediments to the natural progress of mankind in becoming acquainted with what is for their real happiness, and consequently they are impediments to that happiness itself.

The only improvement in the condition of mankind, that can be rationally expected, is from their gradually emancipating themselves from the various errors and multiform ignorance in which they are involved. Society commences in barbarism, it becomes very slowly enlightened: every step of the progress implies the discovery of new truths, or a

departure from errors to which it has been accustomed, from notions established, and practices consecrated by years. To accomplish this, to discover truth and to detect error, investigation is the direct means: the more free, diligent, and impartial the inquiry, the surer the progress, and the faster the improvement.*

It follows, that to deny the importance of investigation, and the importance of conducting it with diligence and fairness, is to deny the value of the means of improvement, and of using those means in the best manner. If then we are under any obligation to consult the general welfare, diligence and fairness in our inquiries are not only recommendable qualities, which it would be well for us to exercise, but they are positive duties, which we cannot neglect without actual culpability.

And further it is of great importance to our moral principles in general, that we should cultivate the spirit of fairness in research and controversy. While there is so much laxity and want of discrimination in regard to candour and uprightness in the prosecution of our inquiries, while

* "When the question," says an eminent German philosopher, "is about the greatest evils that urge the human race, we always return to the truth of truths: mankind cannot be helped unless they become better; they can never become better unless they become wiser; but they can never become wiser unless they think rightly of every thing on which their weal or woe depends; and they will never learn to think rightly, so long as they do not think freely."—WIELAND *on Liberty of Reasoning.*

research on the most momentous subjects may be neglected or perverted with impunity, we cannot expect to find the spirit of integrity carried to its highest perfection in the commerce of life. From one who exhibits a want of proper diligence and scrupulous impartiality in his treatment of evidence on religious, moral, or political questions, it would be vain to look for uncompromising integrity when he is called to adjust the contending claims of his fellow-men, or to decide between his own rights and those of others. In both cases the same qualities are demanded, and if they are neglected in the one, they will be weakened in the other. Nothing, on the other hand, can more exalt the moral character than a fervent and faithful pursuit of truth.

CHAP. IV.

THE ISSUE OF INQUIRY.

The important questions regarding the obligation to enter upon the pursuit of truth, and the duties to be fulfilled in the pursuit itself, having been treated of, it remains to consider the final issue.

When an inquiry respecting any particular point has been completed, an impression of some sort or other will have been left on the mind of the inquirer; he will either have attained a clear and definite conviction, or he will be more or less in doubt and perplexity. The nature of this final impression will have been determined by the considerations presented to his mind during the process, and these considerations will have been themselves antecedently determined by various circumstances besides his conduct in the inquiry, such as the extent of his previous knowledge, the accessibility of evidence, the natural powers of his understanding, and other causes. Many of these are altogether beyond his control; what is alone within his power is the full and fair research already described; and although this is the direct and most effectual means of reaching a just conclusion, it is not always sufficient to counteract the adverse influences in operation at the same time. The most faithful

devotion to inquiry will sometimes fail in arriving at the truth.

It manifestly follows from all this, that the issue of any investigation cannot be the proper ground of moral approbation or censure. It is the manner of conducting the process to which alone these sentiments are applicable. But it is also manifest that, if the inquirer should be ultimately left in error, although without any fault of his own, he cannot reap the benefits of truth. He may be in this, as in many other affairs, at once virtuous in his conduct and unfortunate in the result of his exertions.

After all that has been already urged, these positions seem almost too plain to require elucidation; yet so prevailing and inveterate is the error of supposing a man's opinions to constitute proper grounds of moral commendation or reprehension, that it is necessary to expose it at some length. Nor will a few words be afterwards inappropriately bestowed in elucidating the distinction, not always adverted to, between exemption from merit and demerit on account of our opinions, and exemption from the natural consequences to which our opinions lead. A clear comprehension of this distinction seems requisite for a complete view of the morality of investigation.

Section I.

The Issue of Inquiry not a Matter of Duty.

The preceding discussions, if they have at all succeeded in their object, clearly show that the whole of our duty in relation to the process of inquiry is comprehended in adequate and impartial examination; examination, in the first place, of the state of our own minds in reference to the subject of inquiry; and, secondly, examination of the subject itself and the evidence appertaining to it. It necessarily follows from this, as already stated, that our duty is not implicated in the result, whatever it may be, that when we are under obligation to investigate any subject, it is incumbent upon us to do it with diligence and fairness, but not to arrive at any one conclusion rather than another.

This latter truth, or rather this negative aspect of the one great truth which it has been the object of the preceding arguments to establish, claims attention even more perhaps than the other. To understand at all times what our duty requires from us is universally acknowledged to be important; but it is sometimes overlooked that it is no less important to know what our duty does *not* require. It may be questioned, indeed, whether more evil has not arisen to the human race from their regarding useless and pernicious actions and events not within their power, as exacted by moral obligation, than from their leaving out of the code

of morality such as are of a contrary character. The mischievousness of these imaginary duties ought to be clearly apprehended in connection with the subject before us, and, as a general truth, demands a passing exposition.

With regard to pernicious actions, a syllable would be superfluous to show that it must be fraught with mischief to consider them as duties, and consequently both to encourage and to commit them. And with regard to useless actions, to erect them into so many imperative obligations, besides creating confusion in our moral sentiments, where perfect distinctness and precision are of the highest value, and inflicting injury (as the prevalence of error cannot fail to do) on our reasoning powers, brings upon mankind all the evils of needless restraint and profitless compunction.

It is equally, if not more, pernicious to regard ourselves and others as responsible for circumstances or events over which we have no control, which we can neither produce nor prevent. The unhappiness reciprocally sustained and inflicted in consequence of the omission of imaginary duties not in any body's power, the irksome constraint, the doubts and fears and misgivings, the disputes and dissensions proceeding from such erroneous feelings of moral obligation, are attested by the melancholy history of human superstitions.*

* "The greatest burden in the world," says the author of Paradise Lost, "is superstition, not only of ceremonies in the

Men are peculiarly liable to erroneous sentiments of this kind, when the scene of the events in question is partly or wholly in the mind — when they are events of a sensitive or intellectual nature, or external actions so mixed up with mental processes, as to baffle the efforts of ordinary discrimination to separate them.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the mistake has been committed, which regards men as lying under an obligation to arrive in their researches at a predetermined conclusion. In the prosecution of any inquiry there are certain acts instrumental in attaining the object in view, which are wholly in our power, while closely connected with such acts there are intellectual processes going on and states of mind produced not within our control; and so long as these distinct things are confounded together, approbation and censure cannot fail to be misapplied, and erroneous feelings of duty engendered. It is, accordingly, the want of a clear and accurate discrimination of voluntary acts and involuntary mental phenomena, which appears to have given rise to the doctrine that it is incumbent on every inquirer to arrive at certain pre-appointed con-

church, but of *imaginary and scare-crow sins* at home. What greater weakening, what more subtle stratagem against our Christian warfare, when besides the gross body of real transgressions to encounter, we shall be terrified by *a vain and shadowy menacing of faults that are not?*" — *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.*

clusions; or, in other words, that a man's duty does not consist in diligence and fairness of examination, but in his regarding certain doctrines as true or false. What these doctrines are, is indeed by no means settled; but that there are some which it is a duty to be convinced of, and others which it is incumbent upon us to disbelieve, almost all men unite in pronouncing. When this remarkable and mischievous notion is fathomed, it amounts to no more in each instance than a theory on the part of any one who holds it, that it is the duty of other human beings to regard a certain proposition as true or false, because he himself regards it in that light; that they are not only logically wrong, but morally criminal, in drawing any inference different from his own.

The self-conceit implied in this theory might induce any one to pass it by with a smile, had it not become a dogma which lies at the bottom of much human misery, and therefore deserving of serious confutation. It will not be difficult to show how utterly inconsistent it is with the conclusions already established in the present treatise.

If there is any correctness in those conclusions, it is our duty, when doctrines or propositions are in certain cases presented to our minds, to inquire into their truth. Whether these are new propositions, or such as we have held without investigation from the first dawn of consciousness, is not material. Circumstances present them to our

minds as demanding inquiry into their truth, and our duty is to examine. It is obvious that in this stage of the business, at all events, it is not our duty either to receive or to reject them. To examine them is to investigate whether they have a title to belief or not; and if we are bound to ascertain whether they have claims on our credence, it would be absurd to argue that it is incumbent on us to begin the investigation by admitting or denying the claims into the validity of which we are inquiring. If there is any such admission or denial obligatory upon us, it must be at a subsequent stage. We proceed, we will suppose, in the examination with adequate diligence and strict impartiality. In this process there is evidently still no duty of belief or disbelief to perform. All that we have to do is to be fair, candid, and diligent. We finally close the investigation, and the state of our understandings in relation to the subject examined (on the supposition that the process has been conducted in the manner described) is obviously the unavoidable and involuntary result; that is, it is the necessary issue of an investigation entered into because it was our duty to enter into it, and conducted throughout in the manner which our duty prescribed. That this result should be a given, a pre-ordained result, cannot therefore be justly or consistently required.

It would be an extraordinary thing indeed for any one to say to us, "It is your duty to inquire

into this doctrine, and to conduct the examination with strict fairness and integrity; but although you do all this, unless your examination terminate in a belief (or disbelief) of the doctrine, you will be morally culpable."

It will probably be objected, "Your culpability arises from this, that you did not do all in your power to believe (or disbelieve) the doctrine." Do all in our power to believe or disbelieve? Why should we? On what grounds of duty? Previous to examination the doctrine is not to us a truth or a falsehood, it is merely a proposition offered to our scrutiny: why then should we wish to believe it, and do all in our power to believe it, or the contrary? The proper wish on such an occasion, as we have seen, is not to find any proposition true or false, but to find the truth; and in regard to doing all in our power to believe or disbelieve, if this implies, as it obviously does, paying more attention to the considerations on one side of the question than to those on the other, it would be a positive violation of duty, an infraction of that rigid impartiality which has already been established as an imperative obligation.*

* "An inclination to favour, in any degree, however small, one side in any question, is evidently not an inclination to do *strict and impartial* justice upon it; but the contrary. And a disposition to put a favourable construction on facts or arguments, is a disposition to put *an erroneous* construction upon them." — *An Introduction to the Study of Moral Evidence*, by Rev. James E. Gambier, 3d ed. p. 74.

But the objector replies, "You have suffered your passions to interfere; it is perversity of heart and malignity of disposition, which have rendered propositions credible or incredible to you, that have been rejected or admitted by others." If this accusation is meant to apply to the manner in which we have designedly treated the evidence, then as by the supposition we have conducted the examination with fairness and diligence, it is manifestly out of place. But if the intention of it is to charge us with being possessed by passions, which have involuntarily on our part exaggerated some portions of the evidence and weakened others, and thus led to erroneous conclusions, we reply: 1. This is a mere gratuitous assumption. 2. It is at all events an involuntary error which is charged upon us. 3. Since by the supposition we have conducted the examination with perfect fairness, notwithstanding our suffering under these passions, the greater is our merit; we have shown an extraordinary degree of moral self-control. 4. The circumstance of having conducted it fairly ought to be received in the absence of all other evidence, as conclusive proof that no such passions have prevailed. 5. As we have just the same grounds for throwing such an imputation on our opponent, we may with equal fairness suppose, that in forming an opinion different from ours, he has been influenced by some of these reprehensible passions.

At this point the objector will probably say,

"You have made suppositions which I cannot allow; you have supposed that an investigation may be conducted with fulness, fairness, and impartiality, and not end in the pre-ordained result, in the prescribed opinion: now this I deny. If the investigation had been diligently and fairly prosecuted, there is only one opinion in which it could have ended. That it has terminated differently is a full proof of some vice in the process."

This we believe is a correct representation of what passes in the minds of many of those individuals who condemn others as morally culpable for their opinions. Tacitly assuming themselves to be unerringly in the right, they conclude that others could not have differed from them had they adequately and impartially examined.

To an objector of this class it is easy to answer: "We might with equal fairness and propriety charge the same vice upon you. What reason can you have for maintaining that all fair and diligent examination must end in the establishment of your opinion, which we may not have for asserting the same thing in favour of our own?"

He may possibly reply: "The reasons for my opinion are superlatively strong. It is impossible to conceive that any one who candidly examines can resist them; they have convinced the best and greatest minds; they have never been refuted."

We answer: "All these phrases are only expressions of the strength of your own conviction. As

to the reasons for your opinion, we have examined them, and they appear to us either intrinsically unsound or outweighed by opposite considerations. Your conviction of their force is not greater than that which we entertain of the strength of the arguments on our side of the question. Our opinion, too, has been held by men of powerful minds; and if it had not, there is nothing in the circumstance of powerful minds having held an opinion which can possibly strengthen the direct evidence in its favour to one who examines it. To one who does not examine, authority may be a valid argument; to one who does, authority in opposition to his own views is nothing but an inducement to examine more closely, to suspect unperceived fallacies, to seek for additional evidence, to review all his own inferences, and try every part of the chain which connects them with acknowledged premises. You will perceive, therefore, that we have as great a right to adopt the language of infallibility as you have."

Such an objector as we have here supposed is thus evidently driven to the untenable position of making the coincidence or discrepancy of the opinion of any inquirer with his own opinion, the criterion whether the inquiry has been properly conducted.

This it is obvious can never be admissible. It is both logically and morally unfair and arrogant. In all arguments the disputants are to be placed on equal terms; nothing must be granted to one that

is not to another. If this sort of procedure were conceded to any, it must be conceded to all, and it is easy to see that all argument would be at an end. But the good sense of mankind, with a happy inconsistency, often saves them when their personal interests are not implicated, from the legitimate consequences of their own principles of action when those interests are at stake. While every one might arrogate such a privilege to himself, yet when fairly brought before him, he would see the folly of a claim to it on the part of another, and compel the unreasonable usurper to desist from the palpable absurdity of his pretensions.

In general, however, people who regard others as guilty of an offence in holding a different opinion from their own, do not consider the heretical opinion as a proof of inadequate or unfair investigation, and therefore to be condemned, but as directly criminal in itself. Theirs is a blind unreflecting prejudice which is quite innocent of the suspicion that such a thing as the duty of investigation exists either for themselves or their neighbours.

It will commonly be found that those who are most virulent against others for their opinions, so far from having personally discharged this great duty, are too ignorant even to have attained to the conception of it.

The consequences of the false theory here exposed—of considering that the duty of mankind consists in the belief of certain prescribed doctrines,

instead of placing that duty in the diligence and honesty of their inquiries—have been lamentable beyond description, and form perhaps the most forcible illustration of the evils of error that can be found in the annals of the world. Besides lying like an incubus on the intellect of the race and paralysing its powers, this pernicious error has been at the bottom of that bigoted intolerance which has so long embittered life and disgraced humanity, and which will continue to do both, till mankind awake to a knowledge of their own nature, and to a perception of the value of truth.

It cannot be too freely proclaimed that whenever and on whatever subject inquiry becomes necessary or obligatory on human beings, the only duty to be performed consists in full and impartial investigation, and has no dependence on the result. When a man has accomplished this, he may have failed in attaining the truth; but he will not only have satisfied the requirements of his own conscience, but have deserved the approbation of every wise and just judge.

This conclusion cannot be better enforced than in the remarkable declaration of the "ever-memorable" John Hales in his letter to Archbishop Laud. The passage has been often quoted, but it will yet bear many repetitions.

"The pursuit of truth," says this single-minded writer, "hath been my only care, ever since I first understood the meaning of the word. For this I

have forsaken all hopes, all friends, all desires, which might bias me, and hinder me from driving right at what I aimed. For this I have spent my money, my means, my youth, my age, and all I have, that I might remove from myself that censure of Tertullian,—*Suo vitio quis quid ignorat?* If with all this cost and pains, my purchase is but error, I may safely say, to err has cost me more than it has many to find the truth: and truth itself shall give me this testimony at last, that if I have missed of her, it is not my fault, but my misfortune."

Section II.

The Issue of Inquiry attended by its Natural Consequences.

Every view of the subject combines to show that an inquirer, having accomplished a full and impartial investigation, has performed his entire duty, and cannot be justly either praised or blamed for the conclusion to which he has been brought.

In performing his duty he has also been employing the most likely or rather the only rational means in his power to attain the truth; but since the attainment of truth is merely the probable, not the necessary consequence of the wise and virtuous course he has pursued, he may after all have fallen into error, and in this event, although he will be perfectly free from culpability, he will not be

exempt from the natural consequences of being mistaken. We have already largely insisted on the blessings of truth, and it is here scarcely needful to say that the belief of a truth is generally speaking a necessary condition for enjoying certain benefits connected with it; while the belief of an error usually draws down a number of evils upon him who entertains it. If any one for example distrusts the efficacy of a medicine in a disease which it can really cure, he may suffer under the loss of health, while an efficient remedy is within his reach. If he believes in the harmlessness of a poison, he may lose his life from an erroneous conception of the properties of the noxious substance.

Thus accurate opinions or just conclusions, are, in some cases, the indispensable conditions, and in others the probable means for obtaining certain benefits and avoiding certain evils; and he who after the most faithful investigation is not fortunate enough to have arrived at the true result, will lose the advantages which would have flowed from a more accurate comprehension of the subject.

If this law seems in some degree harsh, it is the same which prevails in all pursuits in which mankind can embark, and it serves to show in a strong light the importance of truth. Moreover the conscientious although (in the issue) unfortunate inquirer is not without his reward. Besides the approbation of his own conscience for the course he has pursued, both his moral and intellectual

powers will have been invigorated by the meritorious effort, and rendered more efficient for other investigations; nor is it to be overlooked that although unsuccessful in his principal object, his views will have inevitably become more comprehensive and accurate on many subordinate points. No right-minded effort to gain knowledge is altogether fruitless.

In the circumstances here described, we have before us a man who has pursued a meritorious line of conduct, but who notwithstanding his merit has been unsuccessful and unfortunate. Generally speaking in those cases where this combination is witnessed, the feelings excited in the spectator are admiration, sympathy, and a desire to console the sufferer. A virtuous man struggling with adversity has been said by an ancient writer to be a sight worthy even of the gods.

But when the union of merit and misfortune happens to take place, or is supposed to have taken place, in the pursuit of truth, distaste and odium most commonly usurp the seat of these favourable sentiments. The mistake apparently more than obliterates the merit, and we resent it as an unpardonable offence, or more correctly speaking, perhaps, we are insensible to the merit and look only to the mistake. Strange that because a man is innocently involved in the evils of error (a calamity in itself sufficiently severe), his fellow-creatures should feel a strong disposition and

often make the most strenuous efforts to increase the bitterness of his fate!

There can be no question that such a sentiment is barbarous and misplaced, and that the proper, the enlightened, the noble feelings for the occasion, when it really happens, are compassion for the misfortune and admiration for the virtue which has not been able to avert it. A barbarous sentiment of this kind could not be maintained, except by profound ignorance of the nature of morality and of the constitution of the human mind.

"It is as absurd," says a distinguished moralist, "to entertain an abhorrence of intellectual inferiority or error, however extensive or mischievous, as it would be to cherish a warm indignation against earthquakes and hurricanes;"* but the absurdity becomes more exquisite when, as it generally happens, the imputation of error or inferiority is the work of self-conceit, or sheer delusion.

In the next chapter the course of the discussion will lead us to consider with more minuteness the proper conduct to be pursued and the proper sentiments to be cherished by human beings towards each other in all that relates to the search after truth, as well as to point out more precisely the errors and violations of morality which in this great department of action they are apt to commit.

* Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy, by Sir James Mackintosh, § 6.

CHAP. V.

DUTIES TOWARDS OTHERS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH.

While it is our duty to enter upon the investigation of certain subjects, and conduct the inquiry with diligence and impartiality, we may be called upon by various circumstances to exercise an influence over our fellow-men who lie under the same obligations, or who have voluntarily undertaken the pursuit of truth in some department of knowledge.

There appear to be two principal methods in which this may be rightly done. The first is by advising and encouraging others to undertake and prosecute inquiry in the proper spirit and manner, and manifesting our sentiments of their conduct in these respects; the second is by communicating to them the information we possess, the facts and inferences which have presented themselves to our own minds, and thus helping them to their ultimate object — the attainment of truth. The first may be briefly designated as Moral Influence; the second as Intellectual Assistance: the one supplying motives to search for truth, the other means for succeeding in the pursuit. These kinds of influence may obviously be exercised singly or together. Perhaps they are most frequently conjoined, but it will conduce to the perspicuity of the discussion to

treat them separately as far as things often intermingled can be considered apart.

In this survey the improper as well as the proper exercise of our influence and control over the minds and actions of others will also come into view, and lead to a passing notice of that brute violence which is sometimes called in to its aid or substituted in its place.

From their very nature the questions here proposed relate chiefly, although not exclusively, to the conduct of people of intelligence, who are presumed to have gone through the process of inquiry; but the treatment of the subject would be incomplete, if we did not likewise expressly advert to the peculiar obligations incumbent on that much larger class who may be denominated non-inquirers: and we shall accordingly point out the distinguishing features of their case in the concluding section.

Section I.

Moral Influence.

In various cases it may be an act of laudable kindness, and in some even our absolute duty, to offer advice and direction to others, or to express our sentiments in regard to their mode of treating important subjects, or in other words in regard to their entering on inquiry and their conduct in the investigation. We may be called upon in such instances to

encourage or discourage, to recommend, to warn, to approve, or to condemn.

The influence we may thus exercise over the minds of our fellow-creatures is frequently very extensive and lasting in its consequences upon their happiness, and hence it becomes of great moment that it should be properly used; that our counsel and moral sentiments should be applied to promote the practice of virtues suitable to the occasion and thence the attainment of truth.

The path of wisdom and morality in this matter is so plain that it is truly wonderful how it should ever be missed. Whatever assistance we here render to any one, whatever counsel or encouragement we give, should manifestly be with the view of inducing and enabling him to discharge his duty by entering upon any required investigation, and pursuing it with diligence and fairness. We should endeavour to infuse into his mind the ennobling love of truth. And if we have at any time occasion to express our moral sentiments in regard to this part of his conduct, it is equally plain that our approbation or the reverse should be given according to the degree in which these virtues have been exercised or neglected.

If it is our own duty, as we think has by this time been pretty clearly established, to enter upon express investigation in certain circumstances, and to do all in our power by an impartial and rigorous examination to arrive at the truth, it must be incum-

bent upon us to counsel and assist others to do the same where we are at all called upon to interfere; and if direct advice and positive assistance are not in our power, or not demanded by the occasion, we should be especially on our guard how we throw any discouragement or obstacle in their way, or any temptation to neglect or pervert the discharge of the obligation under which they lie. Any act done by us to seduce, or deter or prevent them from performing that duty of inquiry which is equally incumbent on them as it is on ourselves, and from thus securing the enjoyment of those advantages which only truth attained by inquiry can bring, must obviously be immoral and reprehensible.

Nothing, however, is more common than virtual if not direct recommendations to shun the duties of inquiry; nothing less extraordinary than marks of disapproval and dislike when those duties have been faithfully discharged. What is the conduct of many of those who take upon themselves the office of public instruction, who assume to be the guides and counsellors of their fellow-creatures? Do they recommend that on any important question you should pay equal attention to both sides of the controversy? that you should read the books which militate against their own opinions as well as such as have been produced in their favour? that you should scrupulously weigh the conflicting evidence? that you should endeavour to be strictly impartial and scrutinise their own arguments with as

much severity as you employ on those of their opponents? Do they urge, do they even mention, the duty of perfect fairness of investigation? Do they insist upon the duty of inquiry at all? Is their language, "Read, examine for yourselves, draw your own inferences, diligently and impartially investigate; we present you with our conclusions and the reasons on which they are founded: we believe them to be valid and irrefutable, but scrutinise them closely, put them to the test; discharge your own duty, and assist us by pointing out any fallacies you may descry; let us be coadjutors in the grand cause of truth"? Is it not, on the contrary, "The doctrine we announce is the only one which can be free from error; avoid all those writings which are opposed to it as you would avoid the contamination of the plague; do every thing in your power to banish any adverse suggestions from your own minds; turn from all discordant evidence; fly from the danger of impartial inquiry; shun the moral turpitude of doubting what we teach; fear and confide"?

If, however, the positions we have laid down are true, if it is a man's duty to examine, and to examine with diligence and impartiality, it is also his duty to recommend the same course to others. If it would be morally wrong in himself to neglect inquiry, to abstain from the investigation of both sides of a question, to bestow all his attention on arguments of one tendency, to banish as far as he

could all opposite suggestions instead of giving them a fair and candid examination, then he must stand convicted of a moral offence for urging upon others the same conduct. On this point there can be no compromise. It is either right or wrong to be partial in our investigations. If it is wrong to be partial, it is wrong to recommend and enforce partiality; it is a departure from the distinct line of duty, a deviation from candid, upright, and honourable conduct. Let every man, on proper occasions, urge his opinions with all the force of argument in his power; let him explain them with all the skill of which he is master; let him expose the weakness of contrary allegations without scruple; but the moment he begins to teach the sacred necessity of thinking as he does, to set forth the guilt of dissenting from his doctrine, and to insist on the avoidance of all opposite considerations, that moment he commits an offence against the moral law of truth.

No further elucidation seems requisite of that direct assistance one human being ought to give to another by counsel and encouragement in the task of inquiry; but a few more words may be separately bestowed on those moral sentiments, the expression of which, while it constitutes in itself a species of advice, is generally mixed with it, and powerfully operates to encourage or discourage any conduct to which it is applied.

If, in regard to inquiry, the moral approbation

and disapprobation of mankind were rightly distributed, they would fall exclusively on the conduct exhibited in undertaking and prosecuting inquiry, and not on the results; or, still worse, on the opinions lodged in the mind without any inquiry at all. Whenever they are thus justly distributed, the highest encouragement is given to diligence and honesty of investigation. But if men award their praise or their censure to mere opinions, without reference to the mode of acquiring them, the effect is that such opinions are ostensibly adopted or repudiated by numbers of people whether really held or not; and the pursuit of truth, instead of being regarded as a duty, is abandoned as a fruitless, a blameworthy, and even a highly criminal enterprise.

Hence nothing can be of higher importance to the cause of truth and virtue than distinct views on this point, and a rigid adherence to the rule of approving and censuring men for their conduct in regard to inquiry, and not for their opinions. No greater injury can be inflicted on morality than stigmatising the proper discharge of the duty of investigation as an offence, on account of its results not being in accordance with prevailing notions. It is no doubt difficult in many cases to judge whether a man's conduct has been honest or not in the examination of any question; and it may therefore be alleged, that the rule here recommended is too nice for use: but the reply is obvious, that

where evidence is wanting we are under no obligation, or rather it is positively unjust, to proceed to judgment. We are not to apply a wrong rule, because it is difficult to apply the right one. In the great majority of cases, it is not the province of human beings to pronounce sentence on each other's conduct in the business of inquiry. The requisite evidence is generally beyond their reach, or too subtle for their grasp; and the happiness of the world would be incalculably increased, if they strictly confined their approbation and disapprobation to useful and pernicious actions directly and visibly affecting each other's welfare, without attempting to intrude their moral sentiments where they cannot be applied with any certainty. "It is impossible," says Locke, "for you or me or any man to know whether another has done his duty in examining the evidence on both sides, when he embraces that side of the question, which we, perhaps upon other views, judge false: and therefore we can have no right to punish or persecute him for it. In this, whether or how far any one is faulty, must be left to the Searcher of hearts, the great and righteous Judge of all men, who knows all their circumstances, all the powers and workings of their minds, where it is they sincerely follow, and by what default they at any time miss truth: and he, we are sure, will judge uprightly."*

* Third Letter for Toleration, Works, vol. v. p. 299.

In those cases where we are able to form a judgment of the conduct exhibited in the examination of a question, it is not, at all events, by the bare opinions of the inquirer at the close, that we can be furnished with the requisite light. Whatever other criteria may assist us, these can never perform that office: we must resort, in truth, to a very different method. Except a man's own express declarations or confessions, or the palpable existence of external motives of interest or passion, there appear to be only two sets of circumstances by which we may guide our judgment of his conduct in inquiry.

First, we may form a general presumption from a man's known personal qualities and habits. We may, for example, fairly presume, that by a man of strict integrity in other matters, no wilful partiality has been exercised in the examination of any question which he has been called to investigate. In the absence of express evidence to the contrary, this would be the only just inference. A man's personal qualities and habits, however, are known only to a few, and even when known they cannot be considered as specific evidence of particular facts. We have much more exact grounds for deciding on the fairness or unfairness of his investigations in the second set of circumstances referred to when they occur, namely, the qualities which he actually exhibits in communicating his opinions to others. Diligence, candour, uprightness, impartiality on the

one hand, and indolence, disingenuousness, unfairness on the other, are qualities which belong as well to the mode of stating to others the evidence and arguments on any subject, as to the mode of conducting inquiry, and reveal the character of those efforts which have been made in the secrecy and silence of the closet. From the opinion of any one barely expressed, we can learn absolutely nothing of the process by which it has been formed; but let him produce his explanations, his arguments, his authorities, his moral sentiments, and he will probably furnish us with sufficient data to decide on his diligence, fairness, and integrity: at least we have no concern with the course of application in which his opinion has originated, except so far as these data, and the external evidence already referred to, betray it.

The qualities we have enumerated are often as distinctly displayed in a man's writings or conversation, as they are in any part of his conduct. Who can mistake the language of sincerity and singleness of purpose, for that of interestedness and duplicity? who the colourings and exaggerations of party pleading for the honest exposition of the inquirer after truth?

An eminent French statesman once sarcastically said, that language was given to man to conceal his thoughts. If so, it must be commonly a difficult task to use it for the intended purpose; but he

would have still greater difficulty in employing it to conceal his moral qualities.

In any long tissue of sentiment and reasoning, the real properties of the mind can scarcely fail to manifest themselves. It is as impossible for the mean, hypocritical, servile spirit to assume, through any long investigation, the moral carriage of the liberal, the candid, the upright, the noble, as to produce in itself the feelings by which they are animated. The greatest art will not suffice to suppress certain infallible symptoms of what lurks beneath the surface, while it will be totally incapable of counterfeiting, because utterly unconscious of, many other indications, universally attending the qualities which command our esteem and admiration. He who gives utterance to language for the gratification of any unworthy passion, spleen, hatred, revenge, or whatever it may be, may rest assured that the chances are ten thousand to one against a successful concealment of his actuating principle.

Here, then, we have proper grounds for judgment if judgment is necessary, and when we have not these, we have only to refrain from the superfluous officiousness and positive injustice of passing sentence.

The practice of pronouncing on a man's fairness, good feeling, and integrity, not from external evidence, or the usual indications of those qualities, but from the nature of the conclusions at which he

has arrived, is the same in spirit as that of sending him to the scaffold for differing from his executioner. Neglecting all the various causes which inevitably generate differences of opinion, and which, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, ought in each case to be considered as sufficient to account for any discrepancy between one man and another, these mischievous censors can find nothing to which they can ascribe a deviation from their own tenets but perversity of heart or malignity of purpose, and the sole evidence they look for of these reprehensible dispositions, is that difference of opinion itself.

This is the very essence of intolerance, the very spirit of Smithfield and the Inquisition. But of the coarser forms of persecution exhibited in the exercise of brute force or in penal inflictions, a more appropriate place will be found to speak when we come to the consideration of the duties of governments in relation to the pursuit of truth. Here it will be sufficient to say, what will readily occur to every reader, that if it is wrong to endeavour to hinder or deter any inquirer from a diligent and impartial examination of a question by advice and discouragement, it is *à fortiori* wrong to do it by forcible restraint and by the infliction of penalties; and that if moral reprehension and censure ought never to be applied by one individual to another for his simple opinions, the application of brute coercion or physical suffering to prevent or punish

the formation of such opinions is still more vicious. Every argument in the one case applies with tenfold force in the other.

"No one," says an eminent writer, "but the religious persecutor *, a mischievous and overgrown child wreaks his vengeance on involuntary, inevitable, compulsory acts or states of the understanding, which are no more affected by blame than the stone which the foolish child beats for hurting him. Reasonable men apply to every thing which they wish to move, the agent which is capable of moving it — force to outward substances, arguments to the understanding, and blame, together with all other motives, whether moral or personal, to the will alone." †

A writer of a very different school from that of the philosopher just quoted, may be cited to show how nearly all enlightened men of the present day agree in the view of the subject here taken, whatever other doctines they may hold which are really inconsistent with it.

"The principle," says Dr. Wardlaw, "which leads men to judge and treat each other, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but

* This is too unqualified: there are moral, political, literary, and social persecutors, not to mention others, who long to destroy the happiness of such as differ with them in opinion, and often succeed.

† Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy, by Sir James Mackintosh, § 6.

according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions, is a vile principle."*

Section II.

Intellectual Assistance.

The second way of influencing others in the pursuit of truth is by the communication of knowledge—by instruction.

It must frequently happen that a man who has satisfied his own mind on some particular subject, shall be imperatively called upon to assist others whose duty it is to make a similar investigation, by imparting such information as he has himself acquired respecting it. The proper course to be pursued on occasions of this nature, it is not difficult to discover. The great end of that intellectual assistance which he thus renders to others, in the supposed circumstances, is to enable them to arrive at the truth, through the medium of a full and fair investigation. Such an investigation is evidently their duty, as it was originally his own, and what aid he gives should be with the view of promoting it. The most direct and efficient mode of doing so, is simply to lay before them his own view of the question, with the evidence for and against it, without exaggeration, disguise, or concealment, and

* Quoted in the Westminster Review, July, 1826.

thus to suffer the same considerations to operate on their minds which have influenced his own. Put an inquirer in possession of all these, concealing no doubt and no difficulty, no fact and no inference on either side, and you have done all in your power to guide him to the truth, and should any error lurk in the propositions laid before him, you have supplied him with the means of detecting it, by exhibiting the grounds of your opinion and the process through which you connect the conclusion with the premises.

Simple as this proceeding appears, precisely adapted as it must be allowed to be for the attainment of the object in view, and generally followed as it is in all departments of knowledge where the passions and interests of men do not directly interfere, it is systematically superseded in moral and political subjects by two modes of instruction, or rather of intellectual treatment, one consisting in presenting to the mind of the person who is the subject of it the evidence only on one side of a question, and carefully precluding all cognisance of that on the opposite side; the other in teaching conclusions or doctrines without the evidence on which they rest. The first may be called the system of concealment and suppression; the second, that of authoritative inculcation.

Both these modes of proceeding are alike in departing from the line of duty, in debilitating the mind, and interposing obstacles in the way to

truth. Although usually joined or jumbled in practice, it will be expedient to treat them separately.

If when one human being is assisting others in their inquiries, his great aim ought to be, as already stated, to enable them to attain truth by the exercise of their faculties in a full and impartial investigation of the question in hand, then to exclude or suppress any part of the evidence on either side, is directly at variance with the duty of the occasion. It is attempting to make the examination an imperfect one without the cognisance of the parties whom he professes to assist. It is consequently nothing less than a species of imposition at once inconsistent and immoral. The result to their understandings, even when by such means they chance to be guided to the truth, is a view of only one side of the question (which must necessarily be incomplete even as a view of that side), and a conviction insecure, because founded on a narrow and imperfect basis; and when (as is most likely to happen) they are led into error, there is nothing in what has been presented to their minds, or in the method of exercising their faculties, which can at all serve to extricate them from it. The practice tends to preclude the most salutary of all intellectual exercises — turning a question on all sides, and looking at it in all lights. To deprive a mind of this healthful play of its powers is to chain it down to stupidity. Not that this can be effectually accomplished. No mind can be forcibly

limited to what is set before it. In disputable questions there are certain doubts and difficulties naturally presenting themselves to the understanding with greater or less distinctness, whatever concealment or suppression may be practised, nor is there any other sure way of putting them to flight, and preventing them from recurring to perplex the inquirer, than unreservedly setting them before him, and enabling him to see their real character. Any other course is ineffectual, disingenuous in itself, and deeply injurious to him.

But even this system, reprehensible as it is, must be considered superior to the practice of authoritative instillation, which consists in teaching mere dogmas, conclusions without the evidence on which they rest, opinions without the reasons on which they are founded; and which is usually accompanied by directing the utmost fervour of moral approbation to the mere circumstance of these conclusions or opinions lying in the mind unquestioned and unscrutinised.

Besides being open to the objections brought against the practice of concealment and suppression, this course of instruction (if indeed instruction it can in any sense be called), inflicts a still greater injury on the understanding, and when attended by the described discipline of the feelings, perverts the moral sentiments to an extent not generally appreciated. Whenever it is adopted, the reasoning power is obviously altogether unexercised,

the habit is generated of receiving propositions without examination or even annexing to them precise ideas, and healthful curiosity and ardour after knowledge are extinguished. No system of stultification can be more completely effectual.* Whether the doctrines so implanted are true or false, is a matter of mere chance as far as the individual is concerned who is subject to the process, and yet he is taught to consider this matter of mere chance as a peculiar merit on his own part, and he finds it draw down upon him the approbation of the world. His understanding is thus benumbed, and his moral sense debased. With opinions so acquired, should he encounter any facts or arguments of a hostile character, he is probably at first filled with senseless resentment, and becomes ultimately perplexed, although incapable of being convinced; or if he happens to possess a more than usual portion of natural acuteness his prejudices give way, because they have not that intellectual support on which the conclusions of a properly disciplined mind can always stand against attack. No man can adequately comprehend a doctrine until he comprehends what can be said

* Locke, when speaking of "those whom the ill habit of never exerting their thoughts has disabled," very aptly describes the effect pointed out in the text: "the powers of their minds," he says, "are starved by disuse, and have lost that reach and strength which nature fitted them to receive from exercise." — *Conduct of the Understanding*, § 12.

against it; but under this system of inculcation the unfortunate disciple does not comprehend even what can be said in its favour.

In both systems one thing is clear; they are founded at once on a distrust of the capacity of the human mind generally to discern truth from error, and on a confidence in one particular exception—the teacher's own infallibility. If you have no distrust of this nature, why not leave the evidence and the whole evidence to make its due impression? If you do not assume infallibility, how are you justified in trying to fix your own opinions on the minds of your fellow-creatures by a process which, in proportion to its effectiveness, precludes all means of their detecting any errors which those opinions may contain? Without infallibility dogmatical inculcation would be at once arrogant and mischievous, but even with infallibility it would not be justifiable, because although on this supposition the conclusions piled up in the understanding would be true, the faculties would be injured by the process*, the truths would lie lifeless in the memory, and there would be no security

* "An education (if it be so called) in which the memory only retains the verbal expression of results, while the mind does not apprehend the principles of the subject, and therefore cannot even understand the words in which its doctrines are expressed, is of no value whatever to the intellect, but rather, is highly hurtful to the habits of thinking and reasoning." — *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, by the* Rev. W. Whewell, vol. ii. p. 514.

against the future intrusion of falsehood. The only real security against the invasion of error on those subjects where difference of opinion exists, is a full knowledge of the truth, of the premises from which it is deduced, of the process of deduction, and of the fallacy of the arguments opposed to it; and he whose system of instruction should in any way prevent those to whom he imparts his knowledge from arriving at this intellectual condition, even though he were gifted with infallibility, would be inflicting upon them an irreparable injury. How much greater, then, must be the injury, when he has no pretensions to the infallibility he virtually assumes, when he is a mere erring creature like themselves, and in addition to stupifying their faculties, most probably imposes upon them error for truth!

"Is not thought" (it has been eloquently asked) "the right and duty of all? Is not truth alike precious to all? Is not truth the natural aliment of the mind, as plainly as the wholesome grain is of the body? Is not the mind adapted to thought as plainly as the eye to light, the ear to sound? Who dares to withhold it from its natural action, its natural element and joy? Undoubtedly some men are more gifted than others, and are marked out for more studious lives. *But the work of such men is not to do others' thinking for them, but to help them to think more vigorously and effectually.* Great minds are to make others great. Their

superiority is to be used, not to break the multitude to intellectual vassalage, not to establish over them a spiritual tyranny, but to rouse them from lethargy and to aid them to judge for themselves. The light and life which spring up in one soul are to be spread far and wide. Of all treasons against humanity, there is no one worse than his, who employs great intellectual force to keep down the intellect of his less favoured brother."*

Section III.

Treatment of the Young.

The duty of exercising our influence, moral and intellectual, over the minds of others in the fair and straight-forward manner pointed out in the preceding sections is of especial force, when the subjects of our influence are the young. Here, if in any case, a conscientious man will be scrupulous in his proceedings. In this, as in other affairs, *maxima debetur pueris reverentia.* "A mind," says Channing, "inspired with reason and conscience, and capable through these endowments of progress in truth and duty, is a sacred thing."†

Under the designation of principling the minds of children, Locke long ago denounced the prac-

* On the Elevation of the Labouring Classes, by Dr. Channing.

† Character of Napoleon, part ii.

tice of instilling certain doctrines into their minds without exhibiting the evidence, or teaching them the duty, of examination, and even of connecting the idea of guilt with any doubt or departure from the principles prescribed.

"There is," says Locke, "I know, a great fault among all sorts of people of principling their children and scholars; which at last, when looked into, amounts to no more, but making them imbibe their teacher's notions and tenets by an implicit faith, and firmly to adhere to them whether true or false. What colours may be given to this, or of what use it may be when practised upon the vulgar destined to labour, and given up to the service of their bellies, I will not here inquire. But as to the ingenuous part of mankind, whose condition allows them leisure, and letters, and inquiry after truth, I can see no other right way of principling them, but to take heed, as much as may be, that in their tender years, ideas, that have no natural cohesion, come not to be united in their heads, and that this rule be often inculcated to them to be their guide in the whole course of their lives and studies, viz. that they never suffer any ideas to be joined in their understandings, in any other or stronger combination than what their own nature and correspondence give them; and that they often examine those that they find linked together in their minds; whether this association of ideas be from the visible agreement that is in the ideas themselves, or from

the habitual and prevailing custom of the mind joining them thus together in thinking."*

This practice of dogmatical inculcation in the case of children, coupled with the moral treatment usually connected with it, is open to all the general objections already stated. It is, especially, any thing but assisting them to discharge the duties and attain the ends of inquiry: it is in reality the reverse; for no one will surely deny, that if their minds are strongly imbued with particular doctrines, if they are taught to believe that to doubt such doctrines is a crime, if they are commanded to receive them as positive and incontrovertible truths of which no question is to be entertained, if they grow up therefore unaccustomed to the effort and unacquainted with the duty of examination, the effect must be a state of mind as remote as possible from a fearless and ardent desire after truth, and a conduct in regard to investigation in which we shall vainly look for diligence and impartiality.

It may be urged, indeed, that instilling doctrines into the minds of children is to a certain extent

* Conduct of the Understanding, § 41. The same sentiments are expressed in one of Locke's letters to his friend Molyneux. "Pray let this be your chief care, to fill your son's head with clear and distinct ideas, and teach him on all occasions, both by practice and rule, how to get them, and the necessity of it. This, together with a mind active and set upon the attaining of reputation and truth, is the true principling of a young man. But to give him a reverence for our opinions, because we taught them, is not to make knowing men, but prattling parrots." — *Works*, vol. viii. p. 378.

unavoidable; that at least they must necessarily learn many things the reasons of which they cannot understand, and take many conclusions on trust because incapable of appreciating the evidence on which they rest. All this is readily allowed. In the course of tuition it may be requisite to lay before them many propositions for which they can for a while have no other warrant than the authority of the teacher; but if we really wish to produce in them a love of truth, a desire after knowledge, a spirit of candour, and that integrity of mind which will best preserve them from error, nothing must be taught them as a doctrine which it is incumbent upon them to believe, and of which it is a crime to doubt. On the contrary, they should be impressed, as early as practicable, with the duty of fair inquiry. All the instruction given them should be accompanied with inducements to exert their own faculties, to seek after reasons for what is asserted. They should be rescued from the mere passive adoption of what is proposed to them by authority, and trained to the habit of drawing their own inferences. Even when the proof is beyond their comprehension, they should be made to understand that it is only postponed. All the reverence which they are commonly educated to entertain for particular doctrines and names, they should be taught to feel for truth itself, and for honesty of investigation. It is under such a discipline that we should expect to see minds of wisdom and integrity arise which would be blessings to the world.

The sentiments here expressed might be enforced by citations from the works of several distinguished writers of very opposite schools, but I must content myself with a passage from the pages of a late elegant author: — "I would not," he says, "have it be thought that because I plead for freedom of inquiry, I would, therefore, leave youth without the guide of reason and experience. Polybius has defined man to be an animal that forms opinions: as soon, then, as a man begins to show that he possesses the characterising quality of his species, the formation of his opinions ought to be considered as the most essential part of his education. Now, this should not be attempted by dogmatical precepts and positive laws; but by persuasion, argument, and example; by assiduously inculcating the principle which ought to prevail; and by endeavouring to render the reason clear why it should be adopted. Opinions which are communicated upon one side without the authority of reason, and which are received upon the other without the labour of investigation, are seldom honourable either to him who teaches or to him who learns."*

From the numerous examples of the systematic instillation of prejudice furnished by the history of mankind, two may be here cited by way of illustration.

The late Emperor of France pushed the authoritative inculcation of doctrines to an extreme, which

* Academical Questions, by Sir W. Drummond, preface, p. xi.

by its absurdity, exposed the real nature of the proceeding to the dullest observation.

By means of the national catechism ordered by him to be taught in the schools of France, the lesson was carefully instilled into the minds of the young, that all those who failed in their duty to himself, resisted the order of things established by God, and rendered themselves deserving of eternal damnation.*

The other illustration is furnished by the practice of Mahometans. Their children are sedulously impressed with dogmatical confidence in the tenets of the Koran, without the slightest attempt on the part of their teachers to exhibit any evidence or argument, and they are taught to hate with rancour all who differ from their theological creed; the consequences of which are, a total repugnance to improvement, a stultification of intellect, a depravation of morals, and a spirit of fanaticism and intolerance towards all infidels, especially Christians. "The parents," says Lane, speaking of the Egyptians, "seldom devote much of their time or attention to the education of their children, generally contenting themselves with instilling into their young minds a few principles of religion, and then submitting them, if they can afford to do so, to the instruction of a schoolmaster. As early as possible, the child is taught to say, 'I testify that

* Considerations on the French Revolution, by Madame de Staël, part iv. chap. 6.

there is no deity but God, and I testify that Mahomet is God's Apostle.' He receives also lessons of religious pride, and learns to hate the Christians and all other sects but his own, as thoroughly as does the Mooslim in advanced age."*

From these two examples even the most prejudiced minds may be led to suspect that there is something fundamentally wrong in the practice of one-sided instruction and authoritative instillation. When the dogmas inculcated are different from their own, they will scarcely deny the evil effects of a system which, if consistently pursued, would do much to arrest the progress of mankind in knowledge, noble-mindedness, and civilisation.

Section IV.

Public Communications.

There still remains for consideration one important mode in which a man can exercise an influence over the minds of others in relation to the pursuit of truth, in which he can render them essential assistance in the attainment of the great object of inquiry. By the publication of his opinions and of the reasons on which they are founded, he acts at once on the understandings of a multitude. Private communication and personal explanations, such as we have hitherto had principally in view, have

* Account of the Modern Egyptians, vol. i. p. 63.

comparatively a narrow sphere for their evil or their good; but the instruction which is offered to mankind at large, has only the limits of the world for the ultimate boundary of its influence.

In the present day, amongst all the various means of diffusing information, publication through the press is incomparably the most effective in assisting the cause of truth, and for the purposes of the present discussion may be taken as the representative of the rest. "Through the diffusion of education and printing (to borrow the words of an eloquent writer), a private man may now speak to multitudes, incomparably more numerous than ancient or modern eloquence ever electrified in the popular assembly, or the hall of legislation. By these instruments truth is asserting her sovereignty over nations without the help of rank, office, or sword; and her faithful ministers will become more and more the lawgivers of the world." *

What are the circumstances which imperatively call upon a man to assist the cause of truth in this way, it may not always be easy to determine. All nevertheless will acknowledge, that the welfare of mankind would be wofully injured if every individual, however gifted by nature or accomplished by study, were to confine his instructions to the circle of his family and his friends, or restrict his

* Character of Napoleon, by Dr. Channing, part 2.

efforts to mere personal communication. The progress of society in every thing good and great depends on the promulgation and public interchange of knowledge, and the more thoroughly this is effected the better.

Here, then, is an obligation upon all who are capable of benefiting society in this manner. On whom the duty is incumbent is indeed a point unavoidably left to be determined by the conscience and self-appreciation, and, it may be added, at the peril of the individual.

It may be said in general terms, that every one who has taken due pains to master a subject, who feels persuaded that he can present it in a new light, and who is not destitute of the obvious qualifications for the task, lies under an obligation to communicate his knowledge to his fellow-creatures, provided they are in a sufficiently civilised and virtuous condition to receive it without destroying the happiness or the existence of their instructor. Not to do it, if the matter were of importance, would be reprehensible selfishness; it could be only to avoid trouble, or shrink from responsibility, or maintain a solitary superiority over the rest of the world.

It is true, he may be deceived in his estimate of his own achievements; an exaggerated opinion of the value of what we ourselves accomplish, is perhaps inseparable from human nature; but if he has taken due pains, and is actuated by a proper

spirit, his conduct is on every principle entitled to unmixed approbation. It may happen too that, by communicating the result of his inquiries, he may be instrumental in promulgating error; his views may wander widely from the truth, and he may lead many astray by the same misconceived facts or illusive reasonings which have deceived his own mind. These are things which, according to the constitution of man and the present state of society, cannot be avoided. Even in this case, nevertheless, he is doing good. His errors are in all probability such as have, with more or less distinctness, presented themselves to other minds as well as his, in the character of truths. To bring them openly forward, with the premises from which they are deduced and the train of reasoning by which they have established themselves as truths in his own understanding, is giving them the best chance of being refuted, and refuted in so full and luminous a manner, that their real character will be conspicuous to every future inquirer.

Had they been kept back by indolence or timidity, had they and the arguments in their support not been openly produced and examined, they would have continued to haunt other minds as well as his, to delude other thinkers besides himself, and create those casual and vague disputes, which are perpetually arising when a question has not been thoroughly canvassed.*

* See Appendix, note B.

When the circumstances here described have made it a man's duty to communicate his opinions to the public, the manner of doing it can admit of little controversy. He is quite as much bound in this case to honesty of statement and fairness of proceeding, as when he is giving private instruction. The object to be kept in view is to assist the progress and prevalence of truth, which it is almost tautology to say cannot be promoted by either concealment or exaggeration of evidence, by the colouring of facts or the sophistication of reasoning. While he who with upright intentions and after adequate examination is unfortunate enough to be the instrument of disseminating error, merits our esteem, no reprehension can be too severe for the conscious promulgator of false assertions and fallacious arguments.*

From the fallibility of which even the most sedulous and honest inquirer partakes, it also behoves every one who publishes his opinions to the world to suspect the possibility at least of his being in the

* "Is it," asks Mr. Stewart, "more criminal to misrepresent a fact, than to impose on the world by what we know to be an unsound or a fallacious argument?" "Is it in a moral view more criminal, or is it more inconsistent with the dignity of a man of true honour, to defraud men in a private transaction by an incorrect or erroneous statement of circumstances, than to mislead the public to their own ruin by those wilful deviations from truth into which we see men daily led by views of interest or ambition, or by the spirit of political faction?" —*Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers*, vol. ii. p. 338.

wrong, and to refrain from arrogantly assuming on his own part that exemption from error which he will not grant to another. Above all, he should avoid the offensive practice of affecting superior moral excellence in virtue of the doctrines he maintains, and casting odium upon others because they differ from him. He should keep aloof from what has been well designated as "that dogmatical assumption of the upper ground in controversy, which entrenches itself in supposed rights and prerogatives; treats as a violation of decorum the free use of language in its opponents; and even while it condescends to employ arguments, seasons them with arrogant and uncharitable reflections on the motives and intentions of the adversary." *

The substantial duty, in a word, of the man who makes known his researches or speculations to the world, is to take the trouble of due preparation, to be honest in his communications, and to arrogate nothing to himself as an inquirer which he will not grant to others exercising the same function. Instead of demanding from them the deference due to an indisputable oracle from whose declarations it is criminal to dissent, he should point out, whenever the occasion requires it, the urgent duty, and animate them with the manly spirit of impartial investigation; and warn them against receiving on authority any conclusions the evidence for which is open to their own scrutiny.

* Aikin's Letters to his Son, vol. ii. p. 95.

Section V.

The Reception of Public Communications.

In the department of morality now under consideration, as in others, duties are reciprocal. If in certain circumstances an inquirer is called upon to communicate his views of any question to the public, the public, or those who are to derive the benefit of the communication, have also their part to perform, and by the right or wrong performance of it the cause of truth and human happiness is materially promoted or injured. On the principles already maintained, these views ought to receive from every one who makes them objects of attention, and especially from every one who takes upon himself to pass judgment upon their merits, that full and fair examination of which we have so often spoken.

We have seen in a former chapter that every individual is bound to make a diligent and impartial inquiry into those questions the determination of which is necessary to his conduct in life, private or public, professional or unofficial; inasmuch as the fortune, reputation, health, and existence of his fellow-creatures are often dependent on the discharge of the duty.

Under this law every one places himself, who assumes the function of publicly pronouncing on the merits and demerits of works in literature, philosophy, and science. The peace of mind, the

reputation, the social position, and even the property of the author, as well as the good of the public, may all be materially affected by the judgment delivered. The self-constituted judge, then, can be in a fit condition to pronounce sentence only when he has made himself master of the cause.

This sentence, it is almost needless to say, should be as just an appreciation of the work as a proper examination can arrive at. While some degree of good will and approbation is due, as already shown, to every communication made to the public with upright intentions and diligent preparation, this can form no reason for withholding a strict appreciation of merits and defects.

A man who presents his views to the world is attempting to influence the minds of myriads of human beings, and it becomes of importance that these views should be put to the severest test which human ingenuity can devise. Since it is for the benefit of all that truth should prevail, the merits and defects, the strength and weakness of a work, whatever they really are, should be rendered distinctly manifest. As no upright man would wish error to exist for his own private advantage in opposition to the general good, so he ought not to refrain from the exposure of it in the writings of others, merely from a principle of humanity. If the error is important, the duty of the occasion is to point it out. True benevolence here consists in

counteracting a general evil, although at the expense of impairing individual happiness.

The whole duty on the subject, indeed, may be comprised in one word—justice. This is what every one who takes upon himself to pronounce sentence ought to give, and more than this no man ought even to wish to receive. The general presumption in favour of an author's intentions, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, should obtain for him the courtesy due to a laudable attempt, should secure him from all imputations of bad motives, but not shield his speculations from scrutiny. Mistaken in some respects as the wisest and best men of every age have been, there is nothing incompatible between thorough esteem for the moral and even intellectual qualities of his mind, and a full conviction of the inaccuracy of his views and the unsoundness of his arguments—nothing inconsistent between respect for the one and a free exposure of the other.

It will frequently happen, that not only errors will be committed, which it will be requisite to expose, but various mental qualities will be exhibited in the communication of opinions—vanity, conceit, affectation, prejudice, presumption, and other offensive and ludicrous characteristics. There is no reason, when any good is to be accomplished by it, why these should not be set in their true light. At the same time it deserves to be remembered, that some errors carry along with them their own

refutation, and some weaknesses furnish their own exposure, so that neglect may be a not less efficacious although a less painful remedy than censure.

The same justice which requires these errors and weaknesses to be shown in their true character, imposes on us the pleasanter duty of pointing out excellences whenever they occur. To commend just reasoning, felicitous illustration, candour, fairness, modesty, and magnanimity, is equally demanded of us, as to expose and condemn qualities of an opposite nature. Critics do not always feel that it is not sufficient to pass over these meritorious qualities in silence—to intermit their vituperation when they meet with them: something more than this is required by the general good: just commendation is as useful as just censure, and to withhold it is a fraud at once on the individual and the public.

This is the more necessary to be insisted on, as we frequently meet with men, rigid in the application of principles, professing to bring every thing to the standard of utility, and severe in their condemnation of all deviations from this rule, who appear to think they have done every thing required of them when they have performed the task of reprehension. With a strong sense of vice and error, they have no ardour for excellence; prone to censure, they are without inclination to praise; alive to deformity, they are insensible to beauty and elegance. If they attempt to commend, it seems an

effort against their nature, which dies away in imperfect accents of abortive eulogy.

Conduct of this kind is reprehensible on their own principles. It is equally important that excellences should be duly appreciated, as that defects should be placed in a true light. In this, as in other cases, we can have no better guide than the law of truth. Let every thing be regarded and represented exactly as it is; let vices be seen as vices, and let virtues appear in their true character. If men see clearly, they can scarcely fail, sooner or later, to feel correctly.

True merit requires no exaggerated praise. The simplest statement of what has been accomplished is all to which it needs to aspire, although it is not all which a generous spirit is impatient to bestow. Nobleness of mind springs forward with ardour to meet every indication of a similar nature wherever it appears. There is no surer mark of the absence of the highest moral and intellectual qualities, than a cold and captious reception of excellence.

Further, it will not escape the candid mind, that being ourselves liable to mistake, we may err both in censure and applause. Were we infallible, we might with equal fearlessness commit ourselves to a description of both the merits and the defects of any production offered to our scrutiny; but prone to err, we should recollect that errors of censure are not only more certainly destructive of happiness than errors of praise, but tend to repress the most

valuable exertions, and we therefore ought to be especially vigilant in investigating the grounds of our decision before we pronounce an unfavourable sentence.

It is interesting to glance at the consequences which have sometimes ensued from an illiberal and unjust reception of the communications made to the world by some of its master spirits. If we look into the history of science and civilisation, we shall find that such treatment has had a strong depressing influence on the most distinguished philosophers. Copernicus was long withheld from communicating his discoveries by an apprehension of the reception they would meet with. Harvey was deterred from giving more of his writings to the world by the hostility manifested against those which he had already published. The second part of "Cudworth's Intellectual System" was never brought forward (according to Warburton), on account of the world's malignity in judging of the first. Jenner was haunted by the fear that his great discovery would be made the subject of ridicule; and long after it had been divulged, the animadversions cast upon it led him to declare that he would think no more for the public good, since nothing but abuse was got for it.*

Even Sir Isaac Newton himself was the subject of severe attacks, which at one time seem almost to

* Life of Jenner, by Dr. Barron.

have disgusted him with his favourite pursuits. In a letter to Oldenburgh (1672) he writes, "I intend to be no further solicitous about matters of philosophy; and, therefore, I hope you will not take it ill, if you find me never doing any thing more in that kind." In another letter (1675) he states that he had had some thoughts of writing a further discourse about colours, but found it yet *against the grain* to put pen to paper any more on that subject. And in a letter to Leibnitz the same year he observes, "I was so persecuted with discussions, arising from the publication of my theory of light, that I blamed my own imprudence for parting with so substantial a blessing as my quiet to run after a shadow."*

These few instances, which might be easily multiplied, suffice to show that a real discouragement is offered to the finest minds by an unjust and ungenerous reception of their labours; and it cannot be doubted that the experience or the apprehension of such treatment, by stifling many brilliant thoughts, comprehensive speculations, and useful discoveries, has kept down the dignity and happiness of mankind below the point to which they might have attained. But although genius had never yielded a step to such injustice; although by such means no profound train of thinking had been suppressed, no happy conception imprisoned

* Life of Sir Isaac Newton, by Sir David Brewster, p. 56.

in its birth-place, no discovery nipped in the bud, yet assuredly every right feeling demands that the happiness of these benefactors of society should at least be protected from wanton injury. If we cannot find in our hearts to reward their merit, let us at all events abstain from thoughtlessly robbing them of their peace. This is, indeed, no more than our own palpable interest dictates. Even in the present day, it is impossible to tell how much we all daily lose by the reserve of wise and thoughtful men, in keeping back the fruits of long-continued research and meditation, from an apprehension that the prejudices of society and the rancour of criticism might invade that tranquillity of mind, for the loss of which no reputation could compensate.

But it is not only tranquillity of mind of which they have to apprehend the loss. Criticism frequently tells with forcible effect on a man's position in society, and even on his property. We are informed that the deservedly eminent Dr. Thomas Young had the offer of 1000*l.* for the copyright of his lectures, but on account of the ridicule thrown by the Edinburgh Review on some of his papers in the Philosophical Transactions, the publisher requested to be released from his bargain.*

A late author† of no mean abilities relates that, after the appearance of a hostile criticism in the Quarterly Review on his Characters of Shak-

* Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott, vol. ii. p. 18.

† Hazlitt.

speare's Plays, his publishers scarcely sold another copy, although before that time the sale had been considerable.*

It is not necessary to examine for the purpose in hand whether, in these instances, the criticism was just. They abundantly prove that public censure can affect the property and social prospects of authors; and that therefore, on the common principles of the coarsest honesty—of that which respects no injury not reducible into pounds, shillings, and pence—censure ought never to be cast upon any one unless it has been maturely considered, and is fully believed to be just. And even such censure may have the effect of injustice if it is not accompanied by a candid statement of all that is worthy of praise.

On the other hand, it must be admitted to be similarly inconsistent with integrity to pronounce extravagant encomiums, bestowed insincerely, or hazarded without proper examination. When lavished in this way, they are frequently the instruments of fraud and disappointment, leading the reader to throw away his money and his time on worthless books, such as he would have rejected had their real character been known to him. They thus virtually rob one man for the benefit of another, while they assist in depraving the public taste, and misdirecting the public judgment.

* Hazlitt's Table Talk, p. 229.

The laxity which prevails on these points in the present day would raise our wonder if it were not in keeping with the moral tone pervading society. A remarkable instance of it may be found in no less a person than Sir Walter Scott, a noble-hearted man in general, but who, in his capacity of reviewer, performed acts not to be vindicated unless the principles here maintained can be disproved.

Writing to a correspondent, he says, "I have run up an attempt on the Curse of Kehama for the Quarterly." * * *

"What I could, I did—which was to throw as much weight as possible upon the beautiful passages, of which there are many, and to slur over the absurdities, of which there are not a few." * * * *

"*I would have made a very different hand of it, indeed, had the order of the day been* pour déchirer."*

Here is a plain avowal, that, acting as umpire between the author and the public, he was influenced by private motives, unconnected with the merits of the book, to pronounce an award which would have been very different in its character had those private motives been different, while the merits of the book remained precisely the same. And this is the declaration of a man of highly honourable principles, who was fully alive to many of the transgres-

* Lockhart's Life of Scott, vol. ii. p. 302.

sions of public criticism. What would he have thought of similar conduct in a judge on the bench? and yet there is no real difference between one case and the other.

The view which has now been taken of the proper mode of receiving public communications would be incomplete, if it were closed without adverting to the importance, in such cases, of the right application of *moral* approbation and censure. Although this has already been insisted upon in respect to private intercourse, and what was then said will apply *mutatis mutandis* here, yet it will not be superfluous to repeat, in connection with our present subject, that these sentiments should be directed, not to doctrines, but to actions, not to the results of inquiry, but to the conduct exhibited in the prosecution of it; that error should not be treated as crime; that all attempts on the part of any one to excite odium against others for differences of thought should be unsparingly reprobated; that the assumption of intellectual and especially of moral superiority by a writer over all who disagree with him in opinion on the mere ground of that disagreement, should be uniformly scouted; that honesty of investigation and fairness of statement should be greeted with eager and hearty commendation, and that the love of truth should be hailed as the brightest distinction of the inquirer.

Were the principles maintained in this cursory glance at the subject consistently acted upon, every

man would have the proper inducement to keep back or to bring forward the fruits of his researches, and to bring them forward in a proper manner. Knowing that if he produced what was immature, ridiculous, unsound, or fallacious, he must undergo the ordeal of free exposure, he would be cautious of obtruding what would do him no honour: confident, on the other hand, that his merits would be fairly appreciated, he would feel all that alertness in his labours which naturally arises from the conviction that we are making advances to a determinate point: and assured that the decision of his judges would in all probability be right, he would acquiesce in it, even if unfavourable, without irritation, and without complaint, and with the satisfaction, at least, that he had made some progress in a knowledge of his own capabilities. Above all, he would be encouraged in the pursuit of truth by the prospect that his efforts would be of service; that any communication he might make to his fellow-creatures in a right spirit could do them no harm, and might confer lasting benefit; and that he might venture on attempting to enlighten them without any risk of being overwhelmed with obloquy or violence, because he had succeeded.

Section VI.

Duties of Non-Inquirers.

In the preceding sections the argument in its general scope assumes that the parties whose conduct is in question are themselves inquirers, and having performed the task of investigation incumbent upon them, are in a condition to advise or assist others in doing the same. But as we have before stated, there is another class of persons to be taken into view, who not having gone through the process of inquiry, or having gone through it in an extremely superficial and inadequate manner, may for brevity be denominated non-inquirers.

If men of this class did not interfere with their fellow-creatures in regard to matters of research and opinion, their social conduct would not properly come under our present notice; but inasmuch as they do very commonly interfere in regard to such matters, the discussion of the subject would be incomplete if no attempt were made to point out the line of conduct which they ought to pursue, as well as that which they ought to avoid, in so far as their circumstances are peculiar, and do not fall under the rules already prescribed.

It is not material in this view whether individuals are non-inquirers by their own fault or from the necessity of their condition. The point now to consider, is their conduct not in relation to the pursuit

of truth, but in relation to other human beings who are or may be engaged in it. The social duties in question of persons who from whatever cause belong to the class of non-inquirers are principally, in the nature of the case, of a negative character. Not having possessed themselves of the knowledge which investigation only can supply, such individuals are in no condition to furnish intellectual assistance to others, and have little power even to give effectual counsel and encouragement to their fellow-creatures who are or ought to be occupied in the pursuit of truth. As far as they can do either, they ought to be guided by the principles already explained. An ignorant but right-minded person may be instrumental at least in promoting inquiries which he himself from various causes is debarred from prosecuting.

But the main obligation of the non-inquirer is to refrain from that mischievous interference to which he is almost instinctively prone. As he will not or cannot assist the great cause of truth in his own person, he should carefully abstain from doing it the least injury. In this and many other affairs of vital moment, the officious meddling of those who are perfectly powerless to do good has been an immense source of human misery.

The sort of mischievous interference into which the non-inquirer is prompt to fall, is the indulgence of hatred and malignity against other people because they hold different opinions from his own, some-

times by acts of personal injury and annoyance, and sometimes by open invective or secret calumny. Where the former cannot be ventured upon, the latter is the easy and invariable resort. The practice of what has been expressively termed "casting odium" upon others for differences of opinion lamentably prevails in all the self-styled civilised countries of the world, and generally in proportion to the ignorance of the people amongst whom it is found.

Now, without insisting on what has been advanced in a previous section respecting the proper limitation of praise and blame to the conduct exhibited in the pursuit of truth; without even expecting the non-inquirer to comprehend accurately the requisite distinctions, we think his own position is sufficient to show him the gross erroneousness and absurdity of the conduct in question, especially when exercised towards those who have really devoted their attention to a doctrine which he confessedly has not investigated. He differs from them in opinion on a subject which they have examined and he has not: they have taken pains to understand it, he has taken none: they have gained information, of which, as it can be attained only by examination, he is necessarily devoid. Yet in this situation, upon the mere ground of holding an opinion taught him by others, and of the truth of which he is incapable of judging for himself, without ability to weigh the reasons, nay, without even

knowing the reasons in support either of his own or the opposite opinion, he suffers his heart to be filled with rancour, and lifts up his voice or his arm against the men who have taken the only rational course for arriving at the truth.

Such is the real conduct of the majority of human beings, prejudiced non-inquirers, to those who have sedulously discharged the duty of examination, whenever the result of such examination happens to be an opinion different from that which generally prevails. And that it must in the far larger number of cases be different, is sufficiently plain. It would be absurd to suppose, that an inquirer who had devoted all the powers of his mind to the investigation of a subject should have the same views regarding it as the uninquiring crowd. Even if their respective opinions should touch in some points, and be on these points susceptible of being clothed in the same expressions, yet the real conceptions, and especially the related and collateral ideas excited by the words, would be different in the extreme. The intelligent and the ignorant cannot be said (except in a gross and inaccurate sense) to hold the same opinion on any complicated and difficult subject.

After this explanation, the non-inquirer who has attended to it cannot fail to see, that when he reproaches or persecutes others who *have* inquired, on account of any difference of opinion, he is in reality inflicting punishment upon them for the necessary

result of discharging an important obligation, or, when the inquiry is not obligatory, for the issue of a beneficial and laudable undertaking. He is consequently committing a great and disgraceful wrong. His imperative duty is to abstain from intermeddling in a matter in which he is disqualified from taking any useful part. As he can do no good, let him scrupulously avoid the absurdity and injustice of casting the slightest shade of odium on his fellow-creatures on account of any such intellectual differences.

Although the preceding remarks apply expressly to the great majority of mankind, who are, for the most part, precluded from regular and methodical inquiry by their position, yet they are by no means limitable to that class. It is not to be denied that, in relation to a great number of subjects, the polished and the educated are nearly, if not altogether, on a level with the multitude. They regard themselves as intelligent and enlightened, and, to a certain extent, they are truly so; but general intelligence gives them little or no insight into questions which they have not expressly and minutely examined; and in respect of all such questions they can be ranked only in the class of non-inquirers. Upon them, therefore, is incumbent all the self-restraint, all the reserve in passing judgment, all the abstinence from interference which has been inculcated on the class generally. Yet we every day see them erecting themselves into judges of the

most complicated questions, on which their opinions can be nothing more than mere prejudices, and lavishing condemnation and odium upon all who dissent from their dogmas. It cannot be dissembled, and ought not to be suppressed, that this remark is largely applicable to the gentler and more amiable sex, who, seldom calculated by position and education to enter into difficult subjects, and at the same time peculiarly susceptible of strong prepossessions, too often indulge in acrimonious feelings and language against opinions which they cannot possibly have examined with such rigorous attention as could alone justify any one in pronouncing judgment. Even an intellectual condemnation is, under these circumstances, beyond their jurisdiction: but when they proceed also to deal out their moral censure, they exhibit a spectacle at which their best friends must be pained—a spectacle of vain presumption and substantial injustice.

No doubt every human being, man or woman, may innocently entertain, nay, must unavoidably entertain, many unexamined opinions, and so long as they are expressed without the manifestation of any spirit towards other people which would be felt as unjust and intolerable in return, no social wrong is committed; but a great social wrong is committed when, in these cases, the uninformed assume the right of moral condemnation, which, on any supposition, can belong only to the thoroughly instructed, but which, in fact, belongs to none.

Were we even to suppose for a moment that differences of opinion could possibly, in any circumstances, constitute proper grounds for praise and blame, rewards and punishments, yet it is obvious that no one would, in this case, be entitled to pronounce sentence who had not himself faithfully discharged the great duty of inquiry. Before any one can be in a position to condemn his fellow-creatures for any tenets they may hold, the least which can be required is, that he himself should have fully and impartially investigated, not only every part of the subject on which he differs from them, but also the morality of interference with the opinions of others.

It may be added, that any one who had really done this would have lost all disposition for persecution, or even censure. At the end of his investigation he could not fail to discern that, while the mere circumstance of holding any opinion is an object of neither praise nor blame, and while a high degree of either may be merited by performing or neglecting, or perverting, the great duty of searching for truth, the highest degree of criminality attaches to him who interferes by injurious action or contumelious language with the discharge of that duty on the part of another.

Again, then, let it be urged upon all who feel tempted to elevate themselves into moral judges of intellectual differences, to pause before they assume so dangerous a function; to scrutinise their own

attainments; to examine whether they are competent from education and study, and express investigation of the doctrine before them, to pronounce upon its validity; and even when they are competent to do this, whether they are justified in the moral condemnation of any human being for differing in opinion from fellow-creatures as fallible as himself.

CHAP. VI.

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH.

HAVING examined what are the duties of human beings individually in entering upon and prosecuting inquiry, and assisting each other in the pursuit of truth, we shall be at no loss to determine the duties of governments, and to appreciate the influence of those political institutions, and practices of mankind in their collective capacity, which have relation to the same department of morals.

In respect to the subject before us, governments are obviously to be considered under the same aspects as individuals. They may be regarded, in the first place, as inquirers themselves; and, in the second place, as having to conduct themselves with uprightness and propriety towards other inquirers, —as having to exercise over the people subject to their control that moral and intellectual influence of which a former chapter has treated.

Section I.

Duties of Governments considered as Inquirers themselves.

As an inquirer itself, a government has manifestly a most important part to perform. In the discharge of the judicial office, for which all the business of legislation is merely preparatory, and in legislation itself, the most diligent and faithful investigations are continually demanded.* But besides inquiries of this and analogous kinds, which constitute the very essence of governing, other legitimate fields of research are open to the state, and cannot be neglected with due attention to the public welfare. By the application of its resources it may bring to light much useful knowledge that would be otherwise inaccessible. It may institute

* This has been well put by the present distinguished head of the French ministry. "La société existe : il y a quelque chose à faire, n'importe quoi, dans son intérêt, en son nom ; il y a une loi à rendre, une mesure à prendre, un jugement à prononcer. A coup sûr, il y a aussi une bonne manière de suffire à ces besoins sociaux ; il y a une bonne loi à faire, un bon parti à prendre, un bon jugement à prononcer. De quelque chose qu'il s'agisse, quelque soit l'intérêt mis en question, il y a en toute occasion une vérité qu'il faut connaître, et qui doit décider de la conduite. La première affaire du gouvernement, c'est de chercher cette vérité, de découvrir ce qui est juste, raisonnable, ce qui convient à la société." — *Cours d'Histoire Moderne, par* M. Guizot, 5e Leçon.

inquiries and researches for which the means of individuals are utterly inadequate. In this way we have seen expeditions sent out for astronomical and geographical observation, for surveying regions, coasts, and harbours, thus rendering our knowledge of the globe more extensive and accurate, and navigation safe and certain. We have also seen commissions of inquiry appointed to investigate public institutions, social customs, moral and physical influences, and modes of life, which no private exertions would have been competent to examine and appreciate with sufficient fulness and accuracy.*

Hence it is plain that in certain circumstances a government may be morally bound to enter upon inquiries in the same way as an individual; and it is equally plain that in pursuing its investigations it is under the same obligation as any other in-

* "Still the agency of government in regard to knowledge is necessarily superficial and narrow. The great sources of intellectual power and progress to a people are its strong and original thinkers, be they found where they may. Government cannot and does not extend the bounds of knowledge; cannot make experiments in the laboratory, explore the laws of animal or vegetable nature, or establish the principles of criticism, morals, and religion. The energy which is to carry forward the intellect of a people belongs chiefly to private individuals, who devote themselves to lonely thought, who worship truth, who originate the views demanded by their age, who help us to throw off the yoke of established prejudices, who improve on old modes of education, or invent better." — *Character of Napoleon, by* Dr. CHANNING, part ii.

quirer to fulness and fairness of research. All that has been said as to the duties of the individual is applicable, with little modification, to the case of government; and to repeat it here would consequently be a needless fatigue to the reader.

Section II.

Duties of Governments towards their Subjects considered as Inquirers.—Encouragement of Inquiry.

A government is, secondly, to be viewed in its relations and conduct to other inquirers: it is to be considered as to its power of exercising over its subjects a moral and intellectual influence in reference to the pursuit of truth; of supplying both motives and means for inquiry to the people; of rendering them counsel and assistance in the business of investigation. Here, too, the same principles are applicable as in the case of individuals, although the duties may not be exactly correspondent or co-extensive, and the attending circumstances may be more complicated.

If the state interfere at all in this matter, it should plainly exert its moral and intellectual influence for promoting the ends already described: that is to say, for the twofold purpose of inducing and assisting its subjects to discharge the duty of inquiry, and of enabling them to attain the only

legitimate object of inquiry—truth. In strict adherence to these objects, it should create no partialities and antipathies to any particular doctrines; it should hold out no inducements to imperfect and unfair examination; it should have recourse to nothing like authoritative inculcation; it should attempt no suppression or concealment of evidence; it should leave conclusions or opinions unpatronised and unpunished, and extend its encouragement to nothing but enterprise in undertaking, and diligence and fairness in conducting, investigation.

These are the right and appropriate principles on which it should act, the legitimate boundaries in which it should confine itself. In so far as any act, or law, or institution, intrudes beyond these limits, its effects on the cause of truth and virtue are injurious. If complete and accurate knowledge is important to mankind, if full and unfettered research is the way to gain possession of it, if exemption from prejudice and a simple wish to attain correct conclusions form the proper state of mind for entering upon any subject, and diligent and impartial attention to the conflicting evidence the proper conduct to be pursued during the examination, then every political regulation or institution which circumscribes inquiry, which creates other wishes, and offers inducements to pursue a different conduct, carries with it its own condemnation. Reprehensible in an individual, this course is at

least equally so in the state. By such proceedings, society in fact depraves and injures its own members.

Let us then examine the power and the policy of governments by this test. Let us see how far they are able to promote the great objects to be kept in view, and how far the course of interference generally adopted in modern communities assists and encourages the people in attaining the desirable ends here set forth, or on the other hand impedes and perverts their efforts.

Of the two objects to be regarded, as already pointed out, when one party interferes by moral influence and intellectual assistance with another in the business of investigation, the first can scarcely be contemplated by any one as coming within the province of the supreme authority.

There seems to be no practicable way of encouraging and fostering by authority the virtue of diligent faithfulness in undertaking and prosecuting such inquiries as are personally incumbent on the individual members of the community, either by rewards on the one hand, or by punishment for neglect of the duty on the other. The requisite evidence in these cases is altogether of too subtle and impalpable a nature to be reached or appreciated by the state. The duty in question, like many others, is one in the discharge of which a government can give no direct assistance, and the attempt to do it could only lead to waste of means

and misapplication of time. The virtue to be exercised is too delicate for the coarse hand of power to touch.

If this is a correct representation, if the promotion of this virtue, like many other desirable ends, lies without the province of authority, the whole duty of government in the matter is to take especial care not to injure the cause which it is powerless to assist. As it can lend no positive aid, the important point left for it to attend to is scrupulously to refrain from discouraging or repelling or seducing its subjects from the discharge of those duties of inquiry, which as individuals they are bound to perform. Incapable of interfering so as to promote, it must not interfere to pervert the motives and efforts of the inquirer.

Although this is one of the great principles by which public measures and institutions are to be tried, it seems never to have been distinctly recognised or understood. The just and indispensable abstinence from intermeddling inculcated by it, has consequently never been uniformly and consistently practised; and it is a singular feature in the case that the methods to be immediately examined which governments have frequently adopted with the professed view of aiding the people in the second object,—the attainment of truth,—have had a direct tendency to counteract the accomplishment of the first object,—a faithful discharge of the duty of inquiry. Governments have

often, in fact, sought to guide the people to the truth (professedly at least) in some of the most important departments of knowledge, by offering inducements *not* to inquire, or not to inquire in the manner which duty and wisdom alike prescribe.

This will clearly appear in the course of the examination of such methods to which we now proceed.

Section III.

Continuation of the Subject.—Methods of promoting the attainment of Truth.

There are several methods which governments may adopt with the view of enlarging the existing stock of knowledge and diffusing it amongst the people, or, what is the same thing, of assisting them in the attainment of truth.

One method is to engage learned and skilful men to study and to teach certain branches of knowledge, without any attempt to prescribe the particular doctrines or conclusions which shall be inculcated.

A second method is to engage such men to teach, but at the same time to define beforehand, the specific doctrines which shall be taught.

A third method, frequently but not necessarily combined with the second, is to repress by force all

doctrines at variance with such as are authoritatively prescribed.

The remaining business of the present chapter is to try these several methods by the principles already laid down.

Subsection I.

Employing Public Instructors.

With regard to the first of the methods enumerated, it is unnecessary here to discuss its absolute policy; — whether it is better for governments to establish schools and professorships, and to put forth treatises in any department of science, or on the contrary to leave such matters entirely to the play of interests and feelings in the community. Our present business is to examine solely the consistency of the method with the principles which ought to govern the conduct of human beings to each other.

This examination will not detain us long. When the state engages a competent teacher to instruct the people upon a given branch of knowledge without any restriction as to particular conclusions, any imposition of pre-appointed doctrines, it obviously pursues the same just and simple course as the man who candidly lays before his friend whatever he himself knows in relation to any contemplated inquiry.

Such a proceeding may be superfluous and officious, but it can do no harm to the cause of truth; whether politic or impolitic in itself, it does not infringe the principles here maintained. Endowing professorships of Natural Philosophy may be taken as an example of appointing instructors to teach a subject without prescribing what particular doctrines shall be taught. By such means the people are doubtless assisted to attain important knowledge.

The second method which governments may take for the professed purpose of guiding the people to sound and accurate opinions, is to select certain conclusions or doctrines, and to bestow emolument on individuals for teaching them. It is obvious that here the character of the proceeding is entirely changed. Let us examine it under the two points of view already intimated — 1st, as to its effects on the people as responsible beings having personally to discharge the duty of inquiry; and, 2dly, as to its effects on their success in attaining truth.

As to the first, no one can be at a loss to perceive what must inevitably ensue both to the teacher and to the taught. The functionary who enters the service of a government on such a condition has no choice, during the whole of his career, as to what he shall teach. From the first day to the last of a life which, as it is a life of tuition, ought to be a life of inquiry, he can ostensibly make no deviation from the opinions to which he originally bound himself. He must, throughout, either conform to the pre-

scribed doctrines, or quit his station and give up the emolument arising from it. At the outset he either believes or disbelieves the doctrines. If he believes them, he has cogent motives for abstaining from all examination of their validity; at least from any fair and candid examination of the objections brought against them. The indolence of mind engendered by the perfect coincidence of his opinions and his interest disposes him to shun an intellectual effort, which could not have a happier issue than the conclusion in which he is already at his ease; and the apprehension of the bare possibility of a different result operates equally to dissuade him from the enterprise. Every consideration presented by the circumstances in which he is placed suggests, that his exertions should be restricted to an inquiry after more striking and ingenious arguments in support of the opinions which he is at present fortunate enough to hold.

If, on the other hand, he does not believe the doctrines which he has undertaken to profess and expound, he will have equally strong reasons to keep him from a full and impartial inquiry into their truth. To escape the degradation of inculcating on others doctrines which he disbelieves himself, he will apply all his attention to the evidence in their favour: all his diligence, his talent, his ingenuity, will be exerted to magnify the arguments that he wishes to find conclusive; all his care will

be employed to keep his mind from the operation of antagonist considerations.

A man in either of the situations described can hardly be expected to be possessed with a wish to arrive at the truth, whatever it may be. It is the natural tendency of his position to destroy this wish in the most candid and impartial mind, and to substitute in its place the desire to attain or strengthen a conviction of the prescribed doctrines. The consequences of arriving at results inconsistent with them are too fearful for him to contemplate, and he will therefore venture on no course of study or exertion in which he does not see a probable termination in their favour.

Thus shackled and biassed in his own inquiries, it is easy to perceive what sort of influence he will exert over those persons whom it is his province to instruct. A man who shrinks from full and fair investigation himself, is not likely to recommend that duty to others, while he is necessarily incapacitated from presenting to them an impartial statement of evidence. Instead then of rendering assistance to his fellow-creatures, in the way pointed out in the last chapter, he will probably resort to dogmatical declamation, and endeavour to deter others by raising conscientious alarms or dealing out moral opprobrium from that fearless pursuit of truth which the temptations and restraints of his position have made impossible to him. In how many other ways soever he may be doing good, he

will, in this respect, be employed, perhaps unconsciously and unintentionally, in perverting the minds of his fellow-men; and unless he rise far superior to the noxious influences of the situation in which he has been placed by the state, he will become (with equal unconsciousness) an oppressor and persecutor. Thus, by this system of pre-appointed doctrines, not only the national instructors, but through them the community at large, will be prevented or deterred from fulfilling the duty of fair and adequate investigation; diligence and honesty in the pursuit of truth will be discouraged, and a spirit of intolerance engendered and maintained.

It may be remarked in passing that the effects here described do not, manifestly, arise from the circumstance of the benefit being held out by the state, nor from its being mainly of a pecuniary nature, nor from the particular department of knowledge to which the doctrines belong. The annexation of any advantage of whatever character, whether by positive institution or by the habits of the community to any particular opinions, be the subject what it may, has the same consequences. Eligibility to honours, professional employment, the esteem of friends, reputation in society, popularity with the crowd, and other benefits accruing from the profession of certain opinions, may equally present inducements to negligent and impartial treatment of evidence. The temptation of the advantages beforehand and the apprehension

of losing them afterwards, are essentially the same under all these modifications, and operate in a similar way.*

Such institutions and practices have also a further effect besides their direct influence over the minds of the parties as already described. Men, seeing the advantages of holding these doctrines, and some of them feeling perhaps the evils of disbelieving them, are particularly careful to implant them in the minds of their children, that their descendants may fully possess the firm conviction which removes so many obstacles from the career of fame and fortune, and thus the pernicious practice of dogmatical instillation is perpetuated, while the duty of inquiry remains neglected and untaught.

Thus as to the first of the objects which the people have to regard, and which the state, if it interfere at all, ought to encourage and assist them to accomplish; governments, whenever they pursue this method, do nothing to promote but a great deal to counteract it.

Instead of either refraining from interference or adopting a system calculated to impress upon the

* The powerful influence of public opinion, independently of positive institution, in seducing and deterring individuals from the fearless and manly pursuit of truth, may be seen plainly enough in our own country, but perhaps on a still larger scale in America, as vividly described by De Tocqueville. Vide Note E. in Appendix, referred to in its proper place under the next Section.

people the duty of inquiry, to cherish in the community a conscientious regard to impartial investigation, to inspire all classes and especially the national instructors with a love of truth, they offer inducements to unfairness of examination and insincerity of profession.

We turn then next to inquire how far this method accomplishes what it professes to undertake—with what success it guides the people to the truth.

In the first place, it must occur to every one, after the discussions already gone through, that the most effectual way of assisting men to attain truth, is to remove all obstacles to inquiry, all seductions to indolent acquiescence or partial attention to evidence, and to lead them to examine thoroughly the grounds of any doctrine which they may be called upon to investigate. Error universally arises from narrow and incomplete views, and is least likely to be found amongst men trained to exercise their faculties without restraint, and to look at a question on all sides. But when governments employ functionaries to teach certain fixed doctrines, they directly and at once circumscribe inquiry as far as in them lies, and thus lessen the probability of attaining truth. The teachers are, as we have already seen, doomed to remain in one unchangeable intellectual condition, to look from only one point of view, to pace within a circle that cannot be enlarged, and as far as their influence

extends, they will keep the people in a similar unprogressive state, with an equally bounded power of vision.

Full, rigid, impartial, unfettered examination must ever be the way to advance the progress and dissemination of knowledge of every kind, moral or physical, sacred or profane. Imagine for a moment what would ensue if in all the great departments of knowledge, governments should endeavour to protect and further the interests of truth by laying down a string of propositions on each subject, and hiring professors to inculcate and enforce them. Where under such a system, had it been adopted two or three centuries ago, would have been the brilliant results of chemical experiment? or the wonderful treasures of knowledge extracted from the earth by geological research? or the sublime discoveries won by the astronomer from the depths of the heavens?

The absurdity of such a course would be more apparent, although not more real, in proportion as the departments of knowledge in which it was adopted, admitted of certainty in their conclusions, and it assuredly would be more harmless. What sentiments would be excited by any government which should positively enjoin on the mathematical professors in its pay, that they should not teach any propositions at variance with those of Euclid? But the real absurdity would be quite as great although not so innocent, if this provident care on

the part of government were to extend itself to the patronage of any doctrines which might have been fixed upon by any body of men, however able and eminent, in the disputable and varying sciences of medicine, chemistry, and geology. In the first case, the protection would be idly superfluous; in the second, by raising up a strong interest against further inquiry, it would be pernicious in proportion as it proved effectual, because every science the investigation of which by those who apply themselves to it, has not yet produced unanimity, is either erroneous in its conclusions or imperfect in its developement, and a comparison of the discordant opinions arising in different minds from the study of it is essentially necessary to remove those errors of fact, of reasoning, or of exposition by which unanimity is precluded.

It will scarcely be urged against this representation that the few individuals who are at any time entrusted with the powers of government, have peculiar facilities for arriving at truth. In no department of knowledge except that connected with their office, can this be pretended with the slightest verisimilitude. On the contrary, from the circumstance of their attention being engrossed by the important and appropriate objects of protecting person and property, and the thousand incidents thence arising, they are in a great measure disqualified for determining truth in other matters. The absorption of the feelings and faculties by one

class of interesting subjects, necessarily precludes the highest degree of fitness for judging of others. Such a degree of aptitude for forming a sound judgment on any set of questions, can be the fruit of nothing but particular devotion to them under the indispensable conditions of perfect freedom of examination and exemption from extrinsic bias. But suppose the most favourable case; suppose that the few persons wielding the authority of the state, have not ventured to fix on any doctrines as true, without the aid of the most learned men. These men have been assembled for the purpose, have investigated, have deliberated, have determined, and finally presented the government with a set of conclusions in their judgment indubitably true. These are adopted by the state, and professors are paid for teaching them. Now then, it may be said, the objection that the government itself cannot determine truth, is got quit of: it calls in proper assistance, it brings together the ablest men, and obtains a result if not absolutely without error, yet more accurate than could be obtained in any other way.

It may, indeed, be at once admitted, that at any given moment in any department of knowledge, the conclusions of the ablest men who have made it their peculiar study under perfect freedom of inquiry, and totally uninfluenced by either hopes or fears, are far more likely to be correct than the opinions of the multitude; and that if the doctrines

agreed upon by an assembly of such eminent men, perfectly unshackled in their deliberations and unbiassed by professional interests, could be substituted for the prevalent notions in the minds of the people, the cause of truth would be advanced. But this admission will not avail the defenders of fixed doctrines. Such an assembly has never yet been seen, and to be of the required use must be in perpetual session. Amongst a race of inquisitive but fallible beings, knowledge is necessarily progressive. The opinions of the ablest men, if such men could be assembled in the way described, might be nearer approximations to truth at the moment than those of the people at large, but might possibly be shown to be erroneous or defective in the succeeding age, or even the succeeding year. By fixing, therefore, once for all on such opinions to be taught without deviation, by professors salaried for the purpose, a government not gifted with infallibility, or unable to call in the assistance of men who are, would be unavoidably expending its resources in the maintenance and propagation of error.

As the only way, then, to obviate these consequences, the assembly must, as already intimated, continue in perpetual session, or be re-constructed at short intervals. It must be constantly inquiring; keeping up with the advances of knowledge in other quarters; receiving freely the light directed by other sciences upon that to which its supervision is

limited; and modifying accordingly the propositions to be publicly taught.

On this plan, undoubtedly, a great part of the objections applying to the actual system would vanish; but it would only change the character of the difficulties in which a government would be plunged by undertaking to determine and to propagate truth: and as such a project has never been seriously proposed, it is not necessary to dwell on the obvious reasons which render it impracticable.

Nor is any such providential care and contrivance on the part of a government at all necessary or useful. Without this cumbrous and costly machinery, under the simple system of non-interference as to results, the ablest men of the age *are* in perpetual session as truly as they can ever be, canvassing the most difficult questions, devoting themselves to the most arduous researches, and sedulously working their way to truth.

Against this view of the subject, it may perhaps be alleged "that it proceeds on the supposition that knowledge of all kinds is necessarily progressive, whereas it is plain that true propositions cannot alter: they may have other propositions, true or false, added to them, but they remain unaffected themselves. Now, if such true propositions are adopted by the state, they may be more certainly established in the minds of men, and more extensively disseminated than if they were left to make their own way without protection or patronage."

This argument, however, takes for granted that the whole difficulty — the difficulty of determining truth — has been overcome. No doubt there are propositions, which being perfectly true, are unsusceptible of alteration; but it is obvious, that before they can be adopted by the state, they must be found out and discriminated from such as are false. Besides, they may be true, but fall short of the whole truth; they may form only part of a series of propositions, and convey even a false impression, till the complete series has been brought to light; or they may be true only under certain conditions, liable to alter. Hence the knowledge of the subject to which they relate is progressive from the very nature of the human mind, or of the objects of its cognizance; and the question is, whether or not the discovery of new truths, and the disentangling of known truths from the errors with which they are complicated, are best effected by unfettered investigation, or by the state stepping in at some point in the progress, pronouncing authoritatively that the ultimate goal has been reached, and employing functionaries to teach the doctrines thus decisively fixed, as by an enchanter's wand, in the particular form and attitude which they may have happened to assume at the moment the decree was uttered.

This seems to have been actually attempted in jurisprudence by Justinian, after the promulgation of his celebrated collection. "He entirely forbade," says Savigny, "the rise of a new jurisprudential

literature for the future. Only Greek translations of the Latin text, and (by way of mechanical aid) short sketches of the contents of the title, were to be allowed; if any book, properly so called, any commentary on these laws, were written, it was to be destroyed, and the author subjected to the punishment inflicted on forgery." "One thought," he continues, "lay at the bottom of all these edicts; viz., that this selection from the legal science and wisdom of former ages was adequate to all the wants of society, and could only be impaired by any new work." *

In the whole of Justinian's proceeding, we may observe the identical course pursued which we have been here contending against. He employed the ablest jurists he could find to extract the necessary and useful matter from the whole mass of existing documents on the subject; he then stereotyped it as the perfection of wisdom, from which all deviation would be an evil; he appears to have provided the schools of law with a new plan of instruction, by which to teach these immutable precepts; and he visited all commentary, all discussion of the justice or policy of his code, with criminal punishment. "The fundamental idea," adds the writer already quoted, "which prompted it, is in fact the same self-delusion which, deeply rooted in human nature, is continually recurring in every part of the domain

* See Fragments from German Authors, translated by Mrs. Austen, p. 169.

of opinion, and especially in the religious part: *i. e.*, we believe ourselves permitted to impose on others, as exclusively right and authoritative, that particular formula of thought which we have constructed by the honest and conscientious exertion of our own powers, *thus*, as we think, *for ever banishing error.*"*

All such attempts to banish error can serve but to retain it. The only useful office which the prescribed dogmas can perform, will be to stand like so many immoveable landmarks indicating to the eyes of future generations how far the tide of human progress has swept beyond the limits imposed by human presumption.

The objections here stated to the system of preappointed conclusions have now in most cases their full weight. In no departments of knowledge (with few exceptions) do governments in the present day, having any pretensions to be called free, ever attempt to bind down those persons whom they employ in the capacity of teachers to certain fixed doctrines, whether the latest results of inquiry, or

* "*It is the first care of a reformer,*" says Gibbon with grave sarcasm, "*to prevent any future reformation.* To maintain the text of the Pandects, the Institutes, and the Code, the use of cyphers and abbreviations was rigorously proscribed, and as Justinian recollected that the perpetual edict had been buried under the weight of commentators, he denounced the punishment of forgery against the rash civilians who should presume to interpret or pervert the will of their sovereign." — *Decline and Fall*, chap. 44.

such as were propounded and settled in an age of comparative ignorance.

Such a course could not conduce to the general attainment of truth by the people, but in whatever department of knowledge it were adopted, would unavoidably disseminate and perpetuate error.*

But were it even admitted that the doctrines so selected would in all likelihood be true, this system of maintaining and propagating them would still (we must not forget) be open to the insurmountable objection already urged, that it interfered with that personal duty of inquiry, obligatory on individuals, which the state is at all times bound to respect.

It must be recollected that the duty which presents itself to be performed by any one whose situation calls him to inquiry is simply honest and diligent examination, and that to draw him from this course by an offer of advantages even on the side of what the offerer conceives to be truth, is to seduce him from the proper discharge of a task of the highest moral obligation, as well as to place him in an imperfect intellectual condition in relation to the subject. It is impossible to maintain *both* that it is incumbent on a man to conduct an examination impartially, and that it is right in other men, singly or associated, to present inducements which shall influence him to do it partially. Such in-

* See Appendix, Note C.

ducements, it is almost needless to remark, operate precisely in the same way whether offered by individuals or by the state; and the same principles of morality apply to both alike, and with equal force.

When we reflect, too, that the duty of inquiry is in many cases, and especially in those cases in which governments are apt to interfere, a direct obligation to the Almighty Author of our being, the attempt of any human creature, armed with what authority soever, to discourage or prevent or pervert the performance of that duty, becomes a procedure of even awful presumption.*

Subsection II.

Employing Force.

We have next to examine the third method which may be adopted by governments with a view to assist the people in attaining truth; namely, repressing by force all doctrines at variance with such as have been prescribed by authority; in a word, persecution for opinions, that eternal blot on the reputation of humanity, which it is difficult to mention without an indignation inconsistent with a dispassionate survey of its effects.* This must, in a greater or smaller degree, always prevail where emolument or distinction is held out for teaching

* See Appendix, Note D.

or attends the profession of prescribed doctrines, inasmuch as the loss of advantages in possession has all the effect of a positive penalty on the parties subject to it.

When we were pointing out in a former part of this treatise the violations of duty in connection with the pursuit of truth observable amongst individuals, the consideration of the particular transgression now before us was postponed (with the view of avoiding repetitions) to the present chapter, as its more appropriate place. As all that can be said of persecution when it is the work of government will apply with little modification to such forms as it commonly assumes in private life, the separate consideration of the latter became needless. Penalties applied to opinions do not, any more than rewards, depend for their effects on the agency through which they are administered; nor is their rigour uniformly greater when imposed by the state. The persecution inflicted by society itself, or by its individual members, is sometimes equal in atrocity to any which proceeds from the hand of power.*

It may also be here recalled to the reader's attention, that although persecution has been the most frequently and extensively employed in the support of theological doctrines, the same brute violence has been extended to other departments

* For proofs of this, see Note E. in Appendix.

of knowledge. Thus to take an example, which happens to be at hand, from the history of France. In 1624, at the request of the University of Paris, and especially of the Sorbonne, persons were forbidden by an *arrêt* of parliament, "on pain of death, to hold or teach any maxim contrary to ancient and approved authors, or to enter into any debate but such as should be approved by the doctors of the faculty of theology." By the same *arrêt* several persons who had composed and published theses against the doctrine of Aristotle, were either reprimanded or banished.*

The fate of the celebrated Ramus, too, in the preceding century, is a well known instance of the virulence of persecution against all who called in question the infallibility of Aristotle. His writings were prohibited and ordered to be burnt, and he himself forbidden to teach.

In examining this method of forcible suppression by the same tests as have been applied to the method of promoting the cause of truth by the employment of teachers, it seems almost ludicrous to enter upon a formal proof that repressing opinions by violence, so far from assisting inquiry, must prevent the people from discharging the duty of a full and impartial investigation into the subject to which such opinions relate. It is, nevertheless, worth while to trace the way in which in relation to the

* See D'Alembert on the Abuse of Criticism in Religion.

pursuit of truth, it operates on the mind, conduct, and condition, of a people who are unfortunate enough to be placed in such a state of intellectual slavery.

Forcible suppression not only takes away the opportunity and means of inquiry from the community at large, but destroys or vitiates the natural motives to inquire. There can be no doubt that as rewards encourage a partial attention to evidence in favour of those doctrines for the profession of which they are bestowed, so the opposite treatment — persecution — has, to a large extent, the effect of inducing mankind to shun the persecuted doctrines, and the arguments in their support. The lovers of sympathy who shrink from disapprobation,—the worldly who are alive to profit or pleasure but indifferent to truth,—the indolent and supine who do not greatly concern themselves about any opinions so long as their ordinary course of life is suffered to run smoothly, are all deterred by a fear of consequences from attending to doctrines which can bring nothing but discredit and danger on their votaries. They are frightened from what is really their imperative duty. With bolder dispositions it is otherwise. When persecution is let loose upon society without being pushed to absolute extermination, the effect upon the strong-minded and energetic is to rouse the spirit of resistance; and this is especially the effect on every one who suffers

in his own person. His passions are stimulated against his oppressors, his mind is thrown into the attitude of defiance and contention, and instead of simply seeking for what is true, his whole soul is bent on detecting the errors of his antagonists, and providing himself with every possible argument on his own side. He grasps not at truth, but at the means, whatever they may be, of self-defence, and at the power of annoyance. Provoked to a keen scrutiny, he enters upon it without any adequate sense of the real obligation under which he lies, and in a state of mind far from being favourable to stern impartiality of investigation.

This is true, even of that minor species of persecution which consists in debarring dissentients from certain rights and privileges, or exacting declarations of faith, or requiring conformity to repulsive ceremonies. Many find themselves, from rank or birth or station, in this vexatious position in society; and the consequent irritation and sense of injustice sharpen their perspicacity to all the valid arguments of their own party, and to the weak points of the system which degrades itself by annoying them with needless disabilities and fruitless exactions.

Thus, in deterring from inquiry, on the one hand, and perverting the spirit of it, on the other, persecution is inimical alike to the means and to the motives for performing the great duty under our consideration. It is superfluous to enter

at greater length on the consequences flowing in this particular direction from the forcible suppression of opinions; but a remark before suggested, presses again irresistibly on the mind. In most cases where this kind of interference takes place, the duty of investigation is a direct obligation to the Supreme Being; and if it is awfully presumptuous in any fallible mortal to prevent or pervert the fulfilment of so sacred a duty, by holding out to his fellow-creatures the temptation of benefit, what must be the insane arrogance of him who seeks to accomplish the same mischievous purpose by the infliction of misery?

"It is unconsciousness alone" (to borrow the language of a work before referred to) "or an imperfect sense of the real character of his conduct, which redeems it from the blackest guilt. We should otherwise sink confounded at the audacious wickedness of that man who dared to intermeddle by pains and penalties of whatever degree or whatever kind, with the solemn duty of human beings to their Maker, and with the jurisdiction of their Omniscient Judge."*

Let us next examine how far the forcible suppression of opinions will stand the test of the second principle.

Persecutors, it is certain, how exempt soever they

* Letters of an Egyptian Kafir, p. 120.

may have been from any such notion as that of promoting the duty of inquiry, have often laboured under the delusion, that they were assisting the people in the other object, the attainment of truth; they have actually believed that they were promoting the prevalence of sound and accurate opinions by preventing the free utterance of thought and communication of intelligence. The infatuation seems a strange one; but it has undoubtedly prevailed, and still continues amongst many who would not willingly be classed among the weak and the ignorant. It is scarcely necessary to enter here upon the proof — a proof already anticipated in the course of the preceding discussions — how effectually these deluded men were doing the contrary; how certainly, as far as their efforts were not defeated, they were engaged in fixing mankind in darkness and error. At this stage of our dissertation, it must be abundantly plain that in proportion as persecution for opinions is successful, it retards the progress of truth by precluding the interchange of knowledge, the emulous scrutiny of error, the quick comparison of results, and the thorough investigation of the processes by which they are attained. It is a brute obstacle, re-plunging the human race, as far as its power extends, into the disadvantages of that condition in which the physical means of general mental intercourse were unknown.

"Every species of intolerance," says an eminent writer, "which enjoins suppression and silence, and every species of persecution which enforces such injunctions, is adverse to the progress of truth; forasmuch as it causes that to be fixed by one set of men, at one time, which is much better, and with much more probability of success, left to the independent and progressive inquiries of separate individuals. Truth results from discussion and from controversy; is investigated by the labours and researches of private persons. Whatever, therefore, prohibits these, obstructs that industry and that liberty which it is the common interest of mankind to promote."*

But happily such intolerance carries with it, in the reaction which, as already shown, it usually calls forth, some compensation for the injuries inflicted by it on the cause of truth. When this monstrous practice is not pushed to extremity, — where its merciless designs cannot be carried into complete effect, — where it is mitigated by the existence of large bodies who resist it, — where it is therefore only partial and intermittent, and is constantly denounced and defied, it is apt, as we have seen, not only to sharpen the sight and strengthen the convictions of its victims, but to shake existing prejudices in the community by the examination it

* Moral Philosophy, book vi. chap. 10.

provokes, and to extend the influence of the doctrines against which it is levelled.

Seldom, indeed, is the exciting effect of such intolerance confined to those on whom it personally falls. The records of the world sufficiently attest that persecution awakens the attention of parties who are not immediately interested, to questions otherwise not likely to attract their notice, and leads to such trains of reflection as silently sap, if they do not forcibly subvert, the foundations of prejudice. Both sympathy and curiosity are roused; the fate of the victim is commiserated; the opinions which have drawn down vengeance upon him are scrutinized, and the issue frequently is, that they establish themselves in the heart and in the understanding of the inquirer.

Such results, although they constitute no merit on the part of the persecutor, must be allowed, in whatever degree they take place, to lessen the effectiveness of intolerance in checking the progress of knowledge. After every possible alleviation, however, from energies roused, opposition provoked, and curiosity awakened, there is still a large residuum of evil. It is the very essence of persecution, in proportion as it prevails, to injure the cause of truth, and therefore of human happiness, by preventing the utterance of opinions; thus circumscribing the number of inquirers, insulating their thoughts, and, as far as its power reaches,

condemning man, with indefinite capabilities of improvement by intercourse with his species, to that incapacity of communicating and transmitting his impressions which is the natural doom of the brute.

CHAP. VII.

CONCLUSION.

The views which have now been presented of the duty of inquiry essentially differ, it must be confessed, from the opinions and practices of mankind in general.

The state of society at present on this great subject, it is not too harsh to say, is a state of barbarism. Whoever looks abroad must admit, that in the most enlightened countries existing in the world, gross ignorance of the duties of man to God, and of man to man, in relation to the pursuit of truth, abounds. In this vital matter, no where is that conduct which is really virtuous regarded with approbation,—no where is that which is really vicious condemned: there is no well-directed sensibility; no nice discernment; no correct appreciation of merit; no consistent adherence even to admitted principles: honesty of inquiry is subverted by temptation, or overwhelmed with disgrace and persecution; while unenlightened or criminal acquiescence is fostered and recompensed.

The best wish that can arise in the heart of any lover of his species is, that this deplorable condition

of humanity may be relieved; the best mental change that can happen to mankind is an enhancement of their intellectual discrimination, and a revolution in their moral sentiments, in regard to the pursuit of truth.

If any one should ask how such a change is to be brought about, there appears to be only one answer. It can be accomplished by no magic. It must be effected by repeated discussions, by bringing the necessary distinctions frequently into view, by an earnest endeavour to shake off error, clear up obscurity and disentangle confusion, and by holding up our well-considered conclusions on the subject before the eyes of our fellow-creatures. These are the appointed and appropriate means by which only we can purposely hasten a revolution from error to truth in the opinions of mankind, and in the practices founded upon them.

With such views the present work has been written. To contribute in some measure, however small, to the accomplishment of these noble ends, it is now sent forth to the world. The rigid consistency with which it aims to apply in every direction the great principles of morality connected with the pursuit of truth, may be expected to draw down on its doctrines all the ill-will which ignorance and bigotry will dare to manifest; but, on the other hand, it is not too much to hope that the same feature will insure it a candid, if not a cordial,

reception from the real lovers of truth and the best friends of humanity. In bringing it to a close, the writer cannot but feel the conscious satisfaction of having (however inefficiently) laboured in singleness of spirit for an object of inestimable value.

ESSAY

ON THE

PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE.

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PART I.

A. I AM glad that we have disengaged ourselves from the company, as I am not altogether satisfied with the opinions you have been expressing on the character and condition of mankind. They are too disheartening.

N. Are they true? That is the only inquiry worthy of a rational being.

A. When I say they are too disheartening, I mean that they go beyond the truth in the low estimate which they exhibit of human nature. In the present day, I should hardly contest any opinions on any other ground.

N. After all, what have I said? I have said, and I repeat, that when we look back into the history of the human race we can scarcely help feel-

ing ashamed that we belong to it. Man is an animal in a very slight degree rational by nature. It seems to require ages upon ages to bring the race to any thing like a state of reason—a state where prejudice and passion are subordinate to the understanding, where man controls the blind impulse of the present by a view of the future, and distinctly perceives his relative position in the universe. It is certain that mankind have hitherto never reached such a state. Let any one look around him, and what does he observe? A few minds perhaps capable of raising themselves into the pure atmosphere of truth, of emancipating themselves from the domination of mere instinct, of expatiating through the moral and material would with full liberty of intellect, and of appreciating the exact relation in which they stand to the existences around them; but the majority—nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand—the slaves of prejudice and the dupes of passion, inflicting misery upon themselves and others from gross ignorance of the real tendencies of action and the rational object of existence; shrinking from truth as from a spectre; frightened by imaginary terrors; incapable of pursuing more than one step of argument, yet pertinacious in their own infallibility; humbling themselves in the dust as unworthy to approach the God whom they tremble to think of, while they confess his unbounded benevolence, yet assuming their actions to be of such immense importance to him as to require the discipline of

eternity at his hands. The meanness of men's reasoning powers in general is almost incredible. Locke, if I mistake not, terms a man who can advance two steps in reasoning a man of two syllogisms. There are few such to be found. The majority of mankind are men of one syllogism, or of less. The faculty of taking two steps in reasoning without assistance—leading strings—is rare: that of taking three belongs to one in an age. It stamps a man as the wonder of his day.

A. Yet with these mean understandings, these limited faculties, how much has the human race accomplished? You must admit, that men in the present day are superior, wonderfully superior, in knowledge and wisdom to their progenitors three thousand or even three hundred years ago; that they have discarded some methods of rendering themselves miserable, and opened a few fresh springs of happiness. In a word, there has been an advance in the discrimination of good and evil. You will not contend that men are incapable of progressive improvement, chained for ever like the brutes to the circle of individual attainment, doomed generation after generation to commence at one point and to tread the same round. No! human improvement, thank God, admits of successive advances; each generation starts from the ground at which the last had expended its strength in arriving; and I will venture to say, that this single circumstance is sufficient to carry the race to a degree of know-

ledge which it is impossible for us to conceive. Oh! that I could live to see the results of another century of progression.

N. The principle of the progressive improvement of mankind, and the consequences resulting from it, I acknowledge as well as yourself. It was implied indeed in my assertion, that it required ages upon ages to bring the race to any thing like a state of rationality; an assertion, which, while it admits the tendency to improvement, certainly encourages no very sanguine expectations of the rapidity of the progress. In our anticipations on this point we differ. When I look back on the past, or around me on the present, I cannot help feeling convinced, that if men are to advance, as I think they inevitably must, it will be by a very slow march. There are a thousand obstacles in the way. It is but a poor eulogy on human capabilities, that mankind have been four or five thousand years in attaining to their present partial and imperfect civilisation, which, extolled as it generally has been, is scarcely entitled to the appellation of semi-barbarism. If we are to be guided by experience, if we are to expect hereafter only what we have found in the past, our anticipations of the rapidity of future improvement will not be very extravagant.

A. Consider the wars and disorders which have heretofore constantly checked the career of civilisation. But for the madness of ambition, how far it would have already advanced!

N. These wars and disorders were the necessary consequences of those narrow faculties, that incapacity of reasoning, that blindness to their real interests, which I charge on the human race. To say in defence of human nature, that it would have improved faster had not these things happened, is only to affirm, that if it had been endowed with superior sense, it would not have exhibited so much folly.

A. There is one thing, however, which you must allow to be much in favour of those anticipations which look for a more rapid advance in future than has hitherto been experienced—the invention of printing.

N. That indeed is the noblest acquisition of science: it is the impregnable fortress of civilisation; no political changes, no physical vicissitudes, no mutation short of the complete extinction of mankind, can henceforth ever restore the empire of the world to ignorance. But admitting all the benefits of this invention, it is not in the nature of the human mind to advance with rapidity. The onward strides of improvement may be sure, but they will be slow. Genius may burst away from the steady march of the race, and penetrate into regions which it will be the work of future generations completely to explore; but all its energy will not suffice to drag on the main body faster than the regular pace to which the nature of its powers inevitably confine it.

A. You appear to forget, that as by the press the cultivation of knowledge extends itself over greater numbers, a greater portion of talent will be brought out; prejudices will give way in a shorter time, and improvements be adopted with less reluctance. Consider how rapid has been the progress of science within the last fifty years, compared with an equal term during the middle ages.

N. Of physical science it is true. It labours under a part only of those obstructions which impede the science of human nature. Yet even here we may mark several of those impediments which doom the species to a tardy progression; — the dulness and inertness of the faculties to discover truth, the interests arrayed against its reception, the difficulty of sundering the established bonds of mental association. Besides, there is a puny sort of self-love in every department of knowledge, which desires the prevalence and stability of opinions because they are *its* opinions. It cannot find in its heart to fancy itself at all in error. Instead of wishing for the progress and spread of truth, however subversive of established doctrines, and that mankind should be continually detecting their errors and adding to their acquirements, instead of exulting at the prospect which the future presents of receding darkness and advancing light, this contemptible selfishness would have the world to stand still for ever at the point which itself has attained,

and poises its own gratification against the comprehensive interests of mankind, its own shallow pretensions against the growing science of the age, and the intellect of myriads of unborn generations. It would bind down all the great spirits which are yet to advance the happiness and elevate the dignity of man to its own blind dogmas and narrow sphere of vision, and permit no other intellectual movement in the world than an approximation to those opinions which itself has chanced to adopt.

A. You are severe.

N. Severe! Would it not exhaust the patience of the meekest philosopher — a designation to which I have no pretensions — to see men who have possessed themselves of the established quantum of information constantly parading it as the *ne plus ultra* of knowledge, and stifling or attempting to stifle every symptom of improvement lest their own personal consequence should be scratched?

A. I am perfectly aware of the extensive prevalence of the feelings you describe, which, joined to the disinclination, perhaps disability, that every man has to enter into trains of ideas totally at variance with his habitual modes of thinking, protract the reign of error even where interest is not engaged in its support. The conduct of the medical men in relation to Harvey's discovery is a notorious instance in point.* But these obstacles give way.

* See Appendix, Note F.

N. True. Men die off; and they are succeeded by others, whose minds are imbued with truer principles, and who do not feel their reputation pledged against improvement. This, however, is a slow process. By your own showing, a prejudice exposed as false can perish only with the generation to which it adheres. A rapid advance truly, when every step of improvement requires at least an age!

A. We have instances, nevertheless, in which discoveries have met with a pretty general reception in their own times; those of modern chemistry, for instance.

N. Yet Priestley could not part with the doctrine of phlogiston. As he was a man who held his opinions with less than common pertinacity, an inquirer open to conviction to the day of his death — not one of those who early in life packet up their miserable stock of knowledge and label it complete — his is a striking instance how tenaciously a theory once received adheres to the understanding. I grant, however, that physical science advances more rapidly, and disseminates its improvements with more ease, than moral and political knowledge. It would seem that just in proportion as knowledge is unimportant it meets with a readier reception.

A. Do you really intend to insinuate that chemistry, and the other physical sciences, are unimportant? Call to mind the power which they have

given to man over nature — how well they have answered Lord Bacon's description of the rational end of knowledge.

N. I do not call these pursuits unimportant, except comparatively ; but I maintain that they are incalculably inferior in their effects upon human happiness to those sciences which explore the nature of man and the tendencies of action, and which in the present day, notwithstanding the circumstances which force them in some degree on general reflection, are disgracefully neglected.

A. Not all. The science of Political Economy has surely received its due share of attention. Some of the first intellects of modern times have fixed their grasp upon it.

N. True. This is an exception, a glorious exception; and if any thing could render me more sanguine in my anticipations of political melioration, it would be the progress of this science, the irresistible manner in which it has insinuated itself into our councils and moulded our policy. Twenty or thirty years ago the doctrines of Adam Smith were apparently a dead letter; his book was considered by that sapient race, the practical men, as full of Utopian dreams. Pitt did not fully comprehend it, and Fox declared it past understanding.* A first-rate statesman in the present day

* Mr. Butler in his Reminiscences tells us, that Mr. Fox confessed he had never read the Wealth of Nations; adding,

would be scouted for equal ignorance. The prevalence of this science will do good. Its severe logic, its rigorous requisitions to keep in view the meaning of terms, the beautiful dependence of its long series of propositions, will accustom men to think with more accuracy and precision, while they render it even a delightful exercise for a masculine understanding. It is a lever which will move the world.*

A. We have here, then, an instance in which a science, and that not a physical science, has advanced with considerable rapidity.

N. Pardon me. Political Economy is itself a proof that the dissemination of new truths is restricted by the nature of the human mind to what I may venture to term a very moderate rate. It was necessary that the contemporaries of Adam Smith should be succeeded by another generation before his doctrines could prevail.†

"There is something in all these subjects which passes my comprehension; something so wide, that I could never embrace them myself, or find any one who did." — Vol. i. p. 187.

* It would be out of place here to do more than protest against the disparaging estimate of this "*pretended science*" by M. Comte in his Course of Positive Philosophy, a work abounding in unquestionable ability and disputable doctrines. It is to be regretted that previous to being committed to the press it was not stripped of the prolixity (in this case most remarkable) incident to the form of lectures. An analysis and review of the whole by a master-hand would be invaluable to the English reader.

† "At the interval of half a century, the speculations of this

A. What will you say, however, to the improvements of Malthus, Say, Ricardo, and others? These have been generally, if not universally, admitted by their contemporaries.

N. Where is your proof? Not to enter into the question, whether the writings of these authors contain any valuable discoveries, I will venture to assert, that the number of people, who fully understand the true nature of any improvements which have been introduced into the science since the days of Adam Smith, scarcely amounts to a few hundreds. No! we must all die before these things can be generally understood. To comprehend them belongs not to our age.

A. It is my turn to ask for proof.

N. I refer you to the Reviews. How few of the reviewers of Mr. Malthus, M. Say, or Mr. Ricardo* have ventured to grapple with their doctrines. To enter into reasonings of this kind is a tasking of the intellect to which few writers can submit, and which would scarcely promote the popularity of a periodical work. I refer you to the House of Commons. Of the number of those who are nightly

great author have been incorporated in the practices of government. *This is the time which truth and wisdom have taken to travel from the philosopher's study to the senate-house;* and at length, after having struggled its way through many obstructions, the system of free trade is not only recognised, but is begun to be acted upon in the regulation of commercial affairs." — Dr. CHALMERS *on Endowments*, preface, p. xi.

* See Note G. in Appendix.

employed in the discussion of economical topics, how many are there fully in possession of even the acknowledged principles of the subject?

A. Neither the Reviews nor the House of Commons can be reasonably expected to be in the very van of a difficult science, although doubtless splendid exceptions might be named. But to return to your assertion respecting the slow advance of the science of man, I am disposed to think it more rapid than you are willing to allow, and that the contrary opinion on your part arises from the few changes which have appeared in our civil and political institutions. Now it is very possible that knowledge on a particular subject may have been making a great progress for years, and yet not have manifested itself in the modification of existing establishments. Nay, this seems absolutely necessary: for, before any effects can appear in practice, it is requisite, in the first place, that the discoveries should have been made; and, secondly, that they should have been familiarised by dissemination. Hence it is not fair to measure the progress of a science at any given period by its practical results.

N. I concede some weight to your remarks. But what examples would you select of improvements in moral and political science apart from practice?

A. After Political Economy, which we have already considered, I should adduce Legislation, Moral and Intellectual Philosophy generally, and

the Philosophy of Physical Inquiry in particular, and also the Theory of Language.

N. I see whom you are aiming at. You doubtless have in your eye Bentham, Dr. Thomas Brown, Horne Tooke, and a few others.

A. You might have guessed more widely of the truth. I hesitate not to express my conviction, that these writers have made important advances in their several pursuits. I know the reluctance with which their claims are admitted, but I suspect that few have taken the trouble to understand their works.

N. So! You are coming round I perceive to my opinion; for you must acknowledge, that if few have taken the trouble to understand writers of this class and character, the rate at which their discoveries are propagated must be very tardy. Believe me, my dear Sir, these men belong to the next age. The truths, which they have promulgated, must be familiarised in elementary treatises, taught in the schools, wrought into our lighter literature, and instilled into the minds of another generation before they can be generally received. It is a common error to consider the achievements of a few great minds as indicative of the state of civilisation to which the community at large has attained. Men of genius leave their contemporaries a century behind. There is an eloquent passage in a writer of some celebrity so much to the point, that I must beg to quote it in illustration of my

views. "We cannot help remarking," says he, "what a deception we suffer to pass on us from history. It celebrates some period in a nation's career as pre-eminently illustrious for magnanimity, lofty enterprise, literature, and original genius. There was perhaps a learned and vigorous monarch, and there were Cecils and Walsinghams, and Shakespeares and Spensers, and Sidneys and Raleighs, with many other powerful thinkers and actors, to render it the proudest age of our national glory. And we thoughtlessly admit on our imagination this splendid exhibition as representing, in some indistinct manner, the collective state of the people in that age. The ethereal summits of a tract of the moral world are conspicuous and fair in the lustre of heaven, and we take no thought of the immensely greater proportion of it which is sunk in gloom and covered with fogs. The general mass of the population, whose physical vigour, indeed, and courage, and fidelity to the interests of the country, were of such admirable avail to the purposes, and under the direction of the mighty spirits that wielded their rough agency; this great mass was sunk in such mental barbarism, as to be placed at about the same distance from their illustrious intellectual chiefs, as the hordes of Scythia from the most elevated minds of Athens."*

A. A noble passage, eloquent in language and

* Essay on Popular Ignorance, by John Foster, p. 71.

felicitous in illustration : but you surely do not regard it as applicable to modern times ?

N. I look upon it as a pretty faithful picture of the state of things in the present day. He who, not content with imposing reports and statistical results, comes into actual contact with the real body of the people, will find an immeasurable difference between the average of their intelligence and the luminous and comprehensive views which fill the eye of a Bentham or a Brown, or any other man of genius whose name may be employed to mark the farthest point of intellectual progression.

PART II.

N. It appears to me, that in our last conversation on the progressive improvement of mankind, we differed only in regard to its rapidity, you contending for a much quicker progress than I am disposed to anticipate. The difference between us, however, scarcely affects any of the important consequences flowing from the general principle.

A. Your arguments, although forcibly urged, by no means shook the previous conviction of my mind; but what are the consequences to which you particularly allude?

N. The most cursory glance at the subject is sufficient to suggest a thousand valuable inferences, some of them widely at variance with prevalent opinions. For instance, if all kinds of knowledge necessarily improve, it is vain to look for the soundest principles, the deepest insight into nature, in our older writers.

A. That is a conclusion which is certainly little accordant with the theories of the day. Even I, sanguine as I am of the future, should hesitate to accede to it.

N. The ground of this prepossession in favour of old writers is evidently a false analogy, which Lord Bacon has well exposed. In every subject which admits of an accession of knowledge, the

best writers must be in time superseded. To a later age they must often appear tedious, wasting their powers on trifles, attempting formally to establish what is obviously absurd or what no one disputes, or tasking their strength in the prolix exposure of fallacies, the true character of which may now be shown in a few sentences. Such works after a certain period are consulted only on account of their reputation, for their style, or for the pleasure of tracking the steps of a great mind. The works of Bacon and Locke are already becoming instances in point. They are more talked of than read; and if you will pardon a homely expression, oftener dipped into than waded through.

A. We have works, nevertheless, and those not works of art, but what in contra-distinction may be called works of knowledge, which will not be readily superseded.

N. It would be difficult to name them. I will not deny, however, the possibility of a doctrine being so concisely and clearly established, that the demonstration may never be displaced by a better. Even in such cases, the doctrine in process of time appears so intuitive as not to require proof.

A. It seems to be an unavoidable inference from your remarks, that the study of old authors is a waste of labour.

N. Much of it is an exhaustion of the strength to no purpose. This obsolete learning is well enough for minds of a secondary cast, but it only

serves to hamper the man of original genius. It is unwise in such a one to enter very minutely into the history of the science to which he devotes himself — more especially at the outset. Let him perfectly master the present state of the science, and he will be prepared to push it farther while the vigour of his intellect remains unbroken; but if he previously attempt to embrace all that has been written on the subject, to make himself acquainted with all its exploded theories and obsolete doctrines, his mind will probably be too much entangled in their intricacies to make any original efforts; too wearied with tracing past achievements to carry the science to a farther degree of excellence.* When a man has to take a leap he is ma-

* In harmony with the general scope of the observations here made, a French writer before cited, M. Comte, has well characterised two modes of exposition (and the same distinction holds good in the study as well as in the explanation of science), one the *historic*, the other the *dogmatic;* the former presenting a science in the order in which it has been brought to its present state, the latter presenting it as it would be formed by a mind whose intelligence sufficed to take at once a view of the whole. In proportion as a science advances, the first method becomes more and more impracticable by the long series of intermediate steps through which the mind would be dragged; while on the other hand, the second method increases in facility in the same proportion. Ordinary men (he proceeds to say) could never be placed on a level with the actual state of science, brought about by the labours of a long line of master-spirits, if every individual had to pass through the successive steps which have been necessarily trod by the collective genius of the human race. See *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, tome i. p. 77.

terially assisted by stepping backward a few paces, and giving his body an impulse by a short run to the starting place; but if his precursory range is too extensive, he exhausts his forces before he comes to the principal effort.

A. The general voice is against your doctrine. Old authors are universally considered as treasures of deep thought, mines of wisdom, from which the young aspirant after distinction is recommended to extract the ore, which he is to beat out and embellish for the public use. I think you underrate them.

N. Do not mistake me. I reverence as much as any man the great intellects which have been employed in raising the structure of science. It is no disparagement to the illustrious men of past times, that their errors are pointed out, and that shorter and easier methods are found of accomplishing that which it required all their efforts to effect. With intellects far greater perhaps than any subsequent labourers in the same cause, they may be surpassed in extent and accuracy of knowledge at a later period by men of the most limited capacity. Such is the necessary condition of human improvement. All that an individual can effect is comparatively trivial. His powers of original inference are bounded to a few steps. The works of one must be elevated on those of another. Meanwhile beauty of style, elegance of illustration, perspicuity of arrangement,

and ingenuity of inference—all that constitutes a book a work of art—may be imperishable.

A. Your view of the subject seems to militate against all claims to originality. If one man is to build on the discoveries of another, his best works can only be like stones in the edifice, while it is surely the ambition of every man of genius to erect a structure of his own.

N. This notion, that a man should produce something exclusively his own, unconnected with any thing previously accomplished, in order to entitle him to the praise of originality, has given rise to a good deal of vain contention about the claims of individuals to particular discoveries and inventions. A casual expression, a barren assertion, an imperfect and unsteady approximation to an important truth, has been singled out to invalidate the just pretensions of the man of original genius, who has planted a firm foot on ground of which it is possible indeed that a glimpse had been previously caught, but which had never been actually reached; and who has opened to our delighted minds a vista of consequences which seems more like a creation than a discovery. Thus the originality of Newton in his doctrine of Gravitation has been disputed on the ground of some approaches to this principle by Hook; that of Hume, in his views of the relation of Cause and Effect, on the strength of expressions in sundry writers; that of Malthus, in his principles of Population, on account of some passages in Wal-

lace, Stuart, and Smith; and that of Dalton, in his chemical theory of Definite Proportions, in consequence of an imperfect anticipation of it by Higgins. The truth is, that the originality demanded by such critics is an originality which cannot exist; it is purely chimerical, and the ambition of attaining it can lead only to extravagant paradoxes and baseless theories. Whoever wishes to be original in the only practicable way, must rise from the improvements of others. A living writer* has well characterised this originality in the case of the doctrine of population, when he remarks that Mr. Malthus took an obvious and familiar truth, which till his time had been a barren truism, and showed that it teemed with consequences.

A. I acknowledge that he who can do this may well be content with himself.

N. Yet the critics will quote the familiar truth to prove that the consequences were not original. But this is absurd on any theory but that which requires in every invention or discovery a perfect insulation from preceding achievements, before it is entitled to that praise. The slightest connection with what has been previously accomplished seems in the eyes of these dreamers to divest it of this character. To trace the way in which it was effected, or the steps of the process, is with them the same thing as destroying its claims to admi-

* Mr. De Quincey.

ration. In contradiction to all this, I will venture to affirm that it is invariably owing to the state of a science at the time when a man takes it up, that he is able to make his peculiar discoveries. Hence those fugitive glimpses, those scattered lights, those casual touches in writings of the same date. The minds of a number of individuals seem to be contemporaneously labouring with obscure intimations of the same truth, till in the most vigorous amongst them it struggles from its obscurity and bursts into day. "The greatest inventor in science," says an eminent philosopher, "was never able to do more than to accelerate the progress of discovery." *

A. But surely your representation of the matter has a tendency to lessen the merit of invention, or at least our admiration of it.

N. On the contrary, it shows us where admiration is due, and what are the grounds on which we should grant it, as well as explodes the flimsy pretences on which it is sometimes professed to be withheld. What is still better, it exhibits the real process of invention and discovery, and proves that they must necessarily go on, however slowly, so long as there is any thing to invent or discover.

A. In this point we perfectly agree. Hence the folly of shutting the mind to further improvement, —of conceiving, as many people are apt to do, that they have mastered the sciences once and for ever.

N. Mastered the sciences! A man in the present

* Playfair's Works, vol. ii. p. 52.

day with regard to the sciences is something like Virgil's boatman, *si brachia fortè remisit*, he loses his place—he is in effect carried backward. There is a perpetual necessity for exertion if he would maintain his relative position in the world of intellect; and from this necessity arises much of that hostility to improvement which characterises the dull and the indolent. Thus what should yield delight proves a source of mortification; for what in reality can be more exhilarating than the thought, that thousands of minds are constantly at work upon new improvements and discoveries, that every year may bring some correction to our errors and solve some of our difficulties, and that as long as we live, new lights will pour upon our understandings? A right view of the subject would show us, that every man of genius, of enterprise, and of research, is labouring for our gratification, smoothing the path for our steps, and illuminating objects to delight our vision. When the warm glow of youthful feeling has passed away, I know of nothing so worthy to replace it, nothing so well calculated to relieve the insipidity of middle life, as the prospect of continual advances in knowledge, inspiring hopes which are perpetually gratified and perpetually renewed. An adequate view—a deep impression of the progressive character of science is utterly inconsistent with that overweening confidence which causes a man to place his own opinions as the limit of improvement.

A. If this is preposterous in an individual, it is

surely equally so in a body of men. What then shall we say of a set of immutable propositions on any subject whatever?—a series of doctrines laid down as absolute truths never to be altered?

N. I should certainly pronounce it a grand mistake in the science of the human mind. There is not a single subject which exercises the faculties of man that may not be improved—nay, that will not be improved—by the efforts of successive generations. It would be an unpardonable degree of arrogance in an assemblage of the wisest men that ever lived, supposing that they could be brought together, to circumscribe any subject whatever within the narrow boundaries of their own opinions. It would betray a total misconception of the relations of the human mind to the objects around it. I have contended, that men in the present day are superior in knowledge to their predecessors; but on the same grounds those who come after us will be superior to the existing generation. It is highly probable indeed, how mortifying soever the reflection may be to our personal consequence, that we in this age are mere barbarians compared with the race who shall hereafter fill the earth; and surely for us to erect a standard of opinion for beings likely to be so infinitely superior to ourselves is too absurd to need exposure, and can scarcely fail to provoke many a compassionate smile in the future ages of the world.

A. Absurd enough in all conscience. We are too

apt, I confess, to consider our own age as enlightened almost to the utmost extent of human capacity. When we reflect upon the wonderful discoveries of modern astronomy, on the brilliant operations of chemical analysis, on the new lights darted into the gloom of past ages by geology, on the comprehensive truths of political economy,—when we survey our ships and our commerce, our steam-engines and our gas-lights and balloons, our canals and piers and bridges*,—in the exultation of having taken a giant-stride, we fancy ourselves already arrived at the goal. The truth is, however, that all these considerations are but so many arguments for modesty and diffidence. If the present age has excelled those which have preceded it, this result is owing to circumstances still in full activity, and which will inevitably carry the next generation far beyond us. It is often said that we are presumptuous in thinking ourselves more knowing than our ancestors, but we forget the presumption of arrogating a superiority over our successors.

N. It is curious to speculate on the consequences of this inevitable progression. The multiplication of books, for instance, will give rise to some sin-

* To this enumeration (written about twenty years ago) may now be added steam-carriages, rail-roads, the daguerréotype, and the electrotype: the two former likely to effect an extensive revolution in the manners, habits, and tastes of society; the two latter, the most beautiful results of science in the present century.

gular phenomena. What a vast accumulation of literature, should the world continue a thousand or twenty thousand years longer without a geological submersion! What a weight of materials every year is adding to the stock of the historian! In process of time it will require the whole life of a man to become acquainted with the transactions of former ages, and the longest life will be insufficient to master the literature of a single country.

A. It will be the reign of Retrospective Reviews. A thousand years hence the literature of our own age may possibly furnish half a dozen nibbles to these fishers in the waters of oblivion. The splendour of intellect which envelops us will have dwindled into a mere luminous point, scarcely making its way athwart the intervening space — a star faintly visible in the night of ages. How mortifying to the personal vanity which makes itself the very sun of a system! But if we indulge in speculations of this nature we shall inevitably draw on ourselves the imputation of being visionary advocates of the perfectibility of man.

N. Such an imputation will scarcely be fixed on me, after what I have said in a former conversation on the slow progress of the human race. That there will be a progress, however, and an incessant one, is so far from being a visionary speculation, that I scarcely know a proposition which rests on a firmer basis. And the particular speculation on the future phenomena of literature is equally well

founded. It is obvious that the art of printing has produced a complete revolution in the world of letters during the few centuries which have elapsed since its invention: the movement will continue — will be accelerated; the causes are still in activity, and acquiring new force. We have merely to represent to ourselves therefore a repetition of what has already happened, only on a larger scale and with a somewhat more rapid career. Our conclusions on this subject must be drawn, not from the history of antiquity, but from that of modern times. Had Greece possessed the art of printing, the story of the human race would have been different beyond all conception from what it is.

A. If it had saved the world only from those ages of disputation in which the human mind seemed to spin round a circle without a single step of advancement, the benefit would have been invaluable. It is useless, however, to imagine what might have happened; a more interesting inquiry is, What will the future bring? Literature, Science, Political Institutions, Religion — all must pass through various changes, if there is any correctness in the principle of progressive improvement.

N. Literature and science we have already adverted to. A progress in these must be accompanied by progressive changes in our social and political institutions.* That they have not arrived

* "Il serait évidemment contradictoire," observes M. Comte

at perfection, the slightest glance at the misery around us is all that is requisite to prove. The supposition that they will not be subject to changes would imply, either that while other kinds of knowledge were daily advancing, the science of social happiness was as complete as the nature of the subject allowed, and therefore susceptible of no improvement; or that the happiness of communities admitted of no addition, their misery of no diminution, from the most thorough insight into the various causes which produced them. The history of every country proves that a knowledge of these causes is one of the most difficult of acquisitions; that on no subject is man more easily deluded, less capable of extensive views, guilty of grosser mistakes, and yet more inveterately pertinacious in thinking himself infallible. Nor is there any subject on which the correction of an apparently small error has teemed with such important benefits to the world.

A. From all which it most indubitably follows, that political knowledge and political institutions are predestined to improvement. What a source of sad anticipation to a multitude of politicians!

in the work already quoted, "de supposer que l'esprit humain, si disposé à l'unité de méthode, conservât indéfiniment pour une seule classe de phénomènes sa manière primitive de philosopher lorsqu'une fois il est arrivé à adopter pour tout le reste une nouvelle marche philosophique, d'un caractère absolument opposé." — *Cours*, tom. i. p. 20. See also Note H. in APPENDIX.

N. Already great changes have taken place, as any one will own who is at all conversant with the history of the past. Greater are in embryo. The blind veneration for rank, the feudal feeling, is obviously on the decline, and it is probable that it will be nearly extirpated in the course of ages. The tendency of political change is now evidently to republicanism; and it is not unlikely that the existing governments of Europe will gradually approximate to the form adopted in the United States of America. That form is at present unsuitable to the feelings and habits of Europeans, which still retain a strong tinge of the spirit of the middle ages. There are certain principles, however, which are making daily advances, and which in proportion as they subvert the ancient spirit of hereditary attachment, will render it unnecessary and substitute a better in its place. Such are the principles — that government is for the benefit of the whole community; that to ensure the attainment of this end, the will of the majority ought to prevail; that to secure the benefits of government, the people must strictly conform to the regulations which they themselves have imposed; and the corollaries flowing from these propositions. Changes of this kind must not be expected too soon. We may alter on a sudden the forms of polity, but we cannot suddenly transform the spirits of men. This is the effect of time, or what is meant by that phrase, of innumerable successive circumstances,

and it cannot be either much accelerated or much retarded. The slow progress of mankind is here more apparent than anywhere.

A. From your opinion respecting the tendency of political change to republicanism I must dissent; in no instance have we seen this form of government productive of greater advantages than the mixed; and I am strongly inclined to question whether any happier expedient can be devised than the hereditary descent of power.*

N. I am not anxious at present to discuss the merits of any forms of government. All that I mean to contend for is, that whichever is really the best must in the natural course of improvement establish its claims to preference. Men learn these things slowly, but experience must ultimately force them upon their understandings. The change in men's religious views will also probably be great. As mankind learn to reason more justly, they will see the absurdity of many of their tenets. They will

* "It appears to me," says De Tocqueville, "beyond a doubt, that sooner or later we shall arrive, like the Americans, at an almost complete equality of conditions. But I do not conclude from this, that we shall ever be necessarily led to draw the same political consequences which the Americans have derived from a similar social organisation. I am far from supposing that they have chosen the only form of government which a democracy may adopt; but the identity of the efficient cause of laws and manners in the two countries is sufficient to account for the immense interest we have in becoming acquainted with its effects in each of them." — *Introduction to Democracy in America*, p. xxv.

discover more and more clearly, that instead of the wise and benevolent Author of the Universe, they have been worshipping an image in their own minds endowed with similar imperfect faculties and passions to their own, nay, even invested with principles of action drawn from human nature in its rudest state. Men's conception of the Deity can never go beyond, although it frequently falls short of their moral opinions. He who has a narrow, confused, and indistinct view of what is really wise and admirable in human qualities, cannot have a clear and comprehensive idea of God. Hence, as moral knowledge advances, as mankind come more and more to fix their approbation on actions according to their actual desert, their conception of the Deity will become more refined, more elevated, and more worthy of its object. The proper way to exalt man's veneration of God is to teach him what is really just, benevolent, and magnanimous in his own race. It is melancholy to reflect on the sort of attributes and actions which are daily ascribed to the Supreme Being.

A. I have frequently been struck with the fact to which you have alluded, that men's conception of the Deity generally falls short of their moral opinions; but I have never been able to account satisfactorily for so remarkable a phenomenon. How is it, that even in the present day theological systems continue to invest the Deity, as you have expressed it, with principles of action drawn from

human nature in its rudest state, and long since practically exploded in every civilized country?

N. The awfulness of the subject combines with the interests of men to produce a tardy application of their improved knowledge to their conception of the Author of the Universe. It is as if they entertained an obscure and undefined apprehension that any alteration in their ideas regarding him would not simply be a change in their own minds, but would involve a modification of the nature and happiness of the Supreme Being himself. The veneration which they feel towards their Creator diffuses itself over their own dogmas. But your question has diverted me from the natural course of my remarks. I was going to observe, that mankind will not only necessarily perceive the absurdity of many of their tenets, but they will especially become sensible of the folly and wickedness of intolerance, that never-dying worm which preys on the vitals of human felicity. I am never so inclined to feel contempt for my own species as when I look into the history of religious persecution. It presents to us a combination of all that is weak with all that is wicked in our nature—the senseless activity of an idiot destroying his own happiness, with the malignity of a demon blasting that of others.

A. Language is too feeble to express the deep execration which is its just due. But I own I am more struck with the extreme folly, the childish

weakness, the incapacity of just reasoning, involved in the slightest act of intolerance, than with any other of its features. In point of mere logic, such an act is absolutely disgraceful to the intellectual character of any one capable of drawing a single inference. Were it not for the sufferings of the victim, it would be altogether ludicrous. The puny, pitiful attempts at intolerance in our own day are miserably post-dated—absurd from their pretensions and contemptible from their impotence.

N. With my whole soul I agree with you as to the sentiments which these attempts ought to inspire; but I am of opinion that they are not so ill-timed nor so impotent as you imagine: in other words, I consider that there yet exists a more extensive spirit of intolerance than you are aware of; subdued indeed from its original savageness, but deeply rooted and tenacious. There are also to be found more important cases of intolerance than your language implies. From all that I have myself observed of the spirit of society, I am decidedly of opinion, that the sympathies of the majority of the nation are in almost every case against and not in favour of the victim.

A. I should be pained to believe it.

N. I am convinced you will find it so; and this brings us again to the point before discussed, the over-estimation of the attainments and real civilization of the present age. The spirit of society on this subject may be looked upon as the thermometer

of civilization—at least a high degree of what we include in that term cannot possibly exist where intolerance prevails. The two things are mutually destructive. The same remark may be applied to a still more enormous evil, or one at least that presents itself in greater and more distinct masses—WAR. The existence of war at all is a tremendous proof that mankind are not civilized. Again, then, we must conclude that we over-estimate our progress; that we are really but a little way removed from barbarism, in comparison with the possible point at which the race may arrive. And this would be a most salutary conviction; for while it would add to our alacrity by teaching us how much there was yet to discover, it would abate our presumption in the perfection of our present attainments. If I do not deceive myself, I foresee the time (far distant, alas!) when mankind shall awake to a full sense at once of their actual imperfections and of their capacity for illimitable improvement; when they shall cease to create their own misery, and to lavish their admiration on qualities that thrive on their ruin; "when almost all the great political wonders, the idols of history, stripped one after another of the vain splendour thrown around them, will appear nothing more than the frivolous and often fatal sports of the infancy of the human race."*

* Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme, par J. G. Cabanis, tom. i. p. 340.

PART III.

A. In our previous conversations we have touched on the present state of society, but only in a general way; and we were chiefly occupied with the progress of the human race, and the principles on which such a progress might be looked for. I should like to hear your sentiments on some other features in the intellectual condition of our own times. My friend B. here, who differs in his general views from both of us, will assist me in the task of contesting any questionable propositions.

N. The field is wide: we have already endeavoured to estimate the point reached in the scale of civilization; what other part of the subject have you particularly in view?

A. My views have reference chiefly to the state of moral and political intelligence and feeling. I think, for my own part, that society is in a curious condition in these respect. It seems to be labouring with a thousand incongruous principles and opinions.

N. I perfectly agree with you. When we examine the actual condition of society, we find amazing discrepancies in moral and political sentiment. We find even great contrariety in the same individual. He will be found perhaps, without

being aware of it, maintaining two opinions, mutually repugnant and contradictory; one opinion probably the result of instillation by his preceptors; the other his own acquisition from reading or conversation. Now, not being in the habit of deducing a series of inferences, not being able to follow out any doctrine to its consequences, he is insensible to the contrariety existing between them, and perhaps would regard you with something like horror if you were to attempt to point it out. This is all very well, and cannot be avoided where, without much precision of ideas, there is any thing like a determination of the general intellect to moral and political inquiries; where men's knowledge begins to outstrip their prejudices, and yet is not disentangled from them. The same causes however give rise to other moral phenomena, not quite so free from culpability.

A. To what do you allude?

N. I allude to the concealment of opinions and feelings, to the insincerity, to the conventional simulation which abound in the present day. Every one must be struck with the discordance in tone between the sentiments of our literature, of our public debates, of our formal documents on the one hand, and those heard in private society and exhibited in the common habits of life on the other. The same individual who has been speaking to the popular prejudices of the day in public, will often let you see by a sneer or a jest, or at all events by

the principles which regulate his daily conduct, that he has in reality been playing the actor and duping his audience. Hence our literature does not present us with the actual sentiments entertained. There is nothing like general sincerity in the profession of opinions. The intellect of the age is cowed.

B. A great part of what appears to be insincerity may perhaps be ascribed to a want of the power to perceive logical inconsistencies, and some part to the habit of thoughtlessly expressing in private society opinions not seriously entertained. It has been remarked by an able writer, that were we to know what was said of us in our absence, we could seldom gather the real opinions of the speakers: "there are so many things said from the mere wantonness of the moment, or from a desire to comply with the tone of the company; so many from the impulse of passion, or the ambition to be brilliant; so many idle exaggerations, which the heart in a moment of sobriety would disavow; that frequently the person concerned would learn any thing sooner than the opinions entertained of him, and torment himself, as injuries of the deepest dye, with things injudicious perhaps and censurable, but which were the mere sallies of thoughtless levity." * A similar observation may be made with regard to moral and political opinions. Things are said in

* Godwin's Inquirer, p. 312. ed. 1823.

the social or the listless hour, when the mind relaxes from the tension of steady thought, which would be disowned when the intellect had collected all its forces, and was calmly and solemnly looking at the whole bearings of the subject. Besides, if it were not so, I think you judge the matter too rigidly. Actual simulation of opinions I will not defend; but surely there is a species of dissimulation, or (not to use a word with which unfavourable associations are connected) of reserve or suppression, which far from being culpable may be prudent and even meritorious, nay, absolutely necessary. I think I once heard you assert, that if any man were now to promulgate the moral and political opinions (could they be known) which will generally prevail at the end of two hundred years from this time, he would be hooted from society.* In this sentiment I do not participate, as I see no room for so immense a change as it supposes, but on your own grounds a prudent reserve is commendable.

N. The sentiment was expressed perhaps too broadly, but without pretending to form a conjecture as to what such future opinions may be, I think it substantially correct. I will grant you, therefore, that it is prudent in a man to suppress any opinions flagrantly hostile to popular prejudice; but it is not, you will allow, high-minded;

* See Appendix, Note I.

if it escape our contempt, it is not a species of conduct to raise the glow of enthusiastic admiration, to "dilate our strong conception with kindling majesty," and to elevate us for a time at least above the dead level of our nature. The poet says—

> "Give me the line that ploughs its stately course
> Like the proud swan, conquering the stream by force;"*

and I confess my admiration will always follow him who boldly breasts the current of popular prejudice, forcing his way by his native energy. Nor can I help thinking, that such a man, if he combined undeviating coolness, moderation, integrity, and simplicity of mind, with great intellectual powers, would in the end extort the forbearance at least of the host of enemies who would rush to the encounter from the instinct of fear.

A. Such conduct would undoubtedly excite the admiration of a few, but it would be the destruction of the happiness of the individual unless he were singularly constituted. It is a fearful thing for any man to encounter the execration, or even the tacit condemnation, of the society in which he lives. And, moreover, it is questionable whether, supposing even his sentiments to be true, he would promote the cause of truth by such a bold and reckless course. For any system of thoughts to be received

* Cowper.

with effect, the minds of the community must be in a state of preparation for it. If promulgated too early, it is cast back into obscurity by the offended prejudices of society, or becomes a prominent object against which they are perpetually exasperating themselves. It is a light-house amidst the breakers. The genius of a Smeaton in philosophy would be required to erect an intellectual structure of this kind, capable at once of giving intense light, and withstanding the moral turbulence by which it would be assailed. A premature disclosure of any doctrine, you may rest assured, retards its ultimate reception. In fact, a forbearance to utter all that a man thinks is a species of continence necessary throughout the whole progress of civilization; at every step the commanding minds of the age being in one state, and the feelings and opinions of the majority in another directly hostile to it.*

* "And here may I be permitted to caution my readers against the common error of confounding the double doctrine of Machiavelian politicians, with the benevolent reverence for established opinions manifested in the noted maxim of Fontenelle,—'that a wise man, even when his hand was full of truths, would often content himself with opening his little finger." Of the advocates for the former, it may be justly said, that 'they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;' well knowing, if I may borrow the words of Bacon, 'that the open daylight doth not show the masks and mummeries and triumphs of the world, half so stately as candle-light.' The philosopher on the other hand, who is duly impressed with the latter, may be compared to the oculist, who after removing the cataract of his patient, prepares the still irritable eye, by the

B. I cannot exactly see the necessity of a discrepancy of this nature ; but admitting that the commanding intellects of the age must thus differ in their views on many points from the bulk of mankind, it by no means follows that all who thus differ are to be ranked in that class. On the contrary, I should be inclined to say, that to be widely at variance with our own age is in most cases a mark of unsound understanding; and this seems more especially to follow (turning to N.) from *your* principles; for if the human mind is so exceedingly slow at the work of invention and discovery as I have often heard you represent it to be, it is an obvious inference, that we are not to look for many of those gigantic strides which place the man of genius far in advance of his contemporaries. The chances are, therefore, that singular views are erroneous views. Hence a proper diffidence in himself, a sense of that liability to error which no one ought to feel more deeply than the philosopher, should make him hesitate when he finds his opinions peculiar to his own mind.

N. True, it should make him review them, probe

glimmering dawn of a darkened apartment, for enjoying in safety the light of day." — *Dissertation on the Progress of Philosophy*, by DUGALD STEWART, p. 23. On this subject a remarkable letter addressed by Mirabeau to Sir Samuel Romilly has recently appeared in the life of the latter by his sons, vol. i. p. 294. I have given a copious extract from it in the APPENDIX, Note K.

them to the quick, try them by every possible test; but having done this, it would be absolutely culpable to suppress them merely from the consideration that they were singular, and therefore likely enough to be tainted with error. The latter, indeed, is a condition under which every man must promulgate his opinions.

A. But to return to the numerous diversities of opinion in society: my remark on that head was intended to apply not to the discrepancies in the opinions of the same mind, but to the differences subsisting between individuals and classes. It is astonishing, that with access apparently to the same sources of knowledge, under the same civil and political institutions, with almost perfect freedom of intercommunication, operated upon daily by the same current of periodical intelligence from one end of the land to the other, pursuing similar occupations and similar amusements, the people should be divided into so great a variety of sects and parties, many of them of the most dissimilar and opposite modes of thinking. The fact is strikingly shown by the publications, and particularly the periodical publications of the day. Thus, not to mention that there is one set of journals for the ministerial party in politics, another for the opposition, another for the reformers, with advocates for a thousand intermediate shades of opinion, we have journals for the evangelical,

the orthodox, the unitarians, the methodists, the deists, the phrenologists, the co-operatives, and others which might be specified; and these advocating, each of them, doctrines essentially repugnant and contradictory to those of all the rest. Is it not strange, that under the influence of all the common circumstances which I have just enumerated, such very opposite views should prevail, and be advocated not only with considerable knowledge and skill, but with the most thorough conviction of their truth? Does it not prove, either that truth is unattainable in moral, religious, and political inquiries, or that men have rushed into the midst of these subjects without stopping to ascertain the first principles on which they all must agree, and thus have involved themselves in a chaos of contradictions?

N. You recollect, I dare say, the remark of Locke, that although we cannot affirm that there are fewer opinions prevalent in the world than there are, yet fewer persons entertain them than we are apt to suppose; most people not having any clear ideas on those questions about which so much controversy is raised, and on which they themselves loudly assert their positive judgment.

A. But still you must allow, that the leading minds of each party do really hold them, especially in cases where interest is out of the question, which is sufficient for my purpose, it being in fact still more extraordinary that minds of this description,

minds consequently of considerable powers and superior information, with the same sources open to them, should exhibit such contradictory appearances, or in other words entertain such opposite views.

N. Such discrepancies show, that the individual circumstances which shape our opinions predominate over the general causes to which we are all subjected. They can exist only in a very imperfect state of knowledge, such as I have contended ours to be, where men's modes of thinking have resulted from chances of a thousand kinds, and have not originated in a systematic deduction from undeniable premises. You, I think, have well described the general course of even thoughtful men, rushing into the midst of subjects without an examination of first principles and a regular progress from them; or rather they find themselves from circumstances in the midst of the subjects, and never think of remounting to any primary truths, or stepping out of the magic circle described around them by the age and country and rank in which they came into existence. Engrossed with the established ideas of their system, they exercise their ingenuity in discovering the relations of its parts; and in the pleasure of the occupation, they never think of setting themselves at a distance from it, viewing its external aspect, marking its position in the world of intellect, surveying its relations as a whole to truth and to nature. This is frequently exemplified in the labo-

rious trifling of antiquaries and commentators, who will often display wonderful skill and acuteness in the adjustment of some worthless point, which their own exertions alone have invested with something like importance. The weakest theory, or the most fallacious system of philosophy, will, in like manner, hold in bondage the strongest minds, who are often so intensely occupied with its intrinsic relations as to forget its extrinsic absurdity. In the limits by which they are thus circumscribed, they sometimes exert the highest powers of intellect, and leave nothing for us to bewail but the barriers with which birth and education and other circumstances have surrounded their understandings. A mind thus hemmed in is in a situation somewhat similar to that of a man who has been shut up in a strong castle from his birth, and has therefore had no means of viewing the outward appearance and relative position of the building. His conception too of external objects, as it has been acquired merely by glimpses through the winter, is narrow and imperfect; and his comparative estimate of such external objects, and those within his reach, must be disproportionate to their real difference. Let him once escape from the castle, and his ideas undergo a complete revolution. He gets into the pure breezes of heaven, the open daylight, and the free exercise of vision. A similar happy transition is experienced by the mind which has once disengaged itself from the prejudices of any system in which it has been

cooped up. With regard to the diversities of views and doctrines which have led to these remarks, I rejoice to see them. I am glad to see the co-operative erecting his parallelograms, and the phrenologist mapping out the skull. I cannot comprehend that delicate sensitiveness which is alarmed at novel and extraordinary opinions, as if the structure of society would be demolished, and the globe itself shattered by their promulgation.

B. How then are we to deal with doctrines which appear to be dangerous? Are we to stand idle and allow them free course ?

N. Examine them: look them in the face: if they are false, they will vanish before the gaze of scrutiny: if they are true, I dare any man to say that they ought to vanish.

B. Your reply is what I expected, but I have another question to ask in which you may find more difficulty. Truth is one, error is pernicious; how then can you rejoice is the existence of diversities by which the uniformity of truth is excluded.

N. When I say I rejoice, I speak of course in reference, not to what is absolutely good, but to our actual state. The world is full of ignorance and error, and I am glad to see a zealous pursuit of even singular and eccentric views, as the means of ultimately lessening the evil. Tentative processes of this kind are indeed indispensable steps. The grand experiment which Mr. Owen is making in America, even if it miscarry, is sure to throw

light on the principles of human nature.* Even the modern phrenology, should it prove utterly unfounded, will be of use. The prosecution of its inquiries will furnish a body of curious facts to the philosophical speculator; and if ultimately exploded, it will be to the philosophy of mind what alchemy was to chemistry, and astrology to the true science of the heavens.† The same benefit I own does not

* Mr. Owen's scheme has failed, and *has* thrown light on the principles of human nature.

† "Without the attractive chimeras of astrology, without the energetic delusions of alchemy, whence (asks M. Comte) should we have derived the constancy and ardour necessary for the long series of observations and experiments which have served in after times for a foundation to the first positive theories respecting both classes of phenomena?" With regard to phrenology, it has certainly made way amongst men of science, and besides other testimonies to the validity of its fundamental principles from high quarters, has the voice of the eminent philosopher just named in its favour. It may be added, that the curious phrenological phenomena (real or illusory) which every body has of late years had an opportunity of witnessing, demand the impartial and rigorous scrutiny of all lovers of truth. It has been lamented as a misfortune in these cases, that interesting investigations are taken up by incompetent hands and almost abandoned to them, partly in consequence of a sort of daintiness, or a fear on the part of scientific inquirers of compromising their reputation, and partly from that force of prejudice from which few human beings are exempt. Yet to look at the matter more comprehensively, such incompetent handling is perhaps no misfortune at all. Subjects are in this way forced into discussion when they would otherwise remain neglected for long periods, awaiting the thaw of philosophic pride or prejudice; valuable materials are accumulated, and the fastidious or scornful philosopher is at length compelled to attend to the investigation in self-defence.

spring from a diversity of religious sects, because theology is considered as a matter not open to progressive improvement. Each sect has its fixed doctrines, and the object is not to discover new truths, but to prevent any lapse from the principles prescribed. All inquiry with them is after new arguments to support old opinions. Yet here, although intellectual enterprise is discountenanced, contention and collision are brought into play; the contention of rival sects and the collision of hostile opinions, forcing an examination of points which men would fain shield from inquiry, extorting concessions which can no longer be decently withheld; and thus producing some of the good effects of that spirit of research and discovery which in less important sciences meets with such lavish encouragement. Although each sect may consider its own system as perfect, it has charity enough to assist in stripping other systems of their errors.

B. Then you regard all these diversities of thinking with great complacency?

N. They are really exhilarating in an enlarged view of the subject. At any given point of the progress, in any given state of knowledge or of ignorance, it is much better that the ignorance and the error should be of a multiform than a uniform character. With my views, therefore, it is somewhat ludicrous to see the anger, the vexation, the resentment, with which the generality of men regard those who differ from them in opinion. Such

difference seems to be felt as a sort of personal offence, as an intolerable grievance which must be repressed. Wounded self-love looks around it, and can find nothing short of an act of parliament or a judicial sentence adequate to the task of avenging its wrongs. What is the simple light, however, in which philosophy and common sense would see these differences? They would see, first, that the subject in question required examination; and, secondly, that it was likely to obtain the examination which it required. The permanent existence of any differences of opinion on any subject shows of itself, either that truth has not been fully attained by any of the dissentient parties, or that it has not been deduced in the most perspicuous method; and, therefore, that there is still a necessity for animadversion and discussion.

B. It is implied then in your view of the subject, that truth in these matters is attainable; that there are certain determinate principles which may be discovered, and from which indisputable deductions might be made.

N. Certainly. I see no reason to doubt it, and our friend A, who is so sanguine as to the progress of knowledge, must inevitably accord with me.

A. True: but others may ask how are such principles to be ascertained?

N. By a very slow but a tolerably sure process; by generation after generation thinking, and speaking, and writing; by proposing doubts and hypo-

theses; by criticism, by argument, by ridicule; by all the play and contention of wit and folly, scepticism and pertinacity, sophistry and good sense. From these discordant elements let loose on every possible subject of inquiry, we may ultimately expect that enlightened and lasting unanimity which always attends the clear and simple exhibition of truth.

B. But still you will allow, that there are some subjects which will probably ever remain dubious, difficult, and obscure; and which, as long as the world lasts, must inevitably engender differences of opinion.

N. I will not undertake to say that there is no subject which is doomed to be encumbered with eternal difficulties; but this I will venture to affirm, that of whatever kind they are, they will be accurately estimated and set in their proper light. The nature and the degree of the evidence on each point will be appreciated; the valid inferences, few or many, which the subject affords, will be clearly shown; the absurd conclusions previously drawn from it will be exploded; what it will and what it will not furnish will be rendered equally manifest; and although the obstacles to a perfect comprehension of it may never be surmounted, there may be complete unanimity as to the character of the difficulties which it presents. No reason can be assigned why all this should not be accomplished, however slowly and gradually it may be done, and

this is in fact for us, for human beings, the attainment of truth.

B. Although I am not, for my own part, very sanguine as to any great progress in the human race, I would not deny that there might be a considerable one amongst a few superior minds, who are to be found in every age, and who, forming an unbroken series, might carry on indefinitely the work of perfecting the sciences: but I much doubt the possibility of any corresponding, or rather any commensurate progress in the multitude. It is one thing for the sciences to go on improving, and another for the mass of mankind to become progressively partakers of such improvements.

N. The progress will be slow; nor will I undertake to maintain that it will be altogether commensurate with the advances of those superior minds to whom you refer; but nothing I think can prevent it. The same principles of human nature which render a science progressive among learned and studious men, will make knowledge progressive in every class. There is a certain measure of intelligence, or rather there is a certain set of notions, which every one inevitably imbibes, even the lowest of society; a certain atmosphere of knowledge breathed in common by all; and these notions depend upon the state of knowledge amongst those whose particular business it is to apply themselves to its cultivation. Now the correctness or incorrectness of the notions thus imbibed, makes no dif-

ference in the ease with which they are acquired. The mind of a child receives with as little difficulty the enlightened opinions prevalent in the best English society as the ruder notions of the Hindoo or Hottentot. Unless, therefore, the communication between the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, is cut off, the latter cannot help partaking of the progress of their superiors. But it requires no evidence to show, that the tendency of modern improvement, far from threatening to interrupt or embarrass this communication, is decidedly to render it easy and complete. In fact, the sources of intelligence are open to all ranks indiscriminately. External obstacles to the general spread of sound knowledge are fast giving way. It is in the nature of the human mind itself, that we shall detect the most formidable impediment. We shall find it generally true, that discoveries are both slowly made, and slowly received and adopted. After a man has arrived at maturity, trained in certain fixed principles, prejudices, and habits, it is impossible to change them essentially; and, even if his opinions could be changed, his associations and feelings would prove rebels to his intellect. Hence, as I have before observed, it is the young on whom any improvement is to be impressed; and hence it is an age at least which must be granted for its perfect establishment. Thus the wisdom of the pre-eminent few of one generation cannot become the common property, the familiar instrument of

the crowd, till the next or a still later age; and it appears to me, that this process is one which comparatively little can be done to hasten, but which much may be done to perfect and extend.

A. Here again we come to our old point of disagreement. After all you have urged, I see no reason for departing from the opinion which I before maintained, that the wider and wider diffusion of knowledge amongst mankind must inevitably accelerate the progress of the race. The scope of your doctrine, which appears to me to involve a striking inconsistency, is to show, that a greater number of mankind may be made to partake of the progress, but that the rate of the progress cannot be quickened. You maintain in effect, that the general dissemination of knowledge has little or no tendency to render mankind readier to part with their prejudices; that what each man learns in his youth he must retain with a pertinacity equal and unalterable; and that even the most enlightened individual of the present day, after he has reached a certain age, is as callous to further improvement, as firmly indurated in his notions, as inaccessible to new ideas, as the rude barbarian of the American wild, or the benighted chieftain of the middle ages: or if you do not go quite so far as this; if you would reject this application of the doctrine to the philosopher, you must at least maintain that the nature of the opinions which an ordinary man imbibes in that atmosphere of intelligence described

by you as surrounding his infancy, can make no difference as to the tenacity with which they subsequently cling to him. In all this there appears to me to be an inconsistency for which I can account only by supposing, that it has been concealed from your view by a strong prejudice as to the slow progress of the race, resulting from a disappointment of your sanguine visions on this subject in early life. What! supposing a man's mind to be imbued in youth with liberal and enlightened sentiments, supposing him to gather without any direct effort on his own part, but from the actions and conversation of those around him, "that the human mind is necessarily fallible, that therefore it should never close itself against new light, that it should be constantly accessible to fresh ideas, and ever on the watch to correct its errors; that truth and not its own importance should be its sacred object in all inquiries and on all subjects,"—supposing a man, I say, to be imbued with these views, are we to conclude that notwithstanding their influence he would be as inveterate, as stubborn in his prejudices, as unsusceptible of melioration as the most benighted of his species; as the deluded victim, for example, who casts himself under the chariot wheels of an idol, the superstitious devotee who heroically lashes himself as he conceives into the favour of God, or the furious bigot who exterminates heresy by the rack and the scaffold?

When the matter is put in this light, I think

you must allow, that in proportion to the real intelligence of men will be their openness to conviction, their disposition to receive new ideas, their readiness to review their cherished opinions; and that a step of improvement may come in time to require something less than an age.

B. But you have forgotten another part of our friend's remark, in which I am fully disposed to join him, the necessary slowness with which the human mind makes any improvements, any inventions or discoveries.

A. To this part of his remarks an equally conclusive answer may be given. A great part of the slowness with which discoveries have succeeded each other, may be ascribed to the tardy and limited diffusion of knowledge. N. himself has made the remark, that one discovery must spring from another; that a man of inventive genius must rise from the height to which the labours of his predecessor have carried him. Now for a series of improvements and discoveries of this kind, I see no necessity for the intervention of long periods of time. If a man of original talent has the power of rising from the discoveries of his predecessor, he may do it, or begin to do it, from the moment they are known to him; and thus one man taking up the achievements of another, there may be a series of them even amongst contemporaneous inquirers. The only requisite condition seems to be a ready and immediate promulgation

of all that is accomplished. Formerly indeed what any one man discovered made its way slowly and laboriously to others engaged in the same pursuit. Perhaps he would pass from the scene before his labours were understood and appreciated, and in such a state of imperfect inter-communication a barren interval must undoubtedly elapse between almost every successive discovery in the same science. This lapse of time, however, was required solely to propagate the intelligence amongst those who were likely to make use of it. At present, when the diffusion may be effected with the instantaneousness of lightning, when the world has become an immense whispering gallery, and the faintest accent of science is heard throughout every civilized country as soon as uttered, the requisite conditions are changed. Long intervals are no longer necessary, and the career of improvement may be indefinitely accelerated. Besides, not only are discoveries more rapidly communicated to discovering minds, and the intervals of the series reduced almost to nothing, but with the general diffusion of knowledge, more of these original intellects start forth, and thus another cause is brought into operation to swell the train and hasten the triumph of science.

N. Your observations are ingenious, and to a certain extent perfectly just, nor do I know that they are at all inconsistent with my own views, except inasmuch as they lead to expectations of too

sanguine a character. The process of improvement, and the circumstances which tend to accelerate what has been significantly and sometimes sneeringly termed the march of mind, you have accurately described. The only real difference between us is as to the rapidity of the progress; and I still think, that if you were to examine the condition of society with a severe scrutiny, if you were to make yourself practically acquainted with the intellectual state of the mass, if you were to see, as I have seen, that the glare of modern civilization is owing to the superficial illumination which the intelligence of a comparatively few has cast over the many,—in thus perceiving how little had actually been done, you would be inclined to grant more time for the evolution of those great and glorious results, which we unite in hailing as the ultimate destiny of the human race.

APPENDIX

OF

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

APPENDIX.

Note A. Page 7.

Although the following account referred to in the text may appear at first sight to have little connection with the subject of the present volume, yet, on reflection, it will be found to illustrate the great change in feeling which is consequent on the progress of knowledge and civilization, especially as to the value of human life.

"On the 26th of January, 1796, when the Indefatigable was lying in Hamoaze, after having been docked, the Dutton, a large East Indiaman employed in the transport service, on her way to the West Indies, with a part of the 2d or Queen's regiment, was driven into Plymouth by stress of weather. She had been out seven weeks, and had many sick on board. The gale increasing in the afternoon, it was determined to run for greater safety to Catwater; but the buoy at the extremity of the reef off Mount Batten having broke adrift, of which the pilots were not aware, she touched on the shoal, and carried away her rudder. Thus rendered unmanageable, she fell off, and grounded under the citadel, where, beating round, she lay rolling heavily with her broadside to the waves. At the second roll she threw all her masts overboard together.

"Sir Edward and Lady Pellew were engaged to dine on that day with Dr. Hawker, the excellent vicar of Charles, who had become acquainted with Mr. Pellew when they were serving together at Plymouth as surgeons to the marines, and continued through life the intimate and valued friend of all the brothers. Sir Edward noticed the crowds

running to the Hoe, and having learned the cause, he sprang out of the carriage, and ran off with the rest. Arrived at the beach, he saw at once that the loss of nearly all on board, between five and six hundred, was inevitable, without some one to direct them. The principal officers of the ship had abandoned their charge and got on shore, just as he arrived on the beach. Having urged them, but without success, to return to their duty, and vainly offered rewards to pilots and others belonging to the port to board the wreck, for all thought it too hazardous to be attempted, he exclaimed, 'Then I will go myself!'

"A single rope, by which the officers and a few others had landed, formed the only communication with the ship; and by this he was hauled on board through the surf. The danger was greatly increased by the wreck of the masts, which had fallen towards the shore; and he received an injury on the back, which confined him to his bed for a week, in consequence of being dragged under the mainmast. But disregarding this at the time, he reached the deck, declared himself, and assumed the command. He assured the people that every one would be saved, if they quietly obeyed his orders; that he would himself be the last to quit the wreck, but that he would run any one through that disobeyed him. His well-known name, with the calmness and energy he displayed, gave confidence to the despairing multitude. He was received with three hearty cheers, which were echoed by the multitude on shore; and his promptitude and resource soon enabled him to find and apply the means by which all might be safely landed. His officers in the meantime, though not knowing that he was on board, were exerting themselves to bring assistance from the Indefatigable. Mr. Pellew, first lieutenant, left the ship in the barge, and Mr. Thompson, acting master, in the launch; but the boats could not be brought alongside the wreck, and were obliged to run for the Barbican. A small boat, belonging to a merchant-vessel, was more for-

tunate. Mr. Edsell, signal midshipman to the port admiral, and Mr. Coghlan, mate of the vessel, succeeded, at the risk of their lives, in bringing her alongside. The ends of two additional hawsers were got on shore, and Sir Edward contrived cradles to be slung upon them, with travelling ropes to pass forward and backward between the ship and the beach. Each hawser was held on shore by a number of men, who watched the rolling of the wreck, and kept the ropes tight and steady. Meantime, a cutter had with great difficulty worked out of Plymouth pool, and two large boats arrived from the dock-yard, under the directions of Mr. Hemmings, the master-attendant, by whose caution and judgment they were enabled to approach the wreck, and receive the more helpless of the passengers, who were carried to the cutter. Sir Edward, with his sword drawn, directed the proceedings, and preserved order, — a task the more difficult, as the soldiers had got at the spirits before he came on board, and many were drunk. The children, the women, and the sick, were the first landed. One of them was only three weeks old; and nothing in the whole transaction impressed Sir Edward more strongly than the struggle of the mother's feelings before she would entrust her infant to his care, or afforded him more pleasure than the success of his attempt to save it. Next the soldiers were got on shore; then the ship's company; and, finally, Sir Edward himself, who was one of the last to leave her. Every one was saved, and, presently after, the wreck went to pieces."

After noticing the modesty of Sir Edward in his account of the affair in which he almost kept himself out of sight, his biographer proceeds: "Services performed in the sight of thousands could not thus be concealed. Praise was lavished upon him from every quarter. The corporation of Plymouth voted him the freedom of the town. The merchants of Liverpool presented him with a valuable service of plate. On the 5th of March following he was

created a baronet." *Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, by E. Osler, p. 115, &c.

Note B.—Page 133.

The only passage of any length in the first edition of the "Essay on the Pursuit of Truth," that has not been incorporated one way or other in this second and enlarged edition, occurred in this part of the treatise. The author not being able to find an appropriate place for it without encumbering the train of argument, has deemed it best to relegate it to the Appendix.

After speaking of the upright man who is unfortunate enough to be the unconscious instrument of disseminating error, the passage proceeds as follows: —

"To such a misfortune all men are liable, and this liability imposes on them the duty of communicating their opinions in a spirit of candour and liberality. In danger, with the utmost circumspection, of falling into mistakes, it becomes them to evince an entire openness to correction, a willingness to listen to opposite suggestions, a readiness to review their most cautious conclusions, and a perpetual sense of their own fallibility. They should endeavour, too, to separate the consideration of their own reputation from the cause of truth.

"A man who communicates his views to the world is or ought to be an inquirer after truth; and it is of little importance to him in that capacity, when a mistake has been committed and detected, which part of the process is his. That an error has been cleared up, that a truth has been discovered, should occasion too much pleasure to his mind to permit it to dwell long on the personal consideration of the agency through which it has been accomplished.

"This openness to conviction, nevertheless, is perfectly consistent with a severe examination of all opposite allega-

tions, and a free exposure of antagonist sophistry. Let him reply, retort, return the scrutiny of his opponents, and especially expose any unfairness or malevolence which may characterise their opposition; but let him at the same time cheerfully acknowledge any error of which he may be convicted; let him pay the most scrutinizing attention to hostile criticism, not to find out merely how to reply to it, but how far it is fairly applicable.

"Were we to imagine a being, who while he was free from the moral weaknesses of human nature, was still subject to its intellectual fallibility, the following is the kind of language we should expect to hear from him, on his giving to the public the result of any investigations in which he had been employed.

"In communicating these speculations to the world, I do it under a full sense of my liability to error, and of the chances that I have fallen into many mistakes, notwithstanding the patient thought which I have bestowed on the subject, and the various means I have employed to insure correctness. Future philosophers, I am aware, will see in a much clearer light the truths here developed, and will present them in a much more lucid and convincing order; divested too of the inaccuracies which surround them in my pages. These inaccuracies I have not the slightest wish to see spared. So far from desiring any one to forbear pointing out errors in my reasoning, I shall feel greatly indebted to him for the correction of a fallacy. One of the ends which I seek to accomplish by laying these speculations before the public, is to avail myself of the instruction arising out of the different views which different minds take of the same subject. And not only will any one confer a real benefit on me by dissipating my errors, but he will prevent my speculations from spreading erroneous opinions among mankind, and counteracting any advantages which might result from

such of them as are well founded. Nothing can be more abhorrent to the feelings of a man of upright mind, than that errors should be perpetuated merely to preserve his reputation for correctness, and save his vanity from mortification: nothing therefore ought to be received with more gratitude than an indication where those errors lie. It at once enlightens his own mind, and saves him from being the instrument of injury to his fellow-creatures, when he thought of doing them a service.

"On this point I have only one request to make, that the existence of an error may be *shown*, not merely *asserted;* and that any fallacy in reasoning may be *directly* pointed out, rather than met by counter-arguments drawn from different premises. When any train of reasoning is fairly laid down before us, if it involves an error the fallacy may be detected and exposed. For any such detection then I shall be grateful. I am willing to review, to discuss, to analyse again any principle which I have maintained, and should rejoice to emancipate myself from any illusion.

"Should any one intermix his exposure of my errors with opprobrious language, it will be to his own detriment and disgrace; but it shall not prevent me from taking advantage of his perspicacity to clear my understanding from inaccurate conceptions. While I shall do my best to seize the truth of his arguments, I shall also in the same spirit of fairness endeavour to appreciate and exhibit in its true colours that unfortunate junction of malignancy of disposition with intellectual power of which he has afforded the melancholy spectacle.

"If on the other hand the objections brought against any of my doctrines appear to me, after the fullest and fairest examination, to be unsound, I shall not hesitate on my part to expose their character. To this task I shall devote the utmost acuteness of which I am master, and undertake as close and severe an examination of their

pretensions as I should desire might be bestowed on my own.

"In a word, as truth is my object, I shall endeavour to find it by every means in my power, and shall freely join in the exposure of error, whether found in preceding writings, in my own productions, or in those of my antagonists."

Note C.—Page 179.

The author has been desirous of treating this question respecting prescriptive conclusions, in its broadest application to knowledge of all kinds, and not merely in reference to politics or to theology. In the latter point of view, the subject has been discussed by one of the subtilest intellects of the eighteenth century, in a short essay from which Mrs. Austin's recent translation of "Fragments from German Writers," enables me to present to the English reader an interesting extract.

"But is not an association of clergymen,—a church assembly or a venerable *classis* as they call themselves in Holland,—justified in binding itself by oath to certain immutable articles of faith, in order to exercise a perpetual supreme guardianship over each of its members, and indirectly through them over the people? I answer such a thing is totally inadmissible. A compact of this kind, which is entered into with a view to exclude the human race from all further enlightenment, is simply null and void, even though it be confirmed by the sovereign power, by diets, and the most solemn treaties. One age cannot bind itself; nor can it conspire to place the following one in a condition in which it would be impossible for it to extend its knowledge, to purge itself from error, and to advance in the career of enlightenment. This were a crime against human nature, whose highest destination consists emphatically in intellectual progress; and pos-

terity is, therefore, fully justified in rejecting all such attempts to bind it, as invalid and mischievous.

"A combination to maintain an unalterable religious system, which no man should be permitted to call into doubt, would, even for the term of one man's life, be wholly intolerable. It would be to blot out, as it were, one generation in the progress of the human species towards a better condition; to render it barren, and hence noxious to posterity. A man can, indeed, retard his own intellectual progress, though even then only for a time, as regards things which it is incumbent on him to know; but utterly to renounce it for himself, and far more for posterity, is an outrage on the most sacred rights of humanity. Now, what a people ought not to determine for itself, a monarch ought still less to determine for it; for his legislative character and dignity rests on his being the depository and organ of the collective will of his people. If he does but ascertain that every real or supposed spiritual improvement consists with the existing order and tranquillity of society, he may safely leave his subjects to do what they think necessary for the good of their own souls: in that he has no right to interfere; his business is to take care that none of them forcibly obstruct their neighbours in their endeavours to settle their own opinions, or to promote their own spiritual welfare by any means within their reach."

* * * * *

"In considering the enlightenment by which men emerge from their self-imposed pupilage, I have insisted mainly on religion; because in science and art rulers have no interest in assuming the part of guardians over their subjects; and because pupilage in this matter is not only the most mischievous, but the most degrading of any. But the views of an enlightened ruler go still farther, and tend to this,— that, even as regards his government, there is no danger in allowing his subjects to make a *public* use

of their own reason, and frankly to lay before the world their opinions as to any practicable improvement in it, or their criticisms of its present state and acts; — of this we have before us a splendid and hitherto unequalled example."—Essay by Kant, entitled "What is Enlightenment?" in his *Kleine Schriften.*

Note D.—Page 180.

The very important consideration, briefly stated at the conclusion of this Section, will be found more fully expanded in the following extract from a work referred to in a previous chapter. Every upright and conscientious mind must agree in regarding the question started, or rather the position taken, as demanding the most attentive and dispassionate scrutiny, apart from any particular application. The passage may possibly remind the reader (sometimes in the way of contrast) of certain portions of Bishop Hare's celebrated Letter on Private Judgment *, or of Dr. Paley's Chapter on Religious Establishments and Toleration; but I am not aware that the peculiar view of the subject here presented, taken as a whole, is to be found in English literature: —

"The course of my subject has brought me to the consideration of the third sort of practices enumerated in a former letter. The real character of these has been hitherto little regarded, but can scarcely be mistaken by any one who reflects for a moment on the necessary consequences of annexing emoluments and honours to the profession of a given doctrine, or, in other words, to the ostensible adoption of a predetermined conclusion.

"By this time I hope you will so far agree with my views as to admit that the duty of every inquirer into the

* The Difficulties and Discouragements which attend the Study of the Scriptures in the Way of Private Judgment, in a Letter to a Young Clergyman. By Francis Hare, D.D.

authenticity and meaning of any alleged revelation from God, is nothing more or less than complete and impartial investigation; and hence if any reward but that which springs from the discharge of a duty and from the attainment of knowledge, is to be held up to his view, it assuredly ought to be contingent on the proper prosecution of the inquiry, whatever may be the issue. If he is to be artificially incited at all, he should be incited to perform the part of a diligent and honest inquirer. But no one can gravely maintain that to annex the reward to a prescribed result, to a predetermined verdict, is the way to encourage or secure fairness and sufficiency of examination: on the contrary, you and every body else must admit that it is nothing less than bribing the inquirer into negligence and unfairness: it is setting up his worldly interest in opposition to his duty to God. No conclusion can be more palpable than this. Those who deny it must maintain either that a complete and faithful examination of any alleged message from the Deity is not the duty of human beings, or that exhibiting certain advantages to accrue from arriving at a prescribed conclusion has no tendency to impair diligence and impartiality during the process of inquiry. The one position is at variance with all our moral sentiments; the other with all our experience of mankind. There can be no doubt, my dear Hassan, that the consequences of the doctrine here maintained are irreconcileable with some current notions and existing establishments; but what can be more clearly deducible from the undeniable truth that our own duty to God requires from us a complete and unbiassed examination of any alleged message from him, than the kindred truth that it must be wrong in us to present inducements to any other human being which have the tendency to render his examination of the same solemn subject incomplete and partial? And what inducement can operate more effectually to render his inquiry slight and negligent

and unfair, and thus to seduce him from the direct path of duty, than holding out emoluments and honours as the consequence of deciding on one side rather than the other? The immorality of this proceeding, and its consequences upon the conduct of the inquirer, are equally incontestable.

"Figure to yourself, my friend, a young man, who, while he is desirous to discharge every duty, and ardent in the pursuit of truth, is at the same time ambitious of power, wealth, and distinction. A carcer is open to him, in which these latter desires may be gratified on the single condition of professing and teaching certain established tenets, and performing certain offices grounded upon them. Is it to be supposed that before he accepts the tempting offer, his candour and conscientiousness will be sufficiently strong to induce him to institute a fair and rigid examination of tenets on which his wealth and station are to depend? and after he has accepted it, will the inducements to the performance of that duty be strengthened or increased? The result is not very doubtful; he shuns inquiry and accepts the office, and from that moment all probability of any fair investigation is at an end: he becomes an intellectual slave bound in golden fetters: he is no more free to pursue truth, than the chained eagle is free to soar into the sky; or, rather, he is quite as free to pursue it as the muezzin to throw himself from the minaret, or as the traveller to leap from the summit of the great pyramid; that is to say, at the risk of consequences — of utter destruction.

"And is it possible not to perceive that, besides putting an end to impartial examination, this species of bribery is a bounty on hypocritical pretension? Is there one man in ten thousand, who, looking forward to the prospect of living in the enjoyment of worldly advantages from the profession of certain opinions, will shrink from that profession in the first instance, or subsequently

abandon it, because he finds it impossible to believe in the opinions professed? Can there be a more effectual method of creating insincerity, as well as indifference to truth, and can there be a practice more destructive of moral worth and real piety?

* * * * *

"I cannot close without repeating, that independently of engendering hypocrisy and persecution, and putting a stop to the progress of truth, to bestow rewards on theological opinions,—to make the profession of them the condition of honours and emoluments,—is at variance with the highest principles of religious and moral obligation. If it is our personal duty to the Almighty to examine with full attention and rigorous impartiality any revelation attributed to him, it is an offence against both God and man to tempt others by the offer of any advantages to deviate from the same course."—*Letters of an Egyptian Kafir in search of a Religion* (printed by G. H. Davidson), pp. 109, *et seq.*

The extract given in the next Note from De Tocqueville, shows very strikingly that such temptations are not limited to theological opinions, nor are held out only by state authority.

Note E.—Page 181.

"In America, the majority raises very formidable barriers to the liberty of opinion: within these barriers an author may write whatever he pleases, but he will repent it, if he ever step beyond them.* Not that he is exposed to the terrors of an auto-da-fé, but he is tormented by the slights and persecutions of daily obloquy. His political

* It was sagaciously remarked by Kant, that "we find a strange and unexpected contradiction in human affairs, which, indeed, when regarded as a whole, are full of paradoxes. A higher degree of civil freedom would appear favourable to freedom of opinion, yet does, in fact, impose insuperable barriers to it."

career is closed for ever, since he has offended the only authority which is able to promote his success. Every sort of compensation, even that of celebrity, is refused to him. Before he published his opinions, he imagined that he held them in common with many others; but no sooner has he declared them openly, than he is loudly censured by his overbearing opponents, whilst those who think, but have not the courage to speak, like him, abandon him in silence. He yields at length, oppressed by the daily efforts he has been making, and he subsides into silence, as if he were tormented by remorse for having spoken the truth.

"Fetters and headsmen were the coarse instruments which tyranny formerly employed; but the civilisation of our age has refined the arts of despotism which seemed, however, to have been sufficiently perfected before. The excesses of monarchical power had devised a variety of physical means of oppression; the democratic republics of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the mind, as that will which it is intended to coerce. Under the absolute sway of an individual despot, the body was attacked in order to subdue the soul; and the soul escaped the blows which were directed against it, and rose superior to the attempt; but such is not the course adopted by tyranny in democratic republics: there the body is left free and the soul is enslaved. The sovereign can no longer say, 'You shall think as I do on pain of death;' but he says, 'You are free to think differently from me, and to retain your life, your property, and all that you possess; but if such be your determination, you are henceforth an alien amongst your people. You may retain your civil rights, but they will be useless to you, for you will never be chosen by your fellow-citizens if you solicit their suffrages; and they will affect to scorn you, if you solicit their esteem. You will remain among men, but you will be deprived of the rights of mankind.

Your fellow-creatures will shun you like an impure being; and those who are most persuaded of your innocence will abandon you too, lest they should be shunned in their turn. Go in peace! I have given you your life, but it is an existence incomparably worse than death.'

"Monarchical institutions have thrown an odium upon despotism; let us beware lest democratic republics should restore oppression, and should render it less odious and less degrading in the eyes of the many, by making it still more onerous to the few."—*Democracy in America*, by A. de Tocqueville, Reeve's translation, vol. ii. p. 160.

The sort of social proscription here described is much more prevalent in England, particularly in provincial society, than philosophers seem to be generally aware of, and is dependent on causes not peculiar to republics. M. de Tocqueville's representation of the treatment of opinions in America is, however, too favourable. It is not, as he states, there rendered "entirely an affair of the mind." We do not witness, indeed, a priestly auto-da-fé in the streets of Boston, or a headsman in Cincinnati, but we see "physical means of oppression" equally horrible. Not many years ago the governor of South Carolina recommended the summary execution, without benefit of clergy, of all persons caught within the limits of the State holding avowed anti-slavery opinions; and this savage recommendation was backed by a *select committee* of the legislature.* Further, this atrocious spirit has not contented itself with mere recommendations; houses have been sacked and destroyed, public buildings burnt to the ground, human beings seized, flogged, and murdered with the express object of punishing and putting down the holders of such opinions. Amos Dresser, a student, was arrested, tried before a self-constituted tribunal at Nashville, Tennessee, found guilty of being a member of an

* Society in America, by Harriet Martineau, vol. ii. p. 350.

Anti-slavery Society in another state, of having books of an anti-slavery tendency in his possession, and of being *believed* to have circulated such in his travels. For these offences (incredible as it may appear), in the year 1835 (not 1535), in an "enlightened republic," he was stripped and flogged with a heavy cow-hide in the public market-place amidst the acclamations of the people! But the most affecting instance of martyrdom for opinions in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, is the case of a young man named Lovejoy — an abolitionist, a clergyman, and editor of a newspaper. Four times his types and press were destroyed by mobs, and still he persevered in the resolution of maintaining his ground at all hazards. Being required by a committee of the citizens of Alton, in the state of Illinois, where he had taken up his residence, to leave the place, he addressed a large assembly before which he was summoned,

"Pale, but intrepid; sad, but unsubdued,"

in an unpremeditated speech, which, for courage, justness of thought, pathos, modest but immoveable firmness, — in a word, moral sublimity, has seldom been equalled. Such qualities among such a people sealed his doom. A few days afterwards, his office was surrounded by a mob, and he was murdered on his own premises, having received five bullets in his body.* Further comment would be superfluous.

Note F. — Page 201.

There is just now an instructive instance going on in the medical profession, and amongst scientific men generally, of the reception given to new doctrines. I allude

* See a deeply interesting article in the Westminster Review, No. LXII., entitled "The Martyr Age of the United States."

to what is usually termed Mesmerism. Without entering upon the question respecting its claims to credence, which this is not the place to discuss, it is very obvious to all who are conversant with the subject, that whatever those claims may be, there is a singularly curious field for inquiry which cannot fail to produce interesting and important results; and from which no philosopher who, in the phrase of the day, understands his mission, will turn away. Either the great mass of alleged facts in Mesmerism are true; or the power of imposture, and the susceptibility of being imposed upon possessed by mankind, transcend any thing previously apprehended. If the latter is the conclusion to which philosophers shall be ultimately driven, the laws of this power and of this susceptibility of deception, will form almost as curious a matter for investigation, as the Mesmeric phenomena would themselves do on the supposition they were real.* On either issue, therefore, the whole subject is extremely worthy of attention to the highest intellects; and yet ordinary men have turned from it with angry scorn, refusing even to cast their eyes on the appearances before them, reminding one of the conduct of those candid lovers of truth, who after the invention of the telescope, refused to look through it because it would have clearly shown them their own errors. But the object of this note is not to stimulate the reader to an investigation of Mesmerism, or inspire him with any sentiments in its favour, but to direct his attention to what more immediately concerns our subject, namely, *the mode of its reception;* to incite him to seize the present opportunity of watching the way in which men are instigated by their prejudices, preconceptions,

* "Are not," asks Dugald Stewart, "the mischievous consequences which have actually been occasioned by the pretenders to animal magnetism, the strongest of all encouragements to attempt such an examination of the principles upon which the effects really depend, as may give to scientific practitioners the management of agents so peculiarly efficacious and overbearing." — *Elements*, vol. iii. p. 222.

and personal interests, to conduct themselves towards new doctrines.

It has been remarked by an eminent philosopher, that we cannot now find any language in the process of formation as described by theorists, unfolding itself in inflexions and terminations; but in the instance before us we are more fortunate. Nature may be truly said to be caught in the fact; we may watch the whole development from first to last of the reception given to the announcement of new phenomena and novel inferences. We may study it in all its stages from birth to death, and on a scale on which we shall never have an opportunity, perhaps, of studying it again.

Note G. — Page 205.

The theory of population still remains to be settled by a master-hand. Mr. Malthus had a candid and an accomplished mind, well calculated to bring out a theory in a striking and popular form, but too destitute of precision and depth to do justice to one of the most difficult subjects in the whole range of political economy. At the very outset he takes an enormous leap to a point which it is doubtful whether he could have gained by the legitimate and laborious process of digging his way, and making sure of every step.

Any one who wishes to study the subject, and therefore to look at both sides, will do well not to be repelled by the unwieldy volumes of Mr. Sadler, nor should he overlook the comparatively brief work of Mr. Doubleday.

With regard to Mr. Ricardo, who was a good deal over estimated in his day, the present writer published a free commentary on some of his doctrines in 1825 (when the fame of that eminent economist was at the highest), under the title of "A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value," the main conclusions of

which, although the author was in some quarters much abused for them at the time, while equally lauded in others, subsequent research and reflection have tended to confirm; and he has observed many of them to have been since silently adopted by contemporary economists, sometimes to an extent that ought in mere justice to have been accompanied by an acknowledgment of the source from which they were drawn.* A very striking instance of this in a quarter where it was least to be looked for, the author forbears to mention.

Note H. — Page 222.

The inevitable extension of the methods employed in physical science to moral and political investigation is now almost universally acknowledged; the following representation of it may be new to the reader: —

"While I highly appreciate the ultimate importance of clear and forcible exhibitions of moral truth, I am apt to indulge the hope of a surer and speedier effect from the progress of that physical philosophy to which I have adverted, especially since I have become better acquainted with its advances in this country. Compared with the English, we†, my friend, are in these matters mere children. In our part of the world, physical science being either visionary or empirical, or both united, could not be expected to have any effect in improving morals and politics by the superiority of its methods. But here it is pursued on rigorous principles, which must ultimately be applied to knowledge of every kind.

* This cannot be said of Mr. de Quincey, who in his recent work, "The Logic of Political Economy," has honoured the "Dissertation on Value" with divers comments. Whether these are just or not, the present writer having seen the volume only for a few moments while revising this sheet, is not in a condition to say; but he feels quite sure from Mr. de Quincey's abilities and attainments, that his logical views on any subject must be exceedingly valuable.

† Namely, the Egyptians or Moslems generally.

"The practices of rejecting mere gratuitous hypotheses, of demanding facts, of requiring every step of reasoning to be clearly exhibited, of looking for perfect precision in the use of terms, of discarding rhetorical illusions and mere phrases, of scouting pretensions to infallibility or exemption from rigorous scrutiny, are all prevalent here, all recognised as indispensable in physical research, and cannot possibly be confined to the department of material philosophy. They will necessarily be extended to moral inquiries; and even supposing that, in consequence of social proscription, or priestly or political tyranny, these latter subjects were totally abandoned, received no direct examination, were exposed to no discussion for even a long period, were withheld (if we can conceive it possible) from the very thoughts of men for half a century, yet the influence of physical investigation upon them could not in the end be prevented. All the correct principles of reasoning, all the improved methods of research, all the habits of comparison and discrimination, all the love of truth which the pursuit of any science has a tendency to establish or engender, all the impatience of vagueness and obscurity and assumption which the prosecution of inquiry superinduces upon the spirits of men, would gather round the prohibited subjects, ready, like hungry lions, to rush on what they had been withheld from, by the bars and bolts and chains of social or political despotism."*

Note I. — Page 232.

This *being hooted* from society in consequence of professing particular opinions has really occurred in the United States of America since this was written. The following extract confines itself to *hooting* (at which, however, the people did not stop, as lamentably shown in a

* Letters of an Egyptian Kafir, p. 134.

former note), and is probably one of the most foreible representations of what that term includes ever penned. Speaking of the friends of the abolition of slavery, the writer says: "They met in smaller or larger numbers from time to time; they met for refreshment and for mutual strength: but it was in the intervals of these meetings, the weary, lonely intervals, that their trials befel them. It was when the husband was abroad about his daily business that he met with his crosses: his brother merchants deprived him of his trade; his servants insulted him; the magistrate refused him redress of grievances; among his letters he found one inclosing the ear of a negro; or a printed hand-bill offering large rewards for his own ears or his head; or a lithographed representation of himself hanging from a gallows or burning in a tar-barrel. It was when the wife was plying her needle by the fire-side, that messages were brought in from her tradesmen that they could supply her no longer, or that letters dropped in with such contents as the following: —

"'Madam,

"'I write to inform you that personal violence is intended on you and your husband this evening.

"'Yours in haste,

"'An Abolitionist.'"

"'Beware of nine o'clock.'"

"It was in the course of ordinary life that their children came crying from school tormented by their school-fellows for their parents' principles; that youths had the doors of colleges slammed in their faces, and that young men were turned back from the pulpit and the bar."*

* See the article before referred to, entitled "The Martyr Age of the United States," Westminster Review, No. LXII. p. 15.

Note K. — Page 235.

Extract from a letter dated London, March 1. 1785, from the Count de Mirabeau to Sir Samuel (then Mr.) Romilly: —

"'He was happy,' said I, one day in speaking of Fontenelle. These words, which ought to find a joyful echo in every good breast, alas! one hardly ventures to utter them. Hatred and envy have ever made Fontenelle's happiness a cause of reproach to him. They made it a crime in him that he did not draw down upon himself persecution from the prejudices of his age; that he showed to others only half of those truths of which he saw the whole; that he drew aside one veil from the image of truth, only to throw over it another; that he exhibited genius trembling before prejudices which ought to have trembled before him. What a passion is Envy! without relaxation she pursues the man of genius, throwing back upon him all the torment she suffers at his hands. If he utter a complaint, she says that he is lowering himself by retaliation; if he be silent, his silence is insensibility to insult; if his uncompromising spirit lead him to make popular error the object of his undisguised attack, she paints him as a factious spirit, with whom nothing is sacred; if his prudence soften truth, in order that it may not be exposed to the outrage of the multitude, she accuses him of having stifled it in its birth, and of having sacrificed the eternal rights of mankind to a few days of repose. Doubtless we must admire those vigorous and intrepid spirits who proclaim truth in all the splendour and dignity with which their own genius has clothed her; and who not satisfied with the glory of discovering her, aspire to that of suffering, and, if need be, of dying for her. I shall always respect Fenelon writing *Telemachus* in the court of Louis XIV., and Sir Thomas More publishing

the Utopia in the palace of Henry VIII. These noble spirits hallow the age which dishonoured itself by persecuting them. But while one sheds tears of pity and admiration at the thought of such heroical self-devotion, one regrets that the human mind should not have benefited by them as it ought. I come, my friend, to the conclusion, that to sacrifice one's self for truth is not the way to ensure its triumph. Persecution which spreads the progress of error, arrests that of reason; and philosophers do not, like fanatics, multiply in exile, in prison, and under the axe of the executioner. Perhaps there have been countries and ages in which the boldest truth, announced on a sudden to a sovereign people, forced upon the attention of an immense multitude by all the powers of eloquence, might have effected a revolution [in opinion] at the very moment of its utterance; and it were noble to sacrifice one's self to such a hope as this. But in our days time only can give to truth the victory over prejudice; with us the reign of truth is not the dazzling sway of some new creation of genius, but it is the imperceptible influence of general intelligence, by which error is overthrown without the sound of its fall being heard.

"This is the point of view, my dear Romilly, in which this Fontenelle, whom I have so long despised, only perhaps because of all men of genius he is the one to whom nature has made me the most unlike, appears to me to be so remarkable. Truth seems in his eyes to be like that ancient statue of Isis, which was covered with many veils; he thinks that every age should remove one veil, and only raise the next for the age which is to follow. He knows men and he fears them, not only because they are capable of doing much harm, but because it is very difficult to do them any good; and he has found the means of doing them good by the practice of an art which would doubtless never have been resorted to by a more energetic and impetuous character, but which in him has made even

timidity and discretion subservient to the progress of the spirit of philosophy. At one time he bows down for a moment before an error of his own age, and then raising himself from this constrained attitude of respect, in its very presence, he aims a blow at a similar error which has deluded all antiquity. At another time he places by the side of error a truth which he appears to sacrifice and subject to her, but which is sure to be triumphant provided it be allowed to remain there even at such a cost.* Often he parades prejudices in all their pretensions, and even grants them that which from the fear of appearing too absurd they do not claim. At those times when homage is expected from him he is silent, and this silence always occurs at a place where it will be best understood, and give least offence. Sometimes, on the other hand, he is eager to appear unnecessarily submissive and obsequious, and by so doing shows that there are unjust and suspicious tyrants whom one must distrust. In general, instead of attacking errors one by one, he devotes himself to the task of exposing and drying up in the human mind the sources whence they spring. He aims at giving new light and strength to that power of intelligence which is destined to subvert them all, and by so doing raises up against them an eternal enemy. Thus he attacks them by respect, destroys them by homage, pierces them on all sides with shafts of which they have no right to complain; and although they have always an eye upon him as upon their most dangerous enemy, he lives and dies in peace in the very midst of them.

"Without any disparagement to my own impetuosity, this method may very possibly, my dear friend, be the

* We are here reminded of a passage in Playfair. "Error," he says, "is never so sure of being exposed as when the truth is placed close to it, side by side, without any thing to alarm prejudice, or awaken from its lethargy the dread of innovation."—*Works*, vol. ii. p. 426.

best, and no less entitled to respect than mine, and it is certainly far more conducive to personal tranquillity; but as it does not and never will suit my character, I begin to feel a great inclination for idleness, even that of mind, and above all a very lively regret for inroads on my time occasioned by human observances, the fantastical opinions of other men, and the conventions of society."*

* Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, by his Sons, vol. i. p. 293. The translation above given is the same as that in the Memoirs, with a few verbal alterations.

THE END.

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