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GENIUS AND FAITH;

OR,

POETRY AND RELIGION.

GENIUS AND FAITH;

OR,

POETRY AND RELIGION,

IN THEIR MUTUAL RELATIONS.

BY WM. C. SCOTT.

"These abilities are the inspired gifts of God, rarely bestowed, and are of power to imbued and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune; and to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns, the throne and equipage of God's almightiness."—MILTON.

"Amongst all holy and consecrated things which the Devil ever stole and alienated from the service of the Deity, there is none that he so universally and so long usurped, as poetry. It is time to recover it out of the tyrant's hands, and to restore it to the Kingdom of God, who is the Father of it. It is time to baptize it in Jordan: for it will never become clean by bathing in the waters of Damascus."

COWLEY—*Pref. to his Works.*

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PREFACE.

THE subject discussed in the present work, though often adverted to casually in literary essays, lectures, and reviews, has never met with an ample and thorough investigation. The writer does not confine himself to poetry in the strict and technical sense of the term. He omits all reference to the rules and principles of the art; and aims to exhibit the pervading spirit of poetry, which animates all the higher productions of taste and genius, and imparts its peculiar glow and coloring to the whole esthetic department of literature, whether in prose or verse. This will account for the indefinite form of the title assumed. When he speaks of genius, he refers to poetical genius. And when he speaks of poetry, he means the genius or spirit of poetry. On the other hand, he does not treat of religion in the form of systematic theology. He selects the prominent features of the Christian system, and exhibits the harmony of its divine spirit with all the higher exercises of human genius.

The subject naturally divides itself into two branches; and in its discussion, the misconceptions and prejudices of two distinct classes of men are encountered. The first branch of

the subject consists in a vindication of poetry. And the first class whose prejudices are encountered, is composed of the *sordidly-practical, cui bono* men of the world, who regard poetry as frivolous, fantastic, and visionary in its nature, and unprofitable, if not injurious, in its results; and also of some men of sincere, it may be, but over stern and rigid piety, whose defective taste, contracted views, and canonized prejudices lead them to look upon poetry only in one aspect, and to eschew it as diabolical and dangerous. Perhaps in our own favored land, there is a special liability to this cold and dark perversion of piety, owing to the inheritance of our birthright from the Puritan Fathers. We inherit from them, it is true, much that is great and glorious in our civil and religious destiny. But they were only men, and liable to err. Their chief error was in reference to this very point. It arose naturally from the circumstances of the age in which they lived. They beheld poetry on every hand identified with licentiousness, tyranny, and papal superstition; and in opposing these evils, their zeal was carried to the extreme of denouncing as evil that element, which had been desecrated by such unworthy companionship. Hence their indiscriminate warfare against art and poetry. Hence their unhappy attempt to separate the spirit of Religion from the spirit of the Beautiful. The injurious effect of this mistaken austerity in religion, however, it may originate, is twofold. It serves to mar the proportions and disfigure the aspect of religion itself, by means of the murky medium through which it is viewed. And by renouncing the charms of taste, genius, and poetry, the cause of religion surrenders into the hands of its enemies

to be wielded exclusively against its interests, those bright and glittering weapons, which might have been employed with wonderful effect in its own advancement.

The second branch of the subject consists in a vindication of the Christian religion from the charge of antagonism to poetry. And the class whose prejudices are here encountered is composed of irreligious men of taste and talent, who have taken up the impression, that true virtue chills the glow of genius, and that Christianity fetters the wings of an aspiring mind; and who therefore conclude themselves to be, by special prerogative, exempted from the ordinary claims of morality and religion.

But in addition to the fatal effect of this prejudice on the character of literary men, a most disastrous influence extends from the same source through the whole compass of that polite literature of which such men are the patrons and authors. Hence not only the exclusion of all Christian themes and sentiments from the province of such literature; but hence, also, the adoption of views and feelings at variance with the Christian standard. It cannot be denied that a disguised practical infidelity pervades a large portion of our current literature. There is no open attack on the truth of revelation. A more secret, and therefore more successful, method has been adopted. The arguments of infidelity have been exploded; but its spirit still lives, and lurks unperceived in the shadowy regions of poetry and romance. From this dim fairy-land, supposed neutral in its moral position, because undefined in its physical territory, it darts invisible weapons, which excite no alarm, produce no pain, until the poison has

penetrated the vitals. Truth, triumphant before an open foe, writhes and bleeds under the attacks of an enemy so artful in its disguise, so secure in its concealment. Christianity, firm and vigorous before the daring assaults of avowed infidelity, droops under the withering influence of *polite* modern literature, which bows with an air of distant respect, whilst by artful sneers and flippant ridicule and abusive caricature—by bedaubing what is true, and adorning what is false, in virtue, by a prevailing spirit of hostility and tone of contempt towards piety itself; it performs unmolested the work of an enemy.

Such are the errors and evils which are assailed in the present work. If the writer should succeed to any extent in removing them; if he should so far impress refined and gifted minds by the considerations here adduced, as to lead them at least to ponder and examine the true glory of the Christian faith before they proceed to act under a blind impression of its hostility to genius; in a word, if he should succeed in showing to the devotees of each, that “Poetry and Religion,” though thrown asunder by the passions and prejudices of an evil world, and so far perverted and abused, that the one has come to be regarded as a gay and gaudy Prostitute, and the other as a stern and rigid Recluse; are notwithstanding twin sisters, heaven-born, alike in feature, and of kindred spirit: and that, with arms entwined in a fond embrace, they should ever pursue the same pathway, and move together on the same high mission, bright, beautiful, and blessed, only when thus united in mutual sympathy and companionship. In securing such a result, the writer’s ambition would be more than gratified.

CONTENTS.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
POETRY—the Dignity of its Nature.....	13

CHAPTER II.

Poetry—the Perpetuity of its Mission—The sentiments of Macaulay, as to the Decline of Poetry in an enlightened age, examined.....	40
---	----

CHAPTER III.

Poetry—its Practical Nature and Moral Tendency.....	65
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

Poetry—its Affinity with the Spirit and Precepts of Christianity..	88
--	----

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
False Impressions as to the Moral Insubordination of Poetical Genius; and the intellectual tameness implied in subjection to Christian Principle.....	114

CHAPTER II.

Additional Prejudices considered—False Impressions as to the moral aimlessness of Poetry, as a mere art, and the separate province of Christianity—Sources of Prejudice—Inferiority of Devotional Poetry—Dr. Johnson's opinion examined—Influence of Ancient Classics—Relation of the Bible to literary taste—Elements of Christian Character supposed unpoetical.....	141
--	-----

CHAPTER III.

Poetical Inspiration of Christian Faith and Feeling.....	174
--	-----

CHAPTER IV.

Same subject continued—Vital Harmony of Truth—Defects of Byron's Poetry—Self-communion—Prayer.....	196
--	-----

CHAPTER V.

Christian Heroism, as an Element of Poetry—Characteristics of Vulgar Heroism—"The Code of Honor" and the Character of the Duellist—Contrast presented in the higher virtues of Christian Heroism.....	214
---	-----

CHAPTER VI.

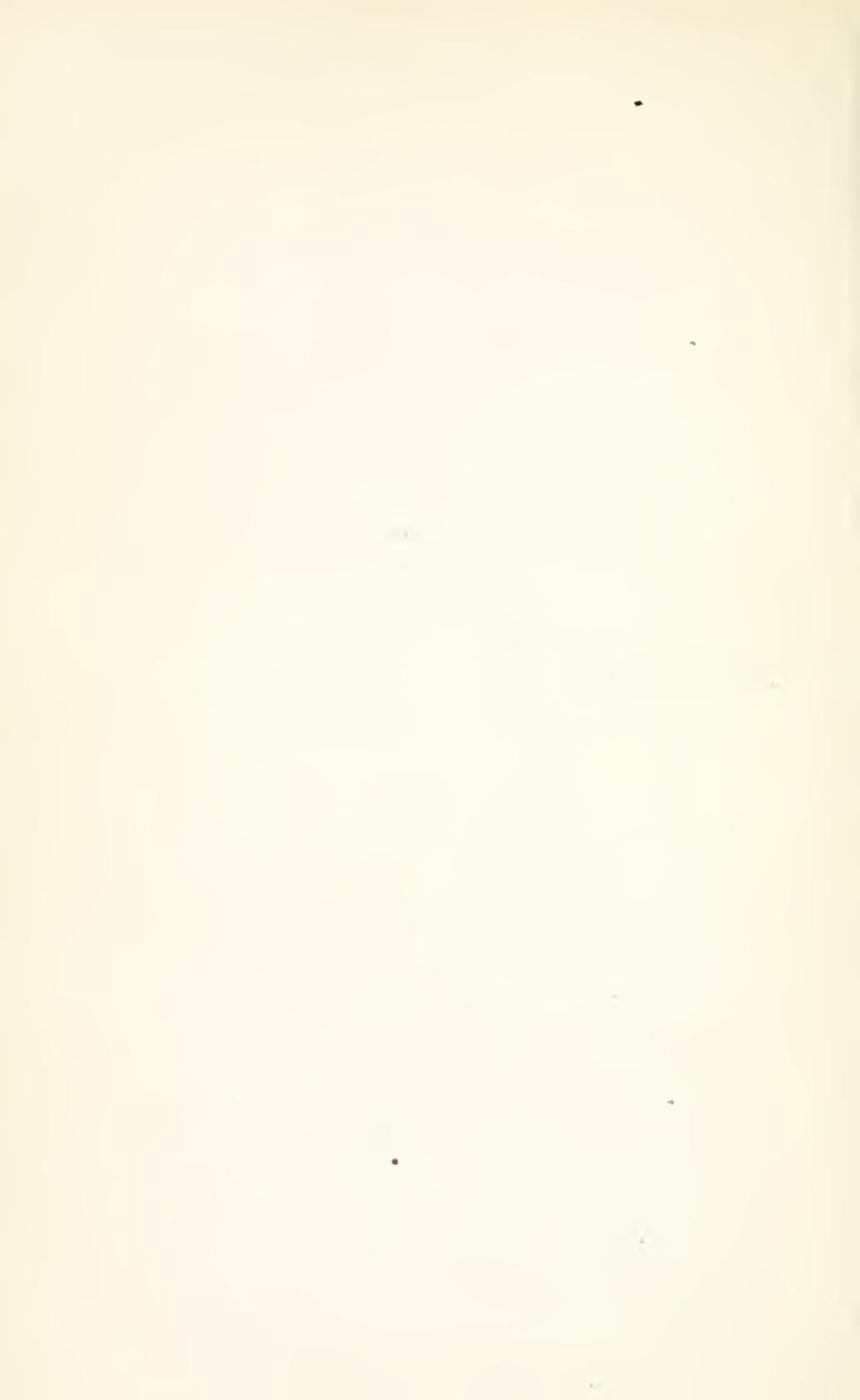
The Responsibility of Poetical Genius.....	249
--	-----

CHAPTER VII.

Deviations of Modern Literature from the Christian Standard Works Grossly Immoral—Works of Pleasure and Amusement—Caricatures of Piety—Low and Defective Moral Standard assumed—The Literature of Social Progress and Philanthropic Reform, so called.....	274
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

Conclusion—The Special Adaptation of Christianity, in its provisions and hopes, to men of refined taste and poetical genius	303
---	-----



PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

POETRY—THE DIGNITY OF ITS NATURE.

ON many subjects, nothing is more insufficient and unreliable, as a medium of communicating thought, than a precise and formal definition. Many things are too ethereal in their nature to be thus restricted. Many forms lose their essential life and energy, when thus compressed within an iron mould. This has been strikingly manifested in all attempts to define poetry. In proof of their insufficiency, we find the question is still repeated, with the same emphasis as of old—what is poetry? To a great extent there continues to exist a want of clear perception, of full comprehension, of just and adequate appreciation, as it regards poetry in its secret source, its essential elements, and its external modifications,—all of which combine to constitute and exhibit a perfect image of poetry itself. It is owing mainly to the general indefiniteness of our views on the subject, the prevailing uncertainty which

is felt in determining what is poetry, or some partial or limited application of the term, that such conflicting opinions are entertained as to the value and dignity of this divine art. We are persuaded, that from this cause, many discard that as frivolous, or denounce it as vile, which, under a different garb and another name, they cherish, admire, and love. But we hope not to remove this evil. We expect not to succeed, while others have so signally failed, in defining poetry. Of the numerous attempted definitions we have seen, we remember but one that serves to convey an adequate and faithful image to the mind. Some one has said, "Poetry is the music of thought conveyed to us in the music of language." But this definition is itself poetical, (as all must be that approach the truth,) and requires that it should also be defined. Rather let it be acknowledged, that the capacity to perceive, recognize and appreciate poetry aright, depends on the position from which it is viewed, and the mental vision of the beholder. There must be a corresponding taste and tendency in the mind itself, a wakeful sympathy, a conscious experience of the poetical, felt and cherished in the soul. Otherwise, you may as successfully attempt to define music to the deaf, or beauty to the blind. There must be a previous aptitude in the mind to receive the impression. It can not be chiselled there as in a rock of marble. The image is conveyed by a process of mental daguerreotype. The necessary materials must be blended on the tablet of the soul, to catch and retain the vivid portraiture, as the creating light flashes upon it.

Poetry, as an art, combines the two arts of music and painting, in language. Poetry, as a sentiment, is the concentration

of that spiritual essence in the soul, which imparts the power of fascination to each of the fine arts—gives melody to music, beauty to painting, and invests with appropriate loveliness, or dignity, the various objects with which it converses. The sensibilities, the affections, and the imagination, encircling the reason with their genial warmth and glowing colors, constituting an atmosphere of purity and a halo of light, these are its agents. The tender, the sublime, the beautiful, in nature and life, in earth and heaven, are its materials. Sympathy, admiration, enthusiasm, are its results.

We propose, in the present investigation, to consider poetry, not as an art, but as a sentiment; not in its outward form, but in its animating spirit. There is before us, consequently, a higher question than the jingle of words, and the measurement of syllables. It is true, versification and rhythm are the usual accompaniments of poetry. There is a peculiar cadence and coloring of language, which constitute its appropriate garb and its native dialect. Hence the custom of expressing in verse any train of lofty conception, brilliant images, and ardent emotions, which may occupy the mind. Versification seems generally to have been one of the first forms of language employed by nations emerging from a state of barbarism—a fact which tends to sanction the conclusion, that poetry is a more natural style of language than prose. But, amid the obscurity which veils the successive stages of the development of language in different nations, little confidence is to be placed in theories, which derive their origin from such a quarter. By no means are we authorized, from the fact above noticed, to believe that a semi-civilized state is the

most favorable to the existence of poetic emotions. The more probable inference we suppose is, that, in the absence of written language, facts and sentiments of inferior interest were suffered to evaporate in conversational intercourse; while those of a more imposing and thrilling nature—those more calculated, from some local or historical association, to influence the imagination and impress the heart—those, in a word, of a truly poetical stamp and character, were spontaneously expressed in their appropriate poetical language, and in the form of verse were transmitted from generation to generation—a form, fastening with a twofold chord upon the mind, and possessing a double cause of self-perpetuation;—in the poetical interest of its original inspiration, which impressed the heart; and in the poetical harmony of verse in its language, which assisted the memory. Thus the poetry of sentiment produces the poetry of language; whilst the character of both the sentiment and language secures the preservation of an unwritten poem in the memory of a people. This we conceive to be the true reason why the earliest transmitted thoughts of most nations have come down to us in the form of poetry. Without, therefore, being forced to adopt that depreciating view of poetry, which would identify it with the shades and heroes of departed mythological superstitions, we may perceive that there is a natural affinity between a certain order of poetical sentiments and their expression in the harmonies of verse; from the fact that it was thus spontaneously adopted by nations, antecedently to any progress in artificial attainments. Poetry did not spring from caprice, or accident, or some happy turn of human invention, in a primitive age.

It was not assumed as a garb of thought, like the aprons of fig-leaves, which our first parents formed to hide the shame of their nakedness, to give place eventually to other forms of dress more comely and convenient, as society advanced in improvement. It was spontaneous in its growth, and native in its origin. It arose from those immutable principles of harmony, established originally by Him who strung that invisible harp in the nature of man, and tuned accordant the mightier instrument of the visible universe around him. It is not, therefore, dependent on the mutations of human caprice and fashion. Nor is it superseded by the progressive discoveries and improvements in society. There is a fixed and uniform law arising from the very constitution of our nature, by which certain kinds of emotion are revealed spontaneously by corresponding expressions in the tones of the voice, the features of the countenance, and the gestures and attitudes of the body; and these natural modes of expression are the same in all ages and among all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized. It is from a similar law of our nature, equally fixed and uniform, that the vivid conceptions and feelings of poetry find their appropriate expression in language moulded and shaped into the kindred form of verse. The words, in such a case, but obey the harmony of that spirit which prompts their utterance. Even those writers, who disown, what they term, the trammels of verse, and look upon poetry, as an art, with contempt, will yet unconsciously adopt a certain juxtaposition of words, a peculiar elevation and harmony of diction, and clothe their conceptions in figurative language and all the brilliant colors of poetry, whenever they

rise into the higher regions of thought and emotion. Examples of this fact abound in the most eloquent prose writers and orators.

Thus much may be said, in vindication of the fitness and propriety of that form of language, in which poetry is generally recognized by mankind. But, notwithstanding a natural tendency to assume this peculiar shape, the elements of poetry may exist where the outward form of a poem does not appear, and where nothing is more distant from the mind, than the purpose of moulding its conceptions according to the rules of versification. Music naturally arranges itself according to a given scale, and its harmonies are measured by the definite rules of a science. But yet there is music—and most effective and thrilling music too—which is not governed by such artificial restrictions. It may be heard in the pleading tones of childhood ; in the eloquent modulations of an orator's voice ; in the breathing wind ; in murmuring streams ; and the resounding waves of ocean. We are prepared, therefore, to give a wider application to the term poetry, than its literal sense would, at first, seem to justify. We may even lose sight of its outward drapery of verse, while we regard its essential elements and pervading spirit ; which will bring under review all that may be designated as *poetical or imaginative literature*. Nor will our attention be confined necessarily to works of fiction and romance. A more extended territory is embraced within the sphere of the sublime and beautiful. We may with propriety include every thing comprehended under the general term *belles-lettres* : for it is the spirit of poetry which moulds and beautifies the productions

thus classified, and arrays them in their appropriate and fascinating garb.

It would seem that, by asserting the claim of poetry to so vast and brilliant a dominion, we would at once secure it from contempt. But there are those, nevertheless, who affect to ridicule and despise its weakness.

Nor is their superciliousness directed merely toward what appears strictly in the form of verse. They would annihilate all polite literature; preferring, however, to designate it by the convenient cant phrase of "*light reading*." We will not pause, at present, to examine the peculiar construction of those mental balances, in which such objects find so facile an adjustment. Nothing, however, is more futile in its effects, than this summary denunciation; for the fantastic sprite, triumphant and free, still roams abroad, assuming its thousand shapes, powerful in its charms for good or ill, unquelled by empty anathemas. The extent of its dominion and the magic sway of its influence over mankind, prove that its nature is misconceived, when it is denounced as feeble and frivolous, and when sneers and ridicule are deemed sufficient for its overthrow.

One of two causes produces this contempt of poetry. Either some mental disqualification, some deficiency in taste and temperament exists, and the mind of the individual is essentially frigid and prosaic in its constitution; or by familiarity with inferior kinds of poetry, by reference to the freaks, frivolities, and perversions of the art, an unworthy standard is assumed, and a false image, a caricature of poetry is conveyed to the mind. Charity inclines us to believe that the

latter is, in most cases, the efficient cause of misapprehension on the subject; as we are reluctant to expose any to the authoritative anathema of Shakespeare against the "man who has no music in his soul." But to estimate fairly the true dignity of any object, we should regard it in its higher elements and nobler spheres of operation. Nor should we fix upon anything that chanced to assume the garb or name as a fit representative of the reality. All fragments of verse are not specimens of true poetry. Nor are all versifiers genuine poets. Amidst the multitude who deal in rhyme, we are to consider only the prominent few, the rarely gifted, as the worthy types of poetical genius. In the present state of society, such various capacities and tastes existing, it requires often but inferior attainments to gain the celebrity of a name in the muse's calendar. Thus the catalogue is enlarged, and poetasters abound.

"Yet such their number that their specks combine,
And the unthinking vulgar swear they shine.
But poets are prodigies, so greatly rare,
They seem the tasks of Heaven, and built with care."

There are, moreover, different kinds of true poetry, and various orders of genuine poets. You may define the spirit of poetry, as you would the element of water, by enumerating its component qualities. But still, after such a definition, poetry, like water, may assume a diversity of forms and external modifications; and it may be classified according to the position in which it is found, and the channel in which it flows. The same element may appear in the meagre rill and the mighty river, in the placid lake and the tumultuous ocean.

Nay, the same, perchance, may be seen—but corrupted and perverted by the operation of extraneous causes—in the stagnant rain pool, glistening in the sun; the foetid marsh, exhaling its deadly vapors; and the turbid and swollen torrent, raging onward in its desolating career. But who would look to these last named accidental conditions of water, as a faithful representative of the pure element itself? Would we not rather find its true image, as we beheld it first gushing forth, clear, fresh, and bright, from its secret fountains, and then flowing on to the melody of its own motion; and whether turbulent or calm,—in stream, or lake, or ocean,—ever clothing the landscape with verdure, as it glides, or reflecting the smile and glory of heaven, in the depths of its repose? Poetry is as much an element, in the world of mind, as water is in the economy of nature. It is subject to similar laws, admits of as many varieties, and is equally liable to corruption and abuse. Let its true value and dignity be as comprehensively considered and as fairly appreciated. Our souls could as little dispense with the presence of the one, as our bodies with that of the other. The absence of both would leave human life and surrounding nature an entire desert. It is a low, blind and narrow utilitarianism, which fixes its sordid eye only on secular and material interests,—that would exclude poetry from the sphere of truth, and reason, and reality. There are realities above and beyond those which meet the vision of the ox and the ass, or the equally brutal gaze of men—yea, realities visible to the eye of a thoughtful and rational mind. There are nobler truths than those evolved by the computations of human arithmetic, or shivered

forth to light by the pick-axe of blear-eyed science. There is a higher reason that that which measures mathematical lines and angles, invents and applies the implements of agriculture, and counts dollars and cents—a reason which takes enlarged, elevated views of nature, of life, of duty, and the destiny of man. Now, we maintain, it is reason, when thus assuming its proper elevation, above the level of material conceptions, and with unsealed vision thus commanding a more enlarged and comprehensive survey of objects—it is *reason itself*, which rises into the region and element of poetry ; like some majestic mountain, towering from the plain, its summit piercing heaven, crowned with its stars, and seemingly blended with its very atmosphere !

We are aware, that here we run counter to a prevalent set of opinions on the subject. By some, poetry is regarded as a weakness, beneath the dignity of reason. By others, as a madness—perchance “ a divine madness ”—beyond the control of reason. By others still, as both feeble and frantic, or powerful only in the strength of a demoniac. We pronounce these views, each and all, to be utterly false. They are the result of narrow prejudice, or gross misconception. “ What ! ” it may be asked, “ is not poetry the creature of the imagination—a quality which predominates in children and savages—the faculty which governs our dreams in sleep, and maddens our brain with the visions of insanity ? And is not reason alone the pride and dignity of man ? ” We answer, by asking in return, what is reason, and what is imagination ? They are faculties of the human mind, conferred by its Creator. They are established modes of the mind’s operation.

They are secret laws which govern the moving element of the soul—itself one and indivisible. They have no separate existence. They all combine and move in harmony; and, like the several chords of an instrument, all unite in producing the contemplated result. Whence, then, this laudation of reason on the one hand, and this abuse of imagination on the other, as if they were, not only distinct, but rival powers? Suppose their separate territory defined, how could we determine the right of possession? How do we distinguish reason and imagination? How do we recognize the form of reason when it appears in any production of the mind? How, except by the process which it takes, and the result at which it arrives? So that each individual applies the standard of his own mind to test the reason of others; and all that does not readily conform to his standard, is forthwith assigned to the undefined territory of imagination. But the standard, thus applied, may be false and perverted; and another may appear unreasonable to us, only because he has a higher scale for the appreciation and value of things. The truth is, the faculties of the mind exist in no such state of isolation. They combine together in the production of any consistent and durable result. We can never point to a single display of the mind, as an effort of reason alone, or of imagination alone. What would reason be without the imagination, the memory and the will? A ship, without sails, stationary on the sea! Why, then, this wretched play upon terms, with a sense appropriated, but not legitimate? Why designate imagination alone, as a foreign element, at war with the dignity of reason? Why advert to it alone as a point of imbe-

ility in the character, or as the only door through which the devil can enter the soul? Alas! there is a secret back-passage, by which, veiled in darkness, he first enters the inner chamber of *the heart*; and, when once securely lodged, he works the wires of the human mind at will, and bids imagination assume the garb of an angel of light, and reason move with philosophic gravity, while both obey his diabolical mandate! Men have been the dupes of reason, as well as of imagination. The imagination of a weak mind may be distorted and out of proportion. But its absence would not secure the strength of such a mind. There have been idiots as well as maniacs. And men have gone mad from the fury of disordered passion oftener than from the spectres of a wild imagination. These are more frequently the consequences than the causes of derangement. The true dignity of the human mind consists in the full development of all its faculties, and their harmonious operation in their appointed sphere. The real strength of one power is not promoted by the suppression of another. The soul, (itself an invisible unit,) is alone truly great in the visible unity of all its proportions, affording mutual support, and imparting symmetry and strength to the whole edifice, as it stands a temple meet for the worship of God.

As to the question, then, "Is not poetry the creation of the imagination alone?" We answer, No! Nor of the reason alone, according to the ordinary sense of the terms. But of *an imaginative reason—the elevated unity of a truly rational soul!* A soul endowed with the power of association, of combination, and of comprehension, as well as that of sin-

gle perception—a soul, whose vision penetrates the visible surface of things, and scans the secret laws of adaptation and harmony, which pervade the universe, and sees, impressed on the transient and material, images of the spiritual and the eternal—a soul profound, thoughtful, meditative; its energies awake, its sensibilities alive, its aspirations tending upward, and seeking congenial fellowship with the true, the tender, the beautiful, the sublime, and the infinite, as revealed to “that inner eye which is the bliss of solitude.” Here we find the source and element of poetry. This is “the vision and the faculty divine.” Not a dreamy inspiration! But the inspiration of the soul itself, derived from its high contemplations, and conscious experience, in this real living world, which it inhabits, and not a visionary scene of spectres and shadows;—the earth and the heavens, which God hath made, and not a fairy land of its own creation!

It will be found that all those prevalent misapprehensions, which involve a disparagement of poetry, are based on a denial of the essential unity of the human mind. They suppose the mind to be divided into so many separate parts, which are termed faculties, and that these faculties are not only distinct, like the organs and senses of the body; but, as it regards the reason and the imagination at least, that they are directly antagonistic. Hence it is concluded that, where imagination prevails, reason is proportionably deficient. But all philosophy and all experience unite to teach that the mind is an undivided thinking principle; and that what are termed its faculties are only the different modes in which it operates. It is the same power which thinks, feels, wills, remembers,

anticipates, reasons, and imagines. We are not conscious of employing a different power, in engaging in these different acts, as we are when the different senses of the body are exercised. For instance, when at one time we see, and at another we hear, we know that the eye is employed in the one act, and the ear in the other. But we are sure that it is the same power acting in different ways, and with reference to different objects.

Let this fact of the essential unity of the mind be kept in view, and any unsoundness or want of balance that may exist, must be traced, not to an original disproportion in the adjustment of its different faculties, but to subsequent derangement of the mind itself, or to undue habits of mental activity in certain forms, induced by corrupt tastes or defective moral principle. The distinction between the faculties of the mind is altogether an arbitrary arrangement, for the sake of convenience in classifying its several functions. It is true in one sense, it may be said that the mind is naturally endowed with such faculties ; but unless we mean that the mind was originally subdivided into parts and fragments, we can only mean by such language, that the mind was created with a capacity to act in these various forms, and that by a law of its own nature it will thus act, unless perverted and abused.

But in the popular belief, reason and imagination are two distinct and rival powers—the one conversing with truth and reality, the other with spectres and shadows. And as poetical genius is supposed to be characterized by a preponderance of imagination, hence the opinion of its unsoundness and want of balance. Even admitting the distinction to be

founded in truth, yet it could serve no practical purpose in the end. For as men differ in their views of truth, and differ also in the limits of their knowledge and faith, each mind of course takes its own stock of received truth, and admitted reality, as the ultimate boundary of reason; and all views that fail to accord with this standard are forthwith assigned to the shadowy sphere of imagination. Thus a controversy, involving all other controversies is opened, which must remain unsettled to the end of time. We choose not to enter upon it at present. But we shall at once drop the term imagination, as having no manner of application, in the sense attached to it, to that mental process of true genius, which results in poetry.

What difference exists between right reason and true genius in their processes and results? What is reason? Or rather, what is the process of the mind when engaged in the act of reasoning? Is it merely arranging the thoughts in the form of a syllogism? That may be reasoning, or it may be only sophistry. It is true a logical formula is implied in all just reasoning; but it is not always, nor generally, expressed. Right reasoning is the just sequence of our thoughts in a dependent train of association reaching to a legitimate conclusion. This connection depends on several conditions, such as cause and effect, resemblance, &c., answering to the several modes of reasoning; as induction, analogy, &c. But these trains of association are different in different minds, according to their comprehensiveness and energy. Some move with a slow and cautious step, and they survey but a limited department of truth. With others, while there is a

latent logical connection, yet in the rapidity of progress, the outward formula is dropped. The links of association are wider apart. The points of electric sympathy and vivid suggestion are more prominent and distant, and the mind takes a wider range in its excursions. The one method need not be less concise or accurate than the other. The other *must* be less complete and comprehensive. The one *may* err, as to minuteness. The other *must*, as to fullness. It discerns only a small portion of truth, and discerns even that falsely ; because out of its relation to the vast system with which it is connected. Slow streams are generally muddy—nor are they always as deep as they seem. The mountain current, dashing through wild and majestic scenery, is transparent and pure ; and now and then, as occasion serves, it eddies into quiet depths of unfathomable blue.

The difference between true genius and so called practical reason, lies, not in the *direction*, but in the speed, power and extent of the mental process. The transition is more rapid through the stages of logical connection. The measure is taken with a longer chain, and the signs of the survey are wider apart. The mind of genius moves with the strides of a giant over the surface of truth. It steps from promontory to promontory and from summit to summit. Its vision takes in a wider range of objects, and embraces a more adequate view of the mighty landscape. The creeping insect may boast of its minuter accuracy, of its closer logical precision, as it measures a few clods and pebbles in its slow and slimy track. What is often vaunted as cool reasoning arises from the tardiness of the mind's operations, from the inch-by-inch

gradation of the mental process. The truth becomes cold by delay. It is murdered by a lingering birth. It comes forth a lifeless abortion; and we know it as truth only by a process of dissection in particles and fragments. But truth itself does not exist in an isolated and fragmentary condition. It is a mighty, moving, living system, all its parts related and dependent in a comprehensive whole; bound in universal sympathy and moving in endless harmony. And the mind which conceives truth in this attitude, and imbibes its pervading spirit, alone weilds a spell of power over the sympathies of mankind, and achieves the noblest triumphs of genius and poetry.

Poetry springs from that peculiar law of more vivid and extended association which distinguishes the ideas of genius from those of ordinary reason. It consists not merely in the capricious combinations of fiction, dressed up in an ornamental style, and bedecked with brilliant metaphors. No, these are the instruments, not the elements, of poetry. They are the subordinate signs it employs as exponents of some higher truth. Fiction, metaphor, rhetorical images and ornaments are only expedients adopted by the poet in the effort to embody and convey to the consciousness of others the lofty conceptions that thrill the depths of his own being. Poetry is endlessly diversified in its materials and forms. And amid the confused mass that has appeared in the shape of poetry, doubtless much absurd fancy, wild extravagance, and pernicious delusion may be found. So also there may be in the shape of logic. Error may crawl in a syllogism, as well as soar in a metaphor.

Poetry essentially consists in those vivid conceptions of the mind which spontaneously awaken corresponding emotions of the heart—those electric trains of thought that kindle admiration and sympathy in their communication—those far-reaching mental wires that come in contact with the beautiful, the sublime and the infinite, and thrill the conscious soul with a portion of their own power. Are these conceptions irrational or extravagant? Do they transcend the limits of truth and reality? Is the mind which entertains them unsound, unsettled and out of balance? And is dull, dry, dreary commonplace, which never feels nor admires, but merely calculates and contrives—is *this* the model of a “*sound, solid, and well-balanced mind?*”

Balance may be destroyed by defect, as well as by excess. In such a case an object only falls to the ground, and remains stationary. But immobility is not equilibrium. Balance includes something more than the idea of rest. It has reference, when spoken of a living creature, to the harmonious and consistent action of all its powers, in their appropriate element and sphere. Hence it indicates a different state with different beings—as for instance, a reptile, a fish, a beast, a fowl, or a man. The balance of a fish in water implies something more than that of a reptile on the earth. The balance of a fowl in the air includes qualities that are not necessary to a beast walking on the ground. And the proper balance of man's nature includes powers and qualities above all these. Some creatures have powers that fit them for different elements and spheres of action. Thus the eagle is furnished with legs and feet, with which it may walk on the earth to

secure its food ; but it is provided also with mighty wings, on which to mount aloft in the air, to bask in the sun, and brave the storms of heaven. How different a spectacle is the eagle poised motionless on his spreading wings, and sweeping circle upon circle still higher in heaven, from that of the abject terrapin, crawling clumsily along in the dust ! And yet the terrapin is a very “ sound, solid, and well-balanced ” animal—*very* ! He seldom stumbles, and never falls. If he is slow, he is sure. He takes no useless flights. He is given to no extravagant soaring. What cares he for the wonders above, or the mysteries around him ? If startled by surprise, or threatened by danger, he only shuts himself up in his hard shell, and crouches closer to the ground. Which does man most resemble in the just balance and harmonious action of all his powers—the eagle, or the terrapin ? He has qualities in common with both. He has a physical nature, with physical necessities, binding him to the earth. And he has a discursive, winged mind, with an immense spiritual scene, in which to expatiate. Nay, on every hand, in the visible scenes of nature, in the surrounding relations of society, in the passing events of human life, there are ample materials to awaken the admiration and sympathy of his observant mind.

Suppose two men, at the same time, to approach the Falls of Niagara, one a poet and the other a geologist of the most frigid class. “ The poet’s eye in a fine phrenzy rolling,” doubtless, takes in the awful majesty of the cataract, his ear catches the thunder of its voice, and his soul, spell-bound, entranced, enraptured, surveys the glorious spectacle. The geologist, casting a careless glance around, turns his back

upon the scene, crouches under a shelving rock, and with hammer in hand, intensely practical, begins to collect his specimens : and, at length, he departs from Niagara with pockets filled with solid facts to support some theory of his favorite science. Now which of these two minds displays a proper balance—a just proportion and symmetry, in its mental exercises, before this stupendous scene? Which of these two minds, in its conceptions and emotions, approaches nearest to a state of equilibrium with truth and reality, in this instance? Now, the distinction so obvious in this case, holds true in different degrees, with regard to all objects and scenes in the universe. There are features of beauty or sublimity—there are certain poetical aspects impressed upon all visible things. The mind, which perceives and feels these traces of poetry alone takes in the whole compass of truth—alone embraces the entire scope of reality.

Indeed, that fashionable contempt of poetry, which vaunts its own frigid stolidity as the perfection of reason, can be consistently maintained only on the ground of a Sadducean system of unbelief, which ridicules everything above gross, tangible materialism, as moonshine and vapor, and scoffs at all noble sentiments awakened by higher spiritual objects of contemplation as romantic and visionary. Thus Religion is involved in the same doom with poetry, and is branded as an outlaw, by the decrees of a reason whose soundness is tested by such a standard as this.

And is it true, that human life is a dismal journey over a barren desert, without a charm to gladden our eyes, without a sympathy to warm our hearts, without a hope to animate our

energies? Is it true that the vast universe of God is a mere complicated mechanism of gross matter, lifeless and soulless, with nothing above its visible forms to give them significance, with nothing beyond its tangible results to indicate a higher end? Are all the rich elements of poetry and all the high motives of religion, but the visionary creations of a wayward imagination, gratuitously superadded to the outlines of reality? Or are they real qualities, pertaining to the present system of things? This question settles the point forever—are the qualities, which we term poetical, real attributes of God's creation, or airy phantoms of man's invention? Is there, then, nothing beautiful, or sublime, or admirable, within the compass of reality? Is there nothing tender, thrilling, or transporting in the conscious experience of the human soul? Is there nothing in the events of human life, nothing in the relations of society, nothing in the history of nations, of high commanding interest? Is there no invisible spiritual world, investing this visible scene with the mystery and glory of its pervading presence, shedding its light, imparting its colors, and impressing its images on things seen and temporal, and crowning the events of life with the issues of immortality? All such high spiritual realities are ignored by a so-called practical and prosaic reason. Nay, besides these, a vast amount of materials arranged and impressed by a Creating Hand, for some worthy purpose, in the structure of his visible works, are repudiated and disowned. To what ends is this vast material scene adapted? To supply mere physical necessities? To display evidences of the Divine Being and perfections? Yea, but more than this—to unfold images of

beauty and glory to awaken the admiration of mankind ! These are all disregarded—and the design of God in their formation is despised as useless and ridiculed as absurd !

The dignity of poetry is supported, both by the intellectual qualities, which it calls into exercise, and the surrounding materials with which it converses. The same Hand, which formed the mind of man, framed the external universe, and appointed the relations of human life. The agent is adapted to the scene. The exalted capacities of the soul find congenial exercise and converse meet in every direction. The source of poetry is in the higher attributes of the mind. But it is not a sealed fountain, requiring some supernatural impulse to call forth its waters, like the rock smitten by the rod of the prophet in the wilderness. It gushes forth spontaneously to seek sympathy and fellowship in the visible scene, through which it rejoices in its course. This inward capacity, this refined mental vision, but looks abroad, and finds corresponding objects and materials. The true poet has but a perception of realities, to which others are blind. “The world is full of poetry.” It is rich, not only in supplies to our physical necessities, but radiant with images of beauty, crowded with objects of interest and wonder, and adapted by its Author to the nobler part of our nature, with elements to gratify its tastes, feed its desires, and quicken its immortal hopes. Human life, in its ties of endearment, in its fountains of love, its duties and pleasures, its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, is eloquent with the voices of poetry. The soul of man, in its high origin, its mysterious nature, its present relations, and its immortal prospects, breathes the very breath of poetry.

And from these departments, the tender, the beautiful and the sublime spring forth to awaken the sympathy, admiration, and enthusiasm of every observant and rational mind.

“The faculty of reason distinguishes man from the brute.” So runs the adage. But there is a scriptural rebuke, which implies that man does not *always* bear a flattering comparison in this respect. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, and my people doth not consider.” If reason in man be of the character that some suppose, and directed only to that class of objects, to which they would confine its exercise, then it is no longer an exclusively human prerogative. Some brutes exhibit at least an admirable instinct, wondrous like a reason of this description. But the maxim is true, if we mean reason rightly exercised, and conversant with its appropriate objects. Rather, we should say, the high distinction of man is found *in those states of mind*, which spring from the worthy exercise of reason—in those mental emotions and those moral sentiments, which belong to man, as a rational and moral agent. The brute has tastes and desires, but they are all sensual. It has emotions, but they are all animal. It has no sense of beauty, no feeling of sublimity, no perception of duty, no idea of moral obligation, and no capacity for moral government. Here is the proud eminence on which man is placed. He alone has a vision to perceive the true order and position of objects around him. He alone has a mind, like a faithful mirror, to reflect the native hues and colors, the just forms and dimensions of the visible universe. He alone has a soul sensible of the tenderness of sympathy, the fascination of

beauty, and the terror-breathing spell of sublimity. He alone is endowed with the higher moral capacity to connect his inward spiritual being in its relations with the God above him, and the immortal destiny before him. Whence, then, (and the question bears back at once the imputation of folly and imbecility to the character of Him, "whose foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of man,")—whence, then, and wherefore this rich expenditure, lavished by a creating Hand, in the refined susceptibilities and exalted capacities of the human mind on the one hand ; and, answering to these, in the rich and beautiful ornaments, and the mysterious and awful wonders, which pervade the departments of nature on the other—all superadded to the necessary means of prosecuting secular pursuits, and maintaining a present and material existence ? "God hath made his wonderful works to be remembered." He has spread before the eye of man the vast and "pictured volume" of the universe, to convey the higher elements of wisdom to the mind—to shadow forth to human conception the images of his unapproachable glory. He has prolonged the probation of human life, that under a salutary experience of its sympathies, its duties, its trials and delights, man may be purified, refined, and ripened for a higher and spiritual destiny. Classed with such elements, conspiring with such influences to fulfil his high purpose, we find the true qualities of poetry. Take, for example, that poetical element, which is confessedly one of inferior rank and dignity—the admiration of mere beauty : Who will pronounce this weak and unworthy the dignity of man ? Whence that endless variety of shades and colors, of forms and proportions, which adorn the universe ?

Why do the gentle and beautiful flowers spring forth and unfold their colors? To be unheedingly trampled under foot? Have they no refined uses, corresponding to the skill of their contrivance, and the delicacy of their structure? Utter they no spiritual voice? Shed they no sacred influence? Fulfill they no heavenly mission? Proud and stupid mortal! It was the finger of God, which pointed to the unheeded flowers! It was the voice of God, which commanded, "Consider the lilies of the field!" And woe unto him who casts dishonor on these influences and elements, as beneath the dignity of reason! Woe unto him who stigmatizes the thoughtful observation of the works of God, and the high admiration of their beauties, and wonders, and glories, as sentimental imbecility, or romantic extravagance!

We by no means maintain, that poets by profession monopolize all the sense, much less all the virtue in the world. Far from it. The power to write the language of poetry depends on a variety of external influences. But the capacity to feel the spirit of poetry is native to the human mind. It exists often unconsciously to its possessor. It inhabits every breast, in different degrees, according to the shades of character. The poet speaks a language intelligible to every human mind. He touches a chord, which vibrates responsively in every heart. Here lies the secret of his power. Here is found the enchantment of his harp—in the answering sympathies which lodge in the bosoms of men. These sympathies will generally be developed in proportion to the true elevation and dignity of the individual mind. The hue and coloring, the very tinge of poetry is an ingredient in all enlarged and

comprehensive intellects. True, there are minds of strength, and research, and activity, which seem utterly blinded to perceptions of the sublime and beautiful. They may grasp a subject with the cold iron energy of thought, but they are destitute of one of the noblest attributes of the human mind—the power *to feel and to admire!* This deficiency springs from the contracted sphere of the mind's vision, or some perversion in its habits of thought. The "*nil admirari*" of stoical philosophy is the attribute of indolent pride and stupid ignorance. The high enthusiasm of poetry is the ardor of wisdom, and the susceptibility of strength. It is not, therefore, as some misconceive, an extraneous element, a foreign quality, superadded to the natural arrangement of the human mind, and calculated to destroy the equilibrium of its powers. But it is the full harmony of those powers, when finely strung and worthily adjusted. It is not a fungus appendage to a diseased limb, caused by the unpropitious operation of the elements, which distorts the due proportions of the branching and towering tree—but the spontaneous verdure and flowers, which invest the beautiful symmetry of its majestic form. Look at Milton! that pyramid in the world of mind—at once a monument of mental greatness, and a model of poetic genius! Reason the most profound, learning the most minute and multiform, attainments the most rare and costly, all hallowed by piety the most pure and fervent—these cemented, compact, and in solid proportion, towering on high, were all crowned with the light of poetry.

“His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.”

Here we find a faithful type of the true nature of poetry, as freed from its accidental corruptions. Here we find a fit representative of its real and rational dignity, as divested of all the perversions and abuses to which it is liable. And in answer to the sneering ridicule, and croaking dogmas, that have become fashionably current with regard to the mental imbecility of poetry, we proudly point to the character and genius of John Milton.

CHAPTER II.

POETRY—THE PERPETUITY OF ITS MISSION.

HAVING already vindicated Poetry from the charge of intellectual weakness, and asserted the dignity of its nature, we have, by anticipation, met an accusation of a kindred character, and are thus prepared to take another step—one easy, nay inevitable, as a consequence of the former—and to maintain the perpetuity of its mission. It is owing to a misconception as to the attributes of Poetry, prevalent in the minds of those who think loosely, or who receive passively the thoughts of others, that an opinion has gained currency, which pronounces the dominion of this art to be, by an inevitable tendency, fast declining and vanishing from the world. It is because the essential dignity of Poetry is not perceived, or comprehended—because the faculties of mind which it calls into exercise are deemed feeble, frivolous and lawless, and the fair creations that it summons forth, are supposed visionary, fantastic and unreal—that, in the estimation of some, its abode is fixed in the clouded atmosphere and dusky twilight of ignorance, and the period of its reign is confined to

the infancy, or the undeveloped youth of individuals and of nations. It is because the poetic faculty is conceived to be severed from all connection with reason, and to possess an isolated identity with the imagination: and then imagination itself is converted, by supposition, into a mere power of delusion, and its department is laid off from the territory of the human mind, as an indiscriminate receptacle for all things that disown the authority of reason—the abode of convicts—a Botany Bay for all manner of fallacies, lunacies and frenzies—a chaotic region, peopled with “Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire”—a mere mad-house of the mind. It is by such an unauthorized process that the conclusion is reached; it is from such false premises that the inference is drawn, that Poetry necessarily declines as science and civilization advance in society.

This opinion, which we now propose to consider, has gained a wide prevalence in many quarters, and is often announced as bearing with it the undisputed authority of a maxim in literature. As yet, however, we have met with but one instance in which, definitely stated as a proposition, the attempt is made to maintain it by a formal and labored argument. But this attempt is conducted with great powers of intellect and bears the sanction of a name of deservedly high authority on such questions. We refer to the eminent British reviewer, Macaulay. Let it not be thought presumptuous in us, to call in question the decisions of such an oracle. We confess that, at first, we experienced no little sensation at the terror of a name, until the discovery was made, that the same writer has furnished us with answers in his own language to

the arguments he has adduced. This will be shown as we advance in the investigation. He discusses this point on three occasions. First, his creed is prominently and plainly set forth in his essay on Milton. Then again, with some degree of variation, and at greater length, in his article on Dryden. But with strange inconsistency, he contradicts his own statements and opposes his own creed in his review of Moore's Life of Byron. So plain indeed is the contradiction, that at first we supposed some mistake had occurred in attributing the different articles to the same author, and that the American publisher had blundered, by inserting the productions of some other hand in this volume of Miscellanies. This, although possible, can yet scarcely be supposed; for however different the sentiments, the style in each of these articles bears marks of paternity, which cannot easily be mistaken. Besides, such variations are not rare nor remarkable in that new form of literature, which seems of late to be gaining an ascendancy—a kind of literary cannibalism, by which authorship feeds upon authors, and volumes grow from the contents of books. The elevation and authority of the reviewer do not arise necessarily from his being head and shoulders above others in stature, but from the fact that advantage is taken of the press and tumult, to mount upon the heads of the multitude, to interpret their language and personate their cause, while the opportunity of his elevation is selected to figure in his own colors before the world. This mode of enlightenment is convenient, and salutary doubtless to a certain extent, especially in this prolific age, when the power of book-making so far exceeds the capacity of book-reading; but it is

not by any means to be endowed with an exclusive infallibility, so as to supersede the exercise of personal investigation and independent judgment. For it is an inevitable tendency of this critical literature to mislead, when so far exalted as to be taken as a substitute for all others. It pursues not merely a condensing, but a transforming process. It aims not merely to afford glimpses of the objects before it, but it must correct, arrange, modify and reduce all things to the order of a given system. Hence a disposition to philosophize and build theories on every small occasion. Every event must have its age, its school, its natural classification in some appointed series of development. And amid the diversity of occasions that arise, it is not a matter of astonishment, if the speculations appended to each should fail in the end to correspond and harmonize together.

But, to return to the writer in question. Passing strange indeed it would seem, that he should have selected the character of Milton, as an occasion for showing the necessary incompatibility between a high degree of learning and refinement, and the full vigor of poetical genius. But stranger still, that this should be done in the form of an eulogy, and with the professed design of adding to the fame of the great poet. The poetical faculty, he contends, is to be found in its greatest perfection in a rude age, and consists in a blind subjection of the soul to the illusions of the imagination,—that these vanish before the light of knowledge; that consequently the refinement by which Milton was surrounded was adverse to his poetry, and the learning which he possessed was a disadvantage to his genius; that the supremacy of his

powers was displayed in rising above these depressing influences, and triumphing over these disadvantages. For, says he—"If these reasonings be just, no poet ever triumphed over greater difficulties than Milton." A most equivocal eulogy indeed ! It amounts to this. The glory of Milton, the greatest poet the world has ever known, consists in the fact, that he succeeded in making a fool of himself, in spite of his learning and wisdom ! If it required the genius of Milton to achieve such a triumph, in the age in which he lived, doubtless then, in this nineteenth century, we may conclude with the author, that the reign of fools is over, and that henceforth and forever, rational prose will occupy the throne of Christendom ! But what would the genius of Milton have been, if divested of the light of science in which it moved abroad, encircled, enveloped by it as a robe of royalty ? What would his Poetry now be, if shorn of those rich gems of learning, which, inwoven with its very structure, spangle the folds of its gorgeous drapery ? What would *Paradise Lost* become, if robbed of all those brilliant allusions of thought, those glowing metaphors, that lofty cast of dialect, and that full command of the harmonies of language, which were derived from the varied departments of science, philosophy, history, theology, and classic lore ; and which, under the action of his superior mind, were sublimated and transformed into materials and elements meet for the habitation of those god-like beings of his creation ?

In the process of his general argument, the reviewer makes two minute specifications. He assigns as causes of the decline of Poetry in an enlightened age ; first, the fact, that in such

an age, *criticism* prevails, and secondly, the fact, that *the language* of an enlightened people becomes unpoetical. We shall here give his own language both for and against these propositions. As to the first, he says—pages 36-7: “The ages in which the master-pieces of imagination have been produced, have by no means been those in which taste has been most correct. It seems that the creative faculty and the critical faculty cannot exist together in their highest perfection. * * * * * That critical discernment is not sufficient to make men poets, is generally allowed. Why it should keep them from becoming poets, is not perhaps equally evident;” &c. Answer—page 119: “It seems to be taken for granted that there is some necessary incompatibility, some antithesis, between correctness and creative power. We rather suspect that this notion arises merely from an abuse of words, and that it has been the parent of many of the fallacies which perplex the science of criticism. What is meant by correctness? If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules which have their foundation in truth and in the principles of human nature, then correctness is only another name for excellence. If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules purely arbitrary, correctness may be another name for dullness and absurdity. * * * * * Has Poetry no end, no eternal and immutable principles? Is Poetry, like heraldry, a mere matter of arbitrary regulation? * * * * * Men became tired of an insipid conformity to a standard, which derived no authority from nature or reason. A shallow criticism taught them to ascribe a superstitious value to the spurious correctness of poetasters. A deeper criticism

brought them back to the free correctness of the first great masters. The eternal laws of Poetry regained their power," &c. We are satisfied with this answer. It is, then, "*a shallow criticism,*" which conflicts with the excellence of Poetry. "*A deeper criticism,*" the criticism of a more enlightened age, restores true correctness, and causes "the eternal laws of Poetry," which, in their very nature, are immutable, to regain their power.

As to the second point, the obstacle which arises in the form of unpoetical language, he remarks—page 2: "The progress of refinement rarely supplies the arts with better objects of imitation. It may, indeed, improve the instruments which are necessary to the mechanical operations of the musician, the sculptor, and the painter. But language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive, then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical; that of a half-civilized people is poetical." Now hear him in a different strain—page 39: "The first works of imagination are, as we have said, poor and rude, not from the want of genius, but from the want of materials. Phidias could have done nothing with an old tree and a fish-bone, or Homer with the language of New Holland. * * * * * In the process of time the instruments by which the imagination works are brought to perfection. Men have not more imagination than their rude ancestors. We strongly suspect they have less. But they produce better works of imagination. Thus, up to a certain period the diminution of the poetical

powers, is far more than compensated by the improvement of all those appliances and means of which those powers stand in need. Then comes the short period of splendid and consummate excellence. And then from causes, against which it is vain to struggle, Poetry begins to decline. The progress of language, which was at first favorable, becomes fatal to it, and instead of compensating for the decay of imagination, accelerates that decay, and renders it more obvious."

Now we admit that the author is here consistent with himself in *one* respect—in maintaining that *at some point or other* the progress of language becomes unfavorable to Poetry. But he contradicts himself in fixing that point. At first he affirms that language, "*in its rudest state,*" or varying a little, "the language of a half-civilized people," is best fitted for Poetry. Then he affirms that the first attempts in this line are poor and rude, and that even Homer could do nothing with the language of New Holland—that up to a certain period the progress of language is favorable to Poetry, and brings it to perfection. But that, after this, it turns about and becomes an enemy. Whence this uncertainty, this contradiction, as to the degree of improvement which renders language unpropitious? The truth is, his supposition as to the influence of language, is a mere thing of air. And his speculations on this point, afford a fair specimen of the modern art of theory-building, which accomplishes in prose, what this writer assigns to the peculiar province of Poetry; constructs imposing but baseless air-fabrics, and then contrives to give these "airy nothings a local habitation and a name." What conceivable injury can an improvement of language bring to Poetry? It is conceiva-

ble, and has often been remarked, that gifted poets serve to develop and improve the language in which they write. Their lives are often adverted to as eras in the history of language.* But are they sowing dragons teeth in this achievement? Does the power they thus create rise up in arms against them? In what respect does an improved language become anti-poetical? What is language to the element of Poetry, but the channel in which it flows? By enlarging its vocabulary, does the language of enlightened society suffer its poetical words to become obsolete? And will the stream roll back and sink under the pressure of its own waters, because the old channels are filled up? Such revolutions may have occurred in nature, but where do we find these triumphs of obsolescism in language? Is the poet forced to derive his dialect from Billingsgate, or the prosaic chit-chat on Exchange? Where are the glowing words of the "first great masters," with whom the sons of genius delight to hold converse? No, let but the pure fountain exist—(and that fountain cannot be opened or shut by the application of words)—it gushes forth by the impulse of its own waters. And then, by the weight of its current and the washing of its waves, it will form its own channel. Let but the fire of genius glow in the breast of the poet, and

* Take one example:—"And as though an era of so much that was great should not pass without a mark to distinguish it among even the greatest of all future time, the poet Chaucer arose to charm and instruct his countrymen, and *by the purification of their native tongue, to complete the national glory.* In the 36th year of the 3d Edward, an act was passed declaring *that the language so ennobled, should be in future used as the language of legislation.*"—*Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England, by John Forster, Historical Treatise, p. 9.*

“Hark! his hands the lyre explore!;
 Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o'er,
 Scatters, from her pictured urn,
 Thoughts that breathe, and *words that burn.*”

But the whole force of this writer's argument lies in the definition which he has given to Poetry. “By Poetry, we mean the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination. * * * * Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body; and as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, Poetry effects its purpose most completely in a dark age.” He has here embodied the vulgar conception of Poetry. Imagination is converted into a power of delusion, and Poetry is identified with superstition. In accordance with this view, he proceeds to consider it as the companion of error and the enemy of truth. Hence his conclusion:—“We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception; the clear discernment of truth, and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.” With such a conception of Poetry, he is right in affirming that it necessarily declines as knowledge advances; for it is only ignorance itself in a state of excitement: and he says truly, that the poetical temperament exists in its highest perfection among children and savages; for it is nothing more than superstition. *But is this Poetry?* Is imagination identical with ignorance? Is Poetry synonymous with superstition? From the time of Rousseau onward, it has been the fashion to idealize savage life—a fashion most in vogue with those who have never seen a savage. Much has been affirmed of the imaginative and poetical character of barbarous nations—far more than is con-

sistent with an honest observation of facts. What is the real character of the savage? (And be it remembered the more savage, the more poetical, according to this writer.) Does he resemble an angel with wings, careering wildly through chaos and darkness? Or a brute with hands, grovelling in the dust, and groping his dull and dreary way, soul-blind under the light of heaven, soul-deaf amid the harmonies of the universe? Uncivilized nations, of course, differ from each other, according to their location, descent, traditions, and the different degrees of approximation to religious truth in their superstitions. But these differences, when favorable, are so many advances in improvement, and so many steps in a departure from the truly savage state. What is characteristic of such a state? The ascendancy of the visionary over the real—of the spiritual over the material—of the imagination over the senses—of the soul over the body? No, but the ascendancy of the merely animal over the intellectual, social and moral qualities, which pertain to human nature. Man approximates the brute as he departs from civilization. He is beastly in his disposition and habits, beastly in his desires and lusts, beastly in the paroxysm of his frantic passions, and when these subside, more beastly still in the torpor of mental stupidity and the apathy of physical sloth. Whatever excitability may belong to the savage character, is, for the most part, foreign to the element of Poetry. As to that class of emotions and moral sentiments and mental perceptions, which are justly termed poetical, he is habitually a stranger. But it will be said, uncivilized men are uniformly superstitious, and this fact shows their imaginative and poetical character. But we ask, does it show any such

thing? The superstitions of the savage show the absence of light and knowledge, and the presence of gross darkness over his mind. They exhibit, moreover, the gleams and traces of a light from Heaven, the fitful operations of a religious principle, often the only visible link in his nature to a higher destiny, but perverted, sunk and overshadowed in surrounding desolation and gloom.

Whence spring the ghosts, and shades, and spiritual powers, all terrific, which agitate the soul of the savage? Whence arose the imposing systems of ancient Mythology? Possibly, in their origin, they were as rude and revolting as the phantoms of modern heathenism. They were developed and modified by time. They were fostered by tradition. They were supported by the sanction of law. And we are to search among the hidden feelings of such a faith, to find, if indeed they can be distinguished, the sources from which the rude structure of superstition originally sprung. Is superstition, then, the product, the offspring of the imagination? Is it the mere work of this image-forming power, which creates the idols of its own worship—which moves and shifts the phantasmagoria to suit its own gratification and delight? Whence, then, that uniform principle of terror, which blends with every system of superstition? The fountain of all superstition is a principle of religion in the nature of man—darkened, debased, and trembling with an inward consciousness of guilt. Hence a sense of the supernatural is attached to the material—visible objects are endowed with invisible powers, and the phenomena of nature, which reason cannot solve, become pregnant with all the wild and frantic

terrors of a degraded and guilty nature. Now we see in all this —what? First, a sense of the supernatural and supreme, as its cause; and then, as its most prominent instrumental agent, the ascendancy of the bodily senses over the mind. Now, the mind itself being in this subordinate state, we are not solicitous to inquire, which of its faculties is called most prominently into exercise. But even admitting the baseless theory, which is here constructed, as to the ascendancy of the imagination—admitting that the phantasms of superstition are the mere “forms of things unknown,” which “imagination bodies forth;” we deny, that in *these* we necessarily find the primary elements of poetry. In the ruder forms of superstition—the superstitions of nations really barbarous—we discover nothing poetical; but every thing wears a dismal, terrific, and revolting aspect. We behold in them, not the operation of a power, which refines, beautifies, and exalts; but the downward tendency, the degrading influence, the darkening and withering touch of a principle, itself debased, but which still owns a high and heavenly origin. It is among nations whose descent, location and traditions, have placed them on a degree of elevation above the rude and primitive savage—nations, in a measure civilized, whose social habits and religious sentiments are elevated and beautified by an approximation to order and truth; it is among such only, that superstition wears the impress of poetry. Such were many of the ancient classic Mythologies, which poetry has embalmed in its own fragrance, and perpetuated for the admiration of mankind. They derived all their dignity from an atmosphere of comparative social and moral refinement. The poetical

fascinations and glories of such superstitions arise from the truth, which they approach and overshadow; as the painted and gorgeous clouds that trail along the sky, derive all their radiance and beauty from the sun which they hide. But admitting these to be poetical, (as we do, regarded in their primitive application,) and admitting that these necessarily vanish, as the sun of true science and religion rises high in the heavens, absorbed by its more ardent beams, dissipated by its more pervading light; shall we *therefore* conclude, that poetry itself has departed with them forever from the earth? Is poetry identified in its nature with these elements of a darkened age? Is it born of the mist and vapors which brood over a damp, and dismal, and unilluminated scene? Is its light to be seen only in the dancing glimmer of the *ignis fatuus* over a marshy waste at midnight? Are its vision and its voice realized only in that of the moping owl, which wings its heavy flight and moans forth its cheerless song amid desolation and darkness? Yea, let the sun arise, clear, bright and beaming in its warmth; and what though the vapor fires disappear, and the night song of the owl ceases, and the misty forms and images, which flitted fearfully abroad, all vanish, and the clouds and darkness which enveloped the scene in dismal drapery, hiding heaven and veiling earth, all roll away, tinged and made lovely in their departure by the very light which dispels them—shall we lament the transformation? Shall even poetry bewail that her sceptre is departed and her kingdom taken away? No, rather she exults with the new consciousness of a more enlarged and glorious dominion; and over the altered scene she presides with becoming majesty,

herself an altered Queen. The touch, which dissolves her fantastic dream-realm, dispels her slumber, and she awakes only to rejoice and triumph amid living realities. The veil of beauty is removed only to render beauty itself visible in the full array of its charms. Delusion, the mask of truth, is laid aside, only that truth itself may appear in its just and native dignity. The soul expands and rises, as light breaks in upon its surface, and dispels the vapors from the horizon of its vision. Nature, relieved from the pressure of an incubus, and the stagnation of a wintry spell, sends forth new life and vigor through all its channels. The warm and bright earth unfolds its variegated scenery, sends forth its stores of vegetable life, arrays itself in verdure and flowers ; its streams sparkle and dance onward, chaunting their own music ; and countless song-birds flit with gilded plumage in the sunlight, and pour forth their rapturous notes in the forest ; while above all, still float perchance the few golden clouds, or shines the rainbow's omni-colored arch, or gleams the lightning or echoes the thunder, signals of occasional storm ; but, even when no vapory image intervenes, over all there still bends the boundless azure, the infinite depth of an unexplored heaven, gemmed with stars and peopled with myriads of glowing worlds.

By this illustration, we have reached the evident fallacy of the argument now under consideration. The author fails to distinguish between poetry itself, and the materials with which it conversed, and the forms which it inhabited, in a primitive age. He supposes that all poetic emotions necessarily cease to exist, because a certain class of objects, which once awakened such emotions, are proven to be visionary. He concludes, that,

because some kinds of feeling are found to be fostered by ignorance and dispelled by knowledge, feeling itself is a night plant, which blooms in darkness and droops in daylight; that all emotion is an appendage of weakness, which vanishes when intellectual strength is matured; that as the light of science rises on the understanding, it not only scatters foul and floating vapors from the heart, but dries up all its fountains, withers its verdure and flowers, and annihilates all its life and loveliness. He has thus endorsed the shallow presumption of cold, sceptical, material philosophers, who, grossly incredulous in the creed of "science, falsely so called," have reached the ultimatum of a proud and stupid indifference to all that is good, and fair, and great,—to all that would lead the mind beyond the narrow circle of its sordid conceptions, or swell the heart above the leaden pressure of a torpid self-idolatry. This pretended austerity of wisdom, itself a mere intellectual fashion borrowed from a primitive age, under an outward aspect of gravity, conceals the very essence of frivolity. Shielded by incredulity against truth itself, it sneers and scoffs at every appeal that would touch a pure sensibility of the heart, or awaken a lofty aspiration in the soul. This scoffing tendency is sometimes displayed with regard to things far more important and sacred than even poetry. We have not the slightest suspicion that this author would sanction the infidel exhibition of such a spirit. But he has, nevertheless, expressed sentiments, which, by inference at least, involve such an application to piety itself. He affirms, for instance, that "no man can be a poet, or even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind." In consistency with such an

opinion, a *sound* mind may safely discard the Bible, as a useless and insipid production of a primitive age. Of all books in the universe, the Bible is most replete with poetry.

It is poetical, not merely in dialect and imagery, but in thought and feeling. In it we recognize the period,

“When the hallowed name
Of poet and of prophet were the same.”

And the muses, which haunted the classic fountains of Helicon, once as fondly lingered round “Siloa’s brook, that flowed fast by the oracle of God.” Yet the Bible was dictated by Omniscience, as a book for the universal race of man. It was addressed to the universal and immutable principles of man’s nature, which no ignorance can totally obliterate, which true learning only establishes and confirms; addressed in a form so lucid in its simplicity as to be comprehended by the illiterate, while the very force of that simplicity is imposing to the learned. Leaving out of view the nature of its evidence as a revelation, and the character of its doctrines, we pronounce it a shallow learning, a perverted taste, a foolish wisdom, which would turn from the voice of the Bible, because it is the voice of poetry. This sentiment is closely linked with a blasphemous dogma, long since exploded, if indeed it be not the very same under a different form of expression, viz.: that “Ignorance is the mother of devotion.” Such, then, we are taught to believe, are the triumphs of learning and social improvement. The pure and lofty feelings of religion are discarded as unintellectual, while the name is perhaps retained from respect, if it be not merged in the more imposing term, philosophy. Piety becomes antiquated—one of the beautiful

features of a past age. A second expurgation of the temple ensues; but how unlike the former. Now, the priests of the Most High are expelled, the censers are emptied, the ark overthrown, the sacred walls are converted into a museum, the holy of holies into a repository of scientific relics, and the altar, its sacred fire extinguished, burns with a new flame made ready for the crucible of the philosopher. Reason is enthroned supreme, self-complacent in its majesty, unruffled in its repose, its dignity a stranger to the weakness of emotion, its immortality enriched by a lofty consciousness of its acquirements, its heaven found in the serene quiescence of self-contemplation; and the whisper of Satan to the first pair in Paradise, "ye shall be as gods," so long apparently proven to be a suggestion of the father of lies, is, after all, exhibited, by the developments of an improved age, to have been a response from the oracle of truth. Oh, if there be one evidence stronger than another of the depravity of man's nature, and the dominion of the devil over it, it is found in this blasphemous presumption, this imperturbable pride of glimmering human reason, arrogating the attribute of omniscience, and terminating in self-worship—these fantastic tricks played before High Heaven, in the very name of wisdom!

The whole argument against poetry, the very conception of its mutable and perishable nature, is founded on an abuse of terms, and a confusion of qualities, in themselves totally distinct. Not only is poetry confounded with superstition, but the recent discoveries of science are taken for the perfection of knowledge, and the arts of modern refinement are held as so many advances in true social and moral improvement. Re-

cognizing these things, however, as distinguishable and separate, we may account for a temporary coincidence of facts, without adopting a general and sweeping conclusion. And even admitting it to be a fact in history, that poetry has so far declined in proportion as science and civilization have advanced, we may explain the tendency, without concluding that such a tendency is necessary and inevitable. But in spite of a general impression which prevails, and in the face of high authority, we deny that facts have, as yet, settled any such uniform law of deterioration in poetry. The great poems of a primitive age, which have been designated as master pieces of the art, were not the result of the age itself, but of the individual genius of their authors, who stood far in advance of the age. Owing, therefore, to the evident contrast between such noble productions, and the rude age in which they appeared, a degree of admiration may be excited toward them, which is denied to equally noble specimens, produced under more propitious circumstances. As society advances, the number of poems multiplies, the steps, in the gradation, become smaller, the distance between the several points is diminished, the separate magnitude of each is disregarded in beholding the radiant cluster, and the expanding influence of contrast is entirely lost on the mind of the beholder. In an extended district of level country, a solitary hill is looked upon as an object of wonder, and rises to an imposing magnitude. But in a wild region, whose whole surface undulates with mountains, the tallest peak loses half its real elevation in the vision of the traveller.

Much is due, moreover, to the force of authority and the

sway of fashion. Such ancient productions have long been held classical, and adopted as the standards of taste and the models of excellence ; so that the public mind, credulous and blindly reverent, bows before their undisputed preëminence. But suppose we admit that poetry has declined, (and the admission may be made, perhaps, with reference to the existing crisis, in comparison with eras that have immediately preceded,) will it therefore follow, necessarily, that this decline arises from a law of its own nature, from an inherent tendency to decay ? May it not be only a temporary depression, produced by a combination of adverse influences from without ? *May not the adverse influences, which originate in the present state of society, be the offspring of superficial knowledge and artificial refinement—the fruit of brilliant degeneracy, and not of solid improvement ?* We admit, that the present age is signalized by the steam-power rush of scientific discovery. Many brilliant and valuable additions have been made to the store of human knowledge, which, with a salutary application, are calculated to promote the comfort, virtue, and dignity of social life. But these, as yet, are incidental results. Science advances, but it is *the isolation of science*—the surface of knowledge, without the depth of wisdom ! The language of nature is deciphered, but not interpreted. The mind becomes a repository of barren, lifeless facts, collected for purposes of ostentation and vanity. The admiration of their discovery, and the wisdom of their inferences, are lost in the stupid pride of their possession. Instead of leading to enlarged views of the vastness of nature and the majesty of its author, instead of awakening humility and self-contemplation,

by the magnitude of loftier contemplations without, the telescope of truth is inverted, and the beholder himself is magnified, while the glory he gazes on is dimmed and contracted. Unlike the true philosopher of a former day, who, when he had finished his sublime discoveries, still felt "like a child who had been collecting pebbles on the shore, while the great ocean of truth lay unexplored before him," the rampant explorer, in modern science, presumes that the ocean itself is but a smooth surface, over which he may glide at pleasure, and read its mysteries in the sparkles of its foam. With the discovery of a few solitary facts, there is associated the presumption of general conjecture. What is unknown and beyond the reach of experiment, by appending some ingeniously constructed theory, is summarily classified along with settled verities. The universe itself is reduced to a dead, mechanical system, and the mind which penetrates the intricacy of its labyrinths, and not the mind which planned and created the stupendous fabric, becomes, in effect, the only God. Hence the prevailing absence of sensibility, admiration, and enthusiasm, which would lead the soul beyond the low circle of self, and upward, in wonder, adoration, and love, to the centre of infinite excellence.

But in addition to this contracting and hardening influence, which terminates on the character of the professed devotee of science, there is an equally disastrous effect produced on the general condition of society by the uniformly secular and selfish appropriation of scientific discoveries. They are converted into means of increasing wealth and multiplying the forms of luxury. They refine the lusts and sensuali-

ties of the body, by supplying new modes of gratification. They extend, confirm and perpetuate the sway of Mammon, by enhancing the glittering pomp of his dominion, and furnishing additional resources to his power. The beautiful and generous charities of life are suspended. The high admiration and ennobling enthusiasm of a contemplative and rational mind, looking abroad over a boundless field of wonders, are unknown. The sole mental impulse and energy displayed appears in the restless whirl of frivolty and dissipation, or the onward speed of sordid calculation "making haste to be rich." There is no tenderness of sensibility, no depth of feeling, no sincerity of conviction, no comprehensiveness and elevation of thought. The true, the beautiful, the sublime, and the infinite, are eclipsed by the visible, the sensual, and the material. And the soul itself lies shrunk and shrouded beneath a glittering incrustation of worldliness.

Such are the boasted triumphs of modern refinement! In the mean time, it is true, a regenerating power, commissioned from heaven, is secretly efficient in new-forming the souls of its chosen subjects; but the surrounding mass, still lifeless and tending to corruption, are merely arrayed in the disguise of virtue. To this high agency, when its prevalence shall be more complete, associated, as it then will be, with the dictates of a deeper philosophy, we look for any real transformation of society, for any genuine advancement of human nature in the path of elevation and improvement. Society, at present, is in a state of transition. Between an age of rude simplicity and ignorance, and an age of clear light and genuine moral refinement, there is an intermediate state of gross secularism

in society, and of brilliant materialism in science. It is under the withering glare of such a period, that poetry droops and declines. Truly, in such an age, (as the writer, whose views we have been opposing, has remarked, but in a sense far different from that which he designed to convey by the language,) “he who aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child.” And so must he who aspires to become a Christian. There is a false pride of wisdom, which as much opposes the one attainment as the other. “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” “If any man *seemeth* to be wise in this world, let him first become a fool that he may be wise.” Not a fool absolutely—not a little child in ignorance and superstition, not in the subjection of the reason to delusion and of the heart to the spectres of heathenish faith, but in the humility of true wisdom and the simplicity of pure feeling. In this demand wisdom itself is the first to acquiesce. It is her chosen attitude, her highest dignity. Wisdom, in its very nature, is humble. The sage is really but a child amid the immensity of nature, and before the majesty of God. All the knowledge that wisdom has acquired unites, to teach humility, and “wisdom is humble that it knows no more.” The advancement of human knowledge never did, and, indeed, never can conflict with the interests of religion, or its companion, poetry. At first, in the haze of twilight, there may be a seeming contrariety ; but with increasing light and profounder investigation, is displayed the beautiful harmony of accordant truth.

True science, in its march, but opens the avenues of poetry,

unseals its fountains, multiplies its materials, and extends its dominion. Its discoveries are still-born and shrouded, when viewed only as isolated facts. No truth terminates in itself. Its face only is seen, its voice is unheard ; its teachings are disregarded, when it fails to direct the mind backward, and onward, and upward, in its contemplations. "Poetry," says Leigh Hunt, "begins when matter of fact or science ceases to be merely such, and to exhibit a farther truth : that is to say, the connection it has with the world of emotion, and its power to produce imaginative pleasure." Notwithstanding the awkward structure of this sentence, it embodies a profound observation, which puts to flight a crowd of unmeaning lamentations as to the opposition between science and poetry. Science expends her energies in supplying poetry with suitable objects and materials. She provides the colors, and the canvas, and lifts the veil from the face of nature, that the artist may admire and portray her charms. What new materials, for instance, have been added to poetry by the discoveries in natural history and astronomy? Are the stars less truly "the poetry of Heaven," since science has revealed their secret laws, their immense magnitude, and their infinite number? If an undevout astronomer be mad, his madness surely is but the more evident, if, at the same time, he be unpoetical. No, the light of true wisdom, when it penetrates the understanding, does not blast the heart. It dispels the torpor of ignorance, dissolves the stolidity of pride, softens and enlivens the sensibilities, quickens and expands all generous emotions, fosters all high aspirations, and prepares the soul for the admiration of poetry and the devotion of religion.

Poetry and Religion, twin sisters! Long rudely severed, lo, they meet again, embracing, at the very fountain of truth! Apart from the pomp and tumult of the world, hand in hand, they traverse the shady lawn, mutually brightened and cheered by each other's presence. They vow never more to separate. Both have suffered by living asunder. But now, both surpassingly beautiful in this hour of their reconciliation, they determine henceforth to walk the same road on their journey, and accomplish their high mission in company. With Science as their willing attendant, they go forth, hand in hand, to beautify and transform the world.

CHAPTER III.

POETRY ;—ITS PRACTICAL NATURE AND MORAL TENDENCY.

THE preceding observations, with regard to the spirit of poetry, have by no means reached a satisfactory conclusion. A subsequent point must still be determined, before the progress of this investigation can receive the gratulation of a well-disposed and virtuous mind. What is the practical influence of this power on the social condition and immortal destiny of man? What are its moral and religious tendencies? Is it a spirit of good, or of evil—an angel of light, or an emissary of darkness? If evil, the dignity and power of such an element would only render its capacity for desolation the more terrible, and the perpetuity of its presence would only consummate the appalling prospect, by adding the impossibility of a termination to its ravages. It is true, an indirect inference, bearing on this point, may have already been suggested in the progress of our remarks. For if, as we have shown, the dignity of this spirit is based on truth and reason, and the harmony of surrounding relations, we may perceive, in its very elevation, at least presumptive evidence, of its holy ori-

gin and benignant tendencies. Not by any means that all greatness is goodness, or that all strength is virtue, or that all power is marshalled under the banner of purity, in the conflict of opposing principles on this apostate earth. Intellectual and moral qualities we admit, have no necessary and inseparable connection. The energies of the mind may exist without the presence of corresponding affections in the heart. And a perverted poetic sentiment is one thing, and true religious principle is another. Even great mental powers may be associated with excessive depravity. But when thus associated, they uniformly suffer injury. Disease is communicated at some point, by the foul contact. Some want of equilibrium, some defect in the harmony of its operations, some irregular and vacillating motion in one region, with torpor and inaction in another, prove that the mind, transcendent though it be even in its debasement, is invariably impaired, when the heart becomes the seat of pollution, and that genius exists in an unnatural element, when surrounded by an atmosphere of impurity. This we affirm to be true of all intellectual qualities, but especially so of those which are with justice denominated poetical, and of that order of genius which finds employment in the elevated and ethereal dominion of poetry. We therefore maintain, that the spirit of poetry in itself—in its uncorrupted and unperturbed essence—bears the seal of a heavenly commission, conspires and harmonizes in its tendencies with the dictates of morality and religion, and moves abroad, in its beauty and majesty, over the earth, on a high and holy mission.

There are many who recognize the purity of this element

in some of its manifestations, but yet regards its influence for good with comparative indifference, while their apprehensions are excited by contemplating exclusively its power for evil. They are led to view it in but one aspect. They are prone, from an observation of its perversions, to conceive a disparagement of its nature; and, by witnessing its frequent association with impurity, to imagine some inherent liability to abuse, some native tendency to mislead, as its essential characteristic. Hence they uniformly regard its presence with a suspicious eye, and meet its approach with a defensive attitude. And they would consider it upon the whole a blessed exchange for the world, to forfeit forever the fascination of its loveliness, in order to be delivered from the stronger spell of its foul enchantments. But such a bargain lies not within the scope of human speculation. The soul of man and surrounding nature, the physical and the moral universe must be remodeled and transformed, before such a consummation is possible. Such a purpose is not merely futile; but the attempt to realize it enhances the evil deplored. By disowning the fellowship of this quality, the benefit of a compromise with its necessary existence is lost, and its influence, without being diminished, is arrayed entirely on the side of evil. And those misguided champions of virtue, who wage a war of extermination against poetry, are only so far successful in their enterprise, that they cause it eventually to assume the character, which is at first imputed, and render its overthrow the more desirable, but not the more possible, by transferring its entire power to the ranks of acknowledged enemies. Such views arise from a want of impartiality in investigation, and

a want of discrimination in judgment as to the essential qualities of poetry.

The opinions entertained on this subject will be much affected by general views on other subjects, and the theories adopted concerning the moral system under which we live. This world evidently is not a scene of perfection. Nothing is stationary, nothing complete within itself. We behold on every hand a strife of conflicting elements—a blended struggle of good and evil qualities. A desolating power has fallen on the originally fair creation, destroyed the symmetry of its proportions, deranged the harmony of its movements, and amid the confusion of discordant elements, has pressed into the unnatural service of evil, tendencies, which, in their design and appointment, were pure and propitious to virtue. The world is filled with perversions, moral and physical. “God made man upright, but he hath sought out many inventions.” Depravity has infected the human soul, and its attending curse has overshadowed the surrounding scene of existence. Upon the floating wreck of the present system, we behold traces of its original symmetry and perfection, but they are marred, and broken, and disorganized. The wreck has been visited by a special interposition of relief. It has been met by a divine appliance of remedy and reparation. The Christian religion restores to human life those qualities which sin has defaced, and re-establishes in their ascendancy over the nature of man, those influences, which have been perverted and overborne by a proneness to evil. Apart, then, from the direct operations of Christianity, we may perceive the existence of qualities, originally pure and perfect,

but now sunk in subjection to depraved tendencies, against which they still rebel and wage an ineffectual warfare. We fail to distinguish these conflicting powers, because they are not visibly arrayed in distinct and opposing ranks. It is an intestine warfare, a confused struggle, hand-to-hand, in silence and darkness. There is naturally no grand division of the race into two separate armies. Every human bosom is the theatre of this strife of opposing influences. Above this scene of conflict, presides a wise and benevolent Creator, and amid the evil which he permits, may be recognized, even in its perversion, the good which he appoints. To determine, therefore, the legitimate tendency of any influence, we should not refer merely to the companionship in which it may be found, or the ends to which it may be devoted in this degenerate world. These may happen contrary to its legitimate tendency, by the counteraction and corruption of other causes. To determine the true character of the element of poetry, we should not look merely at the turbid stream, whose waters collect impurity from the region through which it flows, but should go backward and upward to the pure fountain from which it springs. We should separate poetry itself from its corruptions and abuses, and contemplate its sources in the human soul, and its materials in surrounding nature. These unquestionably exist, impressed by the Creator, on the works of his hands. They bloomed in the bowers of Paradise. They will triumph amid the glories of heaven. In the intervening earthly strife, they claim affinity and fellowship with all pure and heavenly powers. Their

tendency, unless when counteracted and overborne, is propitious to the claims of morality and religion.

The light of nature conspires and harmonizes with the light of revelation. In like manner, there exists a corresponding agreement between poetry, which is the devotion of nature, and piety, which is the devotion of faith. There is a consistency of design, a harmony of expression, in all the works and ways of the Most High. All the images of his character, and all the manifestations of his will, when clearly perceived and faithfully considered, are found to be uniform and accordant. Antecedent in their origin and still distinguishable in their existence, amid impure and evil elements, there may be traced qualities in the nature of man, and features in the material universe, which were originally impressed by a creating hand, and designed to subserve a benevolent and holy purpose. These, as they address the reason, are termed the light of Nature—a light obscured and perverted in a world of moral darkness, but still blending and mingling with that perfect illumination, which has subsequently been transmitted by a direct revelation from Heaven. The record inscribed by the Almighty in the volume of his works, agrees with that more complete testimony written in the volume of his word. The instructions of the latter are additional, but not opposite to those of the former. This point will readily be conceded by all believers in divine revelation. But we claim, in its concession, an implied acknowledgment of the position which we maintain, as to the origin and tendency of the elements of poetry. These are native qualities, imbodyed in the original structure of the system, and introduced by the Hand which

framed the universe. They are connected with the qualities just considered, by an immutable law, which pervades every department of nature—a law which connects emotion with perception, impulse with action, desire with duty; which associates the genial and enlivening heat of the sun with its pervading light; which blends the charms of beauty and sublimity with utility of design in nature; which unites the refined gratifications of taste, with the necessary means of subsistence; which writes the name of God in a type of flowers, and announces his power in a trumpet of thunder.

The application of these general views to the question before us, is evident and conclusive. And we are furnished with an explanation and an answer to the difficulties which may arise from the occasional, and it may be frequent, association of poetry with lust and impiety. Poetry, in its origin, was not a human fabrication, but a divine creation. Its first picture smiled on the landscape of Eden. Its first song was hymned by “the morning stars.” It is not the unnatural offspring of depravity. And whatever alliance with evil it may have since formed, is contrary to its original design and tendency—is a departure from its sphere, and a degradation of its nature. Indeed, what element has not been thus perverted and forced into subserviency to an evil purpose? The light of Nature, though it discloses the glorious perfections of the Godhead, has been obscured by evil passions, and counteracted by a perverse will, and made to minister to the grossest error and the most degrading superstition. Even in an enlightened age, science has been arrayed in opposition to truth, and placed in the attitude of an enemy to revelation.

True, all this may be summarily laid to the account of a vagrant imagination. But such an explanation is more convenient and plausible, than rational and satisfactory. By such an unauthorized and senseless appropriation of epithets, you may make imagination responsible for all the evils under the sun. But the truth is, all great and gifted minds, which have produced any permanent impression, either for good or evil, have been characterized by a high degree of mental qualities, which might with equal justice be denominated imagination. They may not have written verse, but they were *poets*—in the primary and just acceptation of the term—workers and performers in the field of thought. They glowed with enthusiasm, which gave impulse and energy to the operations of their minds. They possessed original, creative, and comprehensive intellects. There is a more rational, as well as a more scriptural mode of accounting for the departures of the human mind from truth, than by charging the evil upon one of the original powers of the mind, and involving the Creator in the authorship of delusion. To the state of the moral character, we are to trace all essential aberration in the intellectual character. The light of truth is obscured by “an evil eye, which causes the whole body to be filled with darkness.”

It will be perceived, then, that the question at issue is not to be determined by those considerations, which are supposed by some to settle it finally and for ever. The legitimate tendency of poetry is not to be tested by the moral character of the majority of professional poets, or the moral tendency of the majority of their productions. Yet it is by applying such

a standard, that poetry has been denounced as essentially evil. But the fallacy of this mode of reasoning is acknowledged, when applied to other subjects. Such logic, if universally adopted, would result in the condemnation of every pursuit and the annihilation of every influence, now consecrated to the service of virtue. Has poetry never exhibited its capacity for good? Has its spell never been wielded by pure hands, or directed to a worthy purpose? Has it uniformly been the companion of crime and the enemy of religion? Even if no other instance could be specified, the fact that poetry is found in the Bible—that many portions of the inspired word were originally “wedded to immortal verse,” in a union which has for its seal the sanction of Heaven, should suffice to silence all caviling, and put to flight all misconception, and awaken a fear, in the minds of those who would discard poetry from the companionship of virtue, lest they should be guilty of the presumption of laboring to separate what God hath joined together.

It may be proper, however, to inquire how far the unfavorable opinion, which prevails with regard to poets and poetry, is in accordance with truth. The terms poet and sinner are by some regarded as synonymous. We are far from maintaining that all the worshippers of the Muse should partake of the honors of canonization, or that all the written poetry in the world should be classed indiscriminately in the Hagiographa of Christendom. Amid the varieties of poetical character, which have appeared, it would be impossible to present a single picture, which would exhibit a uniform moral likeness of the class. In forming a general judgment on the

subject, there are several considerations which should be regarded. There is no class of men whose lives have excited a more minute and prying curiosity, the events of whose private histories have been more closely scrutinized, or more publicly revealed to the world ; and hence a false impression may be conveyed, as to the proportion of their faults, not because they really have more than other men, but because the faults of others are permitted to repose in a more enviable obscurity. There is no class of men whose characters are more exposed to the hostilities of prejudice, or whose motives are more liable to the misconceptions of ignorance, so that the representation which the world receives may be only a caricature of the reality. It is to be remembered also, that the poet is exposed to other influences, in the formation of his character and the direction of his life, besides those which spring immediately from poetry. He possesses the infirmities of our fallen nature, which are common to all men. He is exposed to the peculiar acerbations of a sedentary life, and the jealousies, calumnies, and disappointments attending a career of authorship. There is, moreover, often a proneness among some genuine poets, pitiable it is true, but not the less natural, to foster and encourage a false estimate of their character, from a pride of singularity, and a mock defiance of public sentiment, in exhibiting the supposed eccentricities of genius. But especially is it to be borne in mind, that not the highly gifted of the order, but the vast herd of poetasters and poet-apes, vile imitators of the lowest efforts of the art, and the worst features in the character of some model of genius, who assume the name of poet, on no other ground than a resemblance of

defect, and wear it to no other end but to bring it into disrepute—that these, from their greater number and active impertinence, have been chiefly instrumental in conveying to the public mind a general impression of the class to which they unworthily belong. If these considerations be duly weighed, they are sufficient to meet the force of any argument which may be drawn from the general character of poets, against the legitimate moral tendency of poetry. What though every poet be not, in very deed, a saint? Because poetry does not regenerate a depraved character, shall we therefore conclude, that its tendency is essentially and necessarily evil? No believer in the Gospel can so judge, without departing from its declarations, which represent man as originally corrupt, and recognize but one power, and that divine, which can effect his regeneration. To expect such a result from any other quarter, is certainly unauthorized. Yet all influences which do not reach to this point, are not, therefore, corrupting in their tendency. They may be associated with impurity, they may be enslaved by sin, but when released and elevated to their proper position, they clearly manifest a natural affinity to all that is pure and ennobling in its tendency.

But to turn from the moral character of poets, to the moral tendency of their productions. We are no apologists for the abominations which have appeared in the world under the form of poetry. On the contrary, we design, at a future stage of this investigation, to examine and expose such lamentable perversions of genius and taste and sentiment. Our present purpose is to inquire how far these are to be re-

garded as indicative of the true design and necessary result of the element itself. And we affirm, without hesitation, that the want of principle, or of care in an author, is, in every instance, the source of any corrupting influence that arises from this form of literature. That this want of principle and care has existed, in many instances, cannot be denied. That this corrupting influence operates widely and powerfully through the various channels of current polite literature, to which, in our definition, we have attached the term poetry, is equally evident. But this is one of the necessary evils to which we are exposed in the present disordered and imperfect state of existence. It is not more flagrant, nor should it excite greater surprise, than our necessary subjection to the contaminating influence of conversation and intercourse with society. The same spirit prevails, the same sentiments are indulged, the same characters appear, at least in their evil elements, as much in real life, as in the visions of corrupt poetry. But who would think of secluding himself from intercourse with society, because of the impure social influences which prevail? There are many of the lighter forms of poetry, which are not designed or calculated to produce any direct moral result. They are mere transient pictures of life and nature, which serve to please the fancy and gratify the taste. It is, we admit, a question, how far these seemingly mental enjoyments are connected with the interests of virtue. If they are not essential ingredients, they constitute at least the beautiful ornaments and propitious accompaniments of moral excellence. But there are many productions, which go beyond this point of neutrality, and are

decidedly corrupting in their character. They breathe an impure spirit; they adorn vice with attractions; they clothe virtue in a garb of meanness; they scoff at the sacred ties of humanity and the high obligations of religion. But these generally are not the offspring of the highest order of genius. And whenever true genius thus degrades itself, its sunken attitude, its crippled march, its palsied form, its dimmed eye, its faded beauty, and departed strength, bear testimony to its fall, in the deterioration of its productions. But even in such cases of perverted and injured talent, (to adopt the language of an eloquent defender of poetry.) “strains of pure feeling, touches of tenderness, images of innocent happiness, sympathies with suffering virtue, bursts of scorn or indignation at the hollowness of the world, passages true to our moral nature, often escape in an immoral work, and show us how hard it is for a gifted spirit to divorce itself wholly from what is good.” It is chiefly in the lower forms of literature, that a decidedly corrupting influence prevails. We see it in the ephemeral trash so copiously issued abroad at the present day, which displays promiscuously the half-poetry of lust, the pompous turgidity of putrid heroism, the reels and staggers of drunken romance—the froth and scum and foul litter that float on the surface of the stream, the food and sport of the minnow tribe, which cluster around in frantic circles, their lightness refusing a deeper element, and their organs forbidding a nobler sustenance.

There are two causes which operate thus to pervert and degrade the exercise of genius. The one is found in the evil propensities of the author’s own character: the other in the

evil propensities of the vulgar reading multitude, whom he aims to gratify and delight, but not to enlighten and improve. A present fleeting popularity, or its more agreeable expression in speedy pecuniary profits, constitutes the only motive to enterprise. Under such a law, literature inevitably pursues a sinking process. And so long as this tendency is not counteracted by opposite and higher motives, the evil must continue to multiply itself and the causes which produce it ; and we will never behold the period, when we shall not have reason to deplore this melancholy perversion of the highest powers of our nature, until the character of gifted men, and the general character of society undergo an important transformation ; until genius recognizes its responsibility to a higher tribunal than that of the public taste, and devotes its powers to a nobler purpose than that of catering to the depraved propensities of our fallen nature, and realizes its highest dignity as the champion of virtue, and finds its true fame where alone it is immortal, in the approbation of God and the plaudits of a holy universe. But when we turn from this gloomy prospect, our hearts are cheered by contemplating, on the other hand, a bright array of productions, which unquestionably tend to purify and exalt our nature. They are generally of the highest order of true poetry. They may not be the most popular. This could not be expected in a world where passions and tastes prevail so opposite to the pure spirit which they breathe. But we maintain, that among such we find the purest essence of poetry.

We have extended our remarks on this view of the subject to a greater length, than to many will seem necessary or

desirable. We have been laboring to establish what of itself is sufficiently evident to every discriminating and reflecting mind. But we have an object in view beyond the bare question at issue. We aim, not merely to distinguish between the legitimate tendency of poetry, and its corrupt perversions, but by recognizing its power for evil, when abused, we would appreciate its capacity for good when worthily exercised; and thus lead to a practical conclusion, effecting the opinions of those, who, acting under a false impression, are disposed to surrender this important agent exclusively into hands that wield it against the interests of virtue and religion. Poetry if not evil, by a law of its own nature, cannot be rendered hopelessly so, by the frequency of its perversions. If when its nature is prostituted into fellowship with impurity, it is arrayed in such dangerous attractions and possesses so potent a spell, as justly to excite the apprehension of virtuous minds, may it not, when its nature is released from this enthrallment, and elevated to its proper dignity, exhibit still lovelier charms and wield a still stronger fascination, in behalf of goodness and purity? Shall we disown so beautiful and so mighty a power as the champion of truth, and witness, without regret, its brilliant armor gleaming in the ranks of our enemies? It is vain to affect indifference. It is absurd to think of meeting it with sneers and ridicule and contempt. It is foolish to cry feeble, frivolous and fantastic, and then turn away in disdain, and suppose that its spirit is annihilated by our neglect. It will live, and it must live forever. Its nature is indestructible. Its spirit is immortal. You must brutalize the human soul and overthrow the fabric

of nature, before that spirit will be crushed: Poetry pervades the moral and the physical universe. Wherever features of beauty and excellence, of majesty and glory appear, there its elements exist, whether in the variegated dominions of external nature, or in the hidden world of mysteries in the human soul. The earth with its many forms of loveliness and grace, of splendor and sublimity, its verdure and flowers, its plains and mountains, and rivers and oceans ; the unchanging glory of the far off sky, with its countless orbs of light and myriads of unknown worlds ; the varied relations of life, the noblest actions and achievements of man, the deep and tender feelings of the heart, the ties of country and of home ; the innocent joys of infancy, and the sympathies and sorrows of age ; the hopes and fears and memories, and the lofty aspirations of the spirit, which rise above and stretch beyond the present life, and that mysterious crowd of emotions, which burn and agitate the soul through the period of its earthly existence,—all these are instinct and living with the spirit of poetry. All these must be destroyed before poetry can be annihilated. The stream will continue to flow while these fountains exist ; but it is as dreadful to contemplate, as it is impossible to realize such a consummation.

Suppose all poetry to disappear ;—But before this can be, we must suppose all the sources of poetry to be destroyed. Then, let every form of grace and every hue of beauty be removed. Let every breath of sweetness and every tone of melody be still. Let the flowers of fresh verdure of the earth fade away. Let the sun arise, darkened and shorn of his glory, and set without a parting smile to beautify and bless

the world. Let Aurora hide her blushing face in clouds, and Vesper tear her crimsoned banner from the sky; and then hang out the sable curtain of despair. And let "the stars, which are the poetry of heaven," be extinguished; and the moon, sad mourner, ride pale and solitary through a darkened sky, and weave with her beams a winding sheet to enshroud the beauty and glory of the universe. And then let every tie of endearment be torn from the heart of man. Let all the thrilling hopes and beautiful yearnings of his spirit be crushed. Let him pass through life with nothing around him, but a blasted and barren waste, without an oasis to cheer the gloom; without one sign of life, save the fearful sirocco that sweeps over its surface; and nothing in prospect, but a dull eternity of pulseless and passionless existence. Let all this be done, and then, and not till then, will poetry be banished from the earth; for these are the many fountains that feed this bright and living stream, which gives the bounty of its freshness and the melody of its waters to the world.

But who would not shrink from such a doom? And because hateful and poisonous plants sometimes vegetate in our soil, shall we therefore exchange the green garment of spring for the frozen mantle of winter? Because desolating tempests occasionally sweep over the land, shall the music of the winds be hushed, and the zephyr's wing be broken? Because fitful meteors now and then blaze along the sky, shall we blot out every star, and tear every jewel from the robe of heaven? And because the stain of immorality and lust may to some extent defile the productions and disfigure the character of some men of genius, shall we therefore condemn

poetry as an evil, and shrink from it as a curse? Assuredly not! For even in these most lamentable examples of perverted talent, we find the strongest evidence of the high and holy origin of poetry. The rushing pinions of the eagle may be fettered in the dust; but then, degraded and helpless as he is, the upward glance of his bold eye shows the loftiness of his home, and the purity of his element.

An objection is raised against the influence of poetry, on the ground that it fills the mind with empty visions, and crowds the heart with lawless emotions—that it awakens extravagant expectations, inconsistent with reality, and fosters romantic sentiments, at variance with the sober duties and actual relations of life. Two questions here arise. What are the visions, the emotions, and the sentiments of true poetry? And then, what are the just views of life, and the real aspect of our duties and relations in the present state of existence? If the answers to these questions harmonize, the objection disappears. Let it be remembered, that there are two extremes, directly opposite, toward either of which there may be a departure in our minds from the true level and proper sphere of human life. The one is above, the other is beneath the plan of Providence. Both are remote from truth. Both are *illusions of the imagination*. But the one is an illusion of air: the other is an illusion of dust. To which of these is there a greater proneness in human character? Is the life of man generally above, or beneath its true position? No, the views, and feelings, to which poetry is opposed, are false views and unworthy feelings, although they be such as are generally entertained by mankind. This life is not isolated in its interest, nor circumscribed in its

relations and prospects. It does not contain within itself the chief good. The gratification of the senses, and the comfort and sustenance of the body are not the ultimate ends of existence. Man's nature is prostituted, the scene which he inhabits is sunk and degraded, when such becomes the settled plan of human life. Yet such are the practical views, such are the sober realities, sanctioned by the wisdom of this world, which sneers at poetry as foolish and visionary, and ridicules poets as the dupes of imagination. But if by "visionary" is meant views unreal and untrue; if by "imagination" is meant delusion, we affirm that the sober devotees of Mammon are the most visionary and imaginative beings of the race. Their views of life are false. Their impressions of external objects are unreal. They are victims of the grossest delusion. They conceive the body to be superior to the soul. They place a false estimate on wealth. They forget its insufficiency to yield satisfaction, its liability to danger and accident, its inevitable termination at death. In the imagination of such an one, the world is transformed into a radiant temple—a glittering idol is enthroned within—himself a worshipper prostrate in his devotions—and that idol is his God, and that temple is his heaven, and that worship is the great employment of his life! There may be the order of a system, a regularity of movement, no wayward impulses, no propensities to crime, no collision with the relations of society; there may be prudence, sagacity and skillful contrivance; there may be diligent employment and vigorous enterprise displayed on such a scheme of life, and the man be referred to as a model of practical sense and good character. But his soul is

shrunk to a skeleton. Its high aspirations, its tender sensibilities, its generous emotions, its pure affections are paralyzed, if not dead. The physical energies of life are active ; but its social, intellectual and moral powers are suspended in their exercise. In his youth he may have displayed a different character. He may have delighted in the emotions of poetry and the visions of romance. His heart may have glowed with generous sentiments, and dilated with the dreams of earthly love. The future may have been mirrored to his imagination in all the colors of Paradise. Doubtless the prospect was far higher than the reality. Doubtless there were many wayward impulses, and wild desires and frantic hopes, unsanctioned by truth and inconsistent with duty. Doubtless even then an "unclean spirit" lodged within him, although it assumed a form of beauty and clothed itself in a mantle of light. At length his character was transformed. His former enthusiasm departed, and with it perhaps many of his evil propensities. He became a sober, selfish, calculating man of the world. Wise heads admired the change, and affirmed that "the unclean spirit had gone out of the man." True, the house is "swept and garnished;" but alas! that spirit has returned in another form, and "with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

We admit there are important duties, necessary avocations in life, with which poetry has no immediate connection. But we deny that to such it manifests any direct opposition. Such pursuits are often degraded, in our estimation, by habit, familiarity, and an unworthy association with grovelling ideas

of human life. We admit that poetry has no necessary connection with the means of subsistence, or the methods of accumulating wealth. But we deny that by any law it forbids the sustenance of the body, and a suitable provision for the wants of life. True, it counteracts that general proneness in the human mind to sink in subjection to a blind, selfish, and sordid spirit of wordliness. And in this we recognize its benign tendency. The soul has its wants, as well as the body. It craves its proper nourishment. This world is designed as a temporary scene, on which to purify its tastes, exercise its affections, and mature its powers for an immortal destiny. When human life is elevated to a level with this sublime plan, all its inferior duties and relations move in harmony. The whole scene is radiant in the colors of poetry. When the soul is thus recognized in its true dignity, the realities of nature and life are redeemed from their degradation. They appear in a new form, they have a higher, but not a false signification; they appear in a light different from that in which they meet the gaze of ordinary men, but it is the light of truth. The visions of poetry are not spectres, but realities. Poetry is but the transfiguration of truth. On the mount of vision, its raiment is white and glistening, and its face shines above the brightness of the sun. But this transfiguration is not the addition of an unreal brightness, but the unfolding of a veiled and hidden glory. All truth appears to the vulgar eye of the multitude under an eclipse. Like him, who moved abroad in his humiliation amongst men, the great incarnate personation of truth itself. His divinity was shrouded from the public gaze; and when he was transfigured before his disciples, it was only a

transient gleam of his true original glory that glanced around his form.

In one respect the visions of poetry may be said to be unreal, when it assumes the form of fictitious narrative. But it is only in the different location of the characters, and the peculiar combination and association of the materials. The characters are originally drawn from real life. The materials are derived from nature ; and the structure of the vision itself must be a correspondence with nature and life, or it awakens no sympathy, and wields no fascination for good or evil. And what, though the creations of the poet are more beautiful and perfect than any real scene in nature—tinged and colored as they are with the hues that pervade his own spirit, like the lingering image of a lost Eden, at once a memory of past innocence and a presentiment and proof of future immortality—shall we dread the delusion and deplore the charm ? The soul is not chained down, in its perceptions, to the visible realities which surround the body. It has the capacity to rise upward into a higher element ; and it is purifying and strengthening to exercise that capacity. We have a two-fold nature—a body with its earthward tendencies, and a soul with its heavenward aspirations. This winged nature should not crawl forever in the dust. The birds of the air teach wisdom to man. They descend to the ground and gather their necessary food ; but then mount upward on elastic wing and pour forth their songs of joy and freedom to the wind. And shall man's nature exhaust its energies in procuring the necessary means of subsistence ? Shall he not exercise the wing, and tune the voice of his immortal spirit, that it may be

plumed for a higher flight, and prepared for a nobler song, when at length it shall emerge from the shadows of the present, into the glories of a brighter and better world?

CHAPTER IV.

POETRY—ITS AFFINITY WITH THE SPIRIT AND PRECEPTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE leading object contemplated in the present series of essays, is to vindicate Poetry and Religion from the charge of a mutual antagonism—to maintain, on the contrary, that in many respects they exhibit the congeniality of kindred spirits; and that, therefore, the highest excellence of each is secured, when both are practically united. All this is attempted in the face of the acknowledged fact, that as yet, in their actual manifestation on the field of literature, they have often been not only disunited in their sphere, but placed at positive variance as hostile powers. Based on this fact, as a practical demonstration of some inherent antipathy, there have arisen two distinct prejudices in the minds of two opposite classes of persons. The one regard poetry as necessarily corrupting in its tendency, and as feeble, frivolous and visionary in its nature. The other regard religion as enveloped in a frigid and gloomy atmosphere, which extinguishes the glow of genius, and obscures the visions of poetry. According to the plan

proposed, we meet these prejudices separately and in succession. Thus we have before us two distinct branches of the general subject. We shall conclude our observations on the first division in the present article.

The steps previously taken were all preparatory and conducive to the point at which we have now arrived; and the conclusions hitherto reached but open the way for the inference which we would at present draw as to the affinity existing between the spirit of Poetry and that of Christianity. In our first essay we vindicated the intellectual dignity of poetry, and showed its accordance with truth, and reason, and nature. In our next we maintained, on the same ground, the perpetuity of its existence, and refuted the charge of its necessary decline before the advancement of science and civilization. In our last we inferred from the dignity of its nature and the perpetuity of its presence, a claim to the character of one of the primary and established influences introduced by the Divine hand into the present system; and consequently, its benign and salutary operation on the nature of man as a social and moral being, in cultivating his sensibilities, refining his affections, and elevating his aspirations above gross, temporal, and material objects. In thus considering its influence on the social and moral interests of mankind, we included necessarily the idea of immortality. We regarded the present life as preparatory to a future and higher existence. Any other view involves the whole scene in darkness, disorder, and degradation. Divest human life of this exalted prospect, and the idea of moral obligation disappears. Detach the soul of man from all connection and sympathy with a future state,

and the present scene sinks into a low theatre of physical gratification, on which the brutes are his superiors. Nay, the soul itself becomes a superfluity on such a system, save as the obsequious servant of the body, supplying the office which is more efficiently filled, in the case of inferior animals, by a blind instinct. Morality is a term without signification, unless it be applied to human life as connected in its interests and hopes with an immortal destiny. The social and moral relations of the race, therefore, stand identified with the dictates of religion; and, of course, of that religion which alone is true, among a thousand impostures—Christianity. Such are the several links in the chain of our argument, as to the legitimate influence of the element of poetry. And if our previous conclusions have been just and warranted, we might safely repose the final inference of an affinity between poetry and religion, on the single exhibition of the truth of Christianity. For if, as we have shown, poetry harmonizes with all the relations of human life, fosters the best affections of the heart, cultivates its purest aspirations, and thus advances that moral improvement which is appropriate and desirable, on the supposition of man's immortality; and if the conception of a God, and the prospect of a future state of existence are necessarily involved in the idea of moral obligation, then, our relations to God and our prospects of immortality must be viewed only through the medium of that gospel which "brings life and immortality to light." Christianity is the religion of the human race. Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life."

"In his blest life,
We see the path, and in his death the price,
And in his great ascent, the proof supreme
Of immortality."

But we do not propose leaving the question solely on this ground. Without insisting on the cumulative argument, which we have thus reared, step after step, as we have advanced, we design to point out, from the eminence which we have already gained, some traces of affinity, visible even here, to confirm the testimony collected in our ascending progress. It would be both inappropriate and unnecessary here to enlarge on the evidences of Christianity. It may not be amiss, however, to consider that the truth of Christianity necessarily implies not merely a nominal, but a real and universal ascendancy, in its obligations over the race; so that it should be regarded as a sole and supreme substitute for all the illegitimate forms and manifestations of religion that have ever appeared. That Christianity is true, and that it is exclusively the true religion—the only system adapted to the nature and condition of man—are often regarded as distinct propositions. But they are in fact identical. The one necessarily includes the other. But this absolute authority is demanded by Christianity, not merely in contradistinction to the absurd forms of heathen superstition and idolatry, which have been dissolved before its advancing light, or which still exist in the regions of ignorance and barbarism. The same high claim to universal ascendancy is set up in the face of all modifications and expressions whatever of the religious sentiment amongst mankind. The religion revealed in the Bible, the religion of Christ, is that peculiar mode of God's moral administration,

which is maintained over our apostate world—the only religion adapted to the necessities and possibly to the capacities of fallen and sinful creatures. What is termed “natural religion” is not a distinct system, complete within itself. So far as it can be viewed as isolated from revelation, it presents no just proportions, no adequate symmetry, no harmonious plan, nothing, in fact, to constitute it a system of religion. We discover a few vague indications of duty, and occasional dim and doubtful gleams of a future destiny, to have been the amount of natural religion actually displayed in the history of man, when unenlightened by the gospel. How much farther the intimations of nature might have conducted, had they been wisely observed and honestly followed, is another question ; which, since the introduction of the gospel, we are enabled more clearly to determine ; and looking abroad over this visible scene, in the disclosing light thus admitted, men may be perverse enough to fabricate a system, with such assistance, and denominate it natural religion, without acknowledging their obligation to this higher source for the materials which they appropriate to a confessedly hostile purpose. But the rational and consistent result of the superadded illumination of the gospel, is a discovery of the deficiency of nature’s light and the inadequacy of nature’s resources, and the consequent necessity and fitness of that gracious interposition which is revealed ; so that Christianity becomes the requisite and crowning complement of the religion of nature.

Under the teachings of unassisted reason the honest searcher after moral truth is baffled by mystery, perplexed with doubt, annoyed with the constant failure to attain the permanent sat-

isfaction which he desires ; his spirit, the meanwhile, if honest in self-scrutiny, is burdened with guilt, agitated with fear, and darkened with despair. Such is the religion of nature, unincumbered by superstition and followed to its rational results. We behold a mass of disjointed fragments. We see the mutilated and fallen pillars of a temple once imposing and beautiful, now a heap of ruins. Christianity re-organizes the ruins and reconstructs the edifice. It rises on a new foundation, remodelled on a new plan, and crowned with new radiance and glory ; the old materials blended and harmonized in fairer proportions with the new ; the charms of nature enhanced and exalted in accordant union with the higher attractions of faith. We claim, therefore, for Christianity, an absolute and universal dominion, as the only system in which all the moral and religious qualities connected with the human race find their adequate expression, their consistent arrangement and their complete development.

There is, we believe, at present, a general acquiescence in the high prerogative which is thus assumed. Indeed, it could not consistently be otherwise, when there is a general admission of the truth of Christianity. The age of open and daring infidelity is past. The Bible, for the most part, receives the outward expressions of deference and submission. Whether such expressions are always sincere and cordial, and indicate the real inward acquiescence of the mind, is, however, more than questionable. Hence we find swarms of absurdities and shoals of visionary theories, unsanctioned by the dictates and opposed to the spirit of Christianity, yet claiming its title and patronage. Systems and enterprises are afloat in

almost every direction, which discard the essential and peculiar features of the gospel, and yet aspire to be denominated Christian. So that it has become far more pertinent to inquire, what is the distinctive nature of Christianity, than to ask whence is its origin, or what its authority. Leaving out of view the grosser forms of this illegitimacy, we would advert to a style of nominal Christianity, which prevails especially among what are termed literary circles, from which are discarded many of the humiliating, but yet exalting doctrines and mysteries of our holy religion. It is sometimes denominated invidiously, "the religion of taste and sentiment"—"a poetical religion." These epithets of derision are, no doubt, often applied with as little discrimination as charity. Still it must be admitted there is some show of plausibility in the disparagement of poetry which is thus insinuated. Often, however, the charge amounts to more than an insinuation. The prosaic defender of frigid orthodoxy, who holds poetry next in abhorrence to Beelzebub, if, indeed, he does not regard it as his veritable personification, when transformed into an angel of light, pointing to such quarters, as we have indicated, will triumphantly exclaim: "Lo, the effects of all your fine fancy-work and poetry!" With equal propriety, when any rare instance of outbreaking profligacy occurs in social life, it is echoed abroad, "Behold the fruit of your romantic and poetical extravagance!" Thus a clamor is raised. A vague and general impression is circulated. The verdict of public opinion is announced. And poetry is anathematized as a diabolical agent, which, at one time, poisons the currents of social life and severs the restraints of morality, and at another, enters

the very sanctuary of religion, and there perverts and desecrates to profane abominations the sacred elements of faith and piety. We have previously considered, and we believe satisfactorily answered the objection as to the supposed corrupting influence of poetry on the social and moral relations of man ; and we would only advert to the distinction there drawn and the arguments there employed, as equally a sufficient refutation of the charge of an adverse tendency of poetry in the department of religion. We have already established the position, that the spirit of poetry is not essentially evil. But if this be admitted, and if poetry be an element introduced into the present system by its author, and perpetuated as the system is more fully developed, and the nature of man advances in knowledge and refinement ; and if, in the revelation of the Divine will to man, the spirit and the form of poetry stand associated with the very structure of Christianity, then we have the higher assurance that this element is not only innocent in itself, but pure, elevated, and Christian in its sympathies and affinities ; that, whenever it claims an opposite fellowship, it is not in compliance with a law of its own nature ; but that, when any antipathy is displayed, it originates in some secret moral perversity in the character, and does not spring spontaneously from the fountain of poetry.

With regard, then, to those devotees of polite literature, who discard the peculiar and essential doctrines of the gospel, and rest with self-complacency in what is termed a poetical religion, it may be affirmed, that their having *any* religious tendency is owing to poetry, but that their having *merely this* is owing to moral depravity, which is not poetical. Poets, as

a class, may not be more disposed to Christianity than others. But the spirit of poetry comes under a different law. There may be an affinity in this even when there is an antipathy in other elements of the character ; and we are claiming for poetry *an affinity*, not *an identity* with Christianity. We believe, however, that this spirit, as it springs, all beautiful and radiant from the earth, rises to its true dignity, and expands in its perfect enlargement only when it rejoices in pure and congenial fellowship with that higher spirit which descends from Heaven. Christianity, in its distinctive features, is a remedial system ; superhuman in its origin, devised and revealed by the Divine mind, and requiring the mediatorial intervention of a Divine Person for its accomplishment. It presupposes the existence of moral evil, the universal prevalence of sin. It aims at the regeneration of human character. It requires humility, penitence, and faith. It awakens love and hope, enkindles the ardent sentiments of charity, and the high and holy aspirations of piety. Now, if the spirit of poetry harmonizes with these lofty spiritual results, it must also with the intervening stages of that moral transition which are indispensable in order to their attainment.

Unless we suppose humanity already in a state of moral perfection, there must be a progress demanded in the scale of excellence. But if it be, as it is, a progress from sin to purity, from debasement and ruin to the dignity of spiritual life, then such a transformation is inevitably attended by those humble and penitent dispositions to which the provisions of Christianity are adapted. Humility is the rational sentiment of a creature conscious of its natural infirmities ; but

humility is deepened into penitence, when there is superadded a consciousness of sin ; and this consciousness in the case of a depraved and fallen being, is simultaneous, if not identical, with a just discernment and approbation of rectitude. The love of purity implies a disapprobation and abhorrence of sin, and the new-born existence of right moral feeling in the soul, includes all that sorrow, shame and self-reproach, which constitute the repentance demanded by Christianity. There is no genuine return to spiritual life ; there is no true progress in moral excellence ; there is no pure exercise of devotional feeling and religious aspiration on the surface of our sinful world, unless its first faltering steps advance through this " narrow way," which is open to the faith of the humble and penitent. Any exhibition of piety which discards these conditions, or proudly refuses to submit to such a process of self-renunciation, is empty, heartless, superficial and visionary—the glittering semblance, but not the glowing reality of religious life.

As to the religion of mere taste and sentiment, which is supposed anti-christian in its tendency, we have then a satisfactory solution. Its antipathy originates in the moral state of the character. The spirit of poetry, in such cases, is clogged by a foreign incumbrance, and crippled by an unnatural perversion. It disowns the authority of truth, and departs from the sphere of nature. It becomes wild and frantic among spectres and shadows ; or degenerates into gross materialism, and revels in luxuriant sensuality. *Christianity unites Truth and Poetry at the altar of devotion.* When this high union is forbidden or forsaken, poetry ruins

wild in the visions of its cheerless solitude, or sinks degraded and prostituted in the embraces of putrid lust. Still there may be seen gleams of its native brightness in the confusion of its madness, and traces of its original beauty in the depths of its pollution. From the frequency of such melancholy examples in the character and works of poets, has arisen the prevalent disparagement of poetry with which we have previously contended—the impression as to its unreal, fantastic, and visionary nature. Because, when dissevered from moral principle and religious truth, when divorced by blindness, pride or personal corruption, from that high and harmonious system of truth embodied in the Bible, it still retains its admiration for the beautiful, the sublime, and the infinite : and refusing to behold these qualities when alone they are displayed in union with truth and reality, seeks to find them in a region of vacancy and dreams ; and fabricates gorgeous visions of false heroism, and paints florid scenes of unreal beauty and bliss—at one time revelling in the Elysium of profane mythology, and at another, grovelling in the gilded delights of a sensual Paradise ; because such is the eccentric and wayward career of this wild spirit in those cases, alas ! too frequent, in which it spurns all fellowship with Christianity : because when thus manifested, it neither inhabits earth, nor aspires to Heaven ; but expatiates in a fairy-land of its own creation, and delights in visions which are foreign alike to the sober relations of this life and the higher prospects of a life to come—at war both with the experience of the present and the truth of the future—alien both to the visible realities of sordid secularism, and the invisible realities of Christian

faith ; *therefore*, it is vaguely and foolishly supposed, that poetry itself is but an element of delusion,—a thing of air, and mist, and shadows ; that it vanishes before the light of reason, is dispelled and broken by the touch of reality ; that its colored forms are but phantoms ; its treasures the toys of a child, or the gewgaws of an idiot ; and all the glittering array of its triumphs but the empty and floating exhalations of a vast vapor-realm, over which is enthroned the fantastic queen, Imagination !

But who that has a mind capable of penetrating beneath the surface of things, and distinguishing the various qualities which combine in the formation of character, does not perceive that the element of poetry, in such cases, is perverted by the force of moral qualities, with which it is associated ? And who, admitting this perversion as foreign and antecedent to whatever is strictly poetical in the character, does not perceive even in its eccentric waywardness, its aerial flights, its misdirected impulses amid scenes unreal and visionary, evident traces of that spiritual affinity in poetry for which we are contending ? Who does not perceive, that while clogged with a moral incumbrance, which sinks it from heaven, yet upborne by the strength of its own pinion, it rises from the earth to seek some more congenial element ; although blinded and burdened, and baffled in the pursuit of illusive shadows, it still floats in the misty mid-air of delusion ? Who does not perceive in these inconsistent and impractical manifestations of poetry clear and impressive indications, that, disjoined from its proper sphere and sunk from its true elevation, in its restless and impulsive movements it still retains a long-

ing thirst, an undefined ethereal aspiration, which is met and fully satisfied only in the pure and spiritual revelations of the gospel? All this is perfectly consistent with the mournful truth of human depravity, and the absolute necessity of a divine influence in the regeneration of man's nature. The poet may not be a saint. Considering the high gifts of genius which he perverts, and the mighty motives which he resists, he may be even "the chief of sinners." But he is such not from the promptings of the spirit of poetry—but *in spite* of its legitimate tendencies.

Here we must reiterate our protest against taking the general character of poets as an infallible index to the spirit of poetry. There is as much diversity in the moral traits of poets as in those of any other class of men. The element of poetry, in each instance, is tinged and modified by other elements in the character. No one poet has ever lived who embodied in his own person a perfect representation of all the features of poetry in their harmony and fullness. We form a just estimate on the subject, when we distinguish and separate certain elements from the heterogeneous mass of character, when we extract certain essential qualities, and confer upon these, in their just and full assemblage, the title of the spirit of poetry. The source of confusion in our views, as to the tendency of such a spirit, lies in the different images each one may form under this abstract title, and the difficulty of keeping such an abstraction distinct from the real manifestation of poetry in the character and works of those poets, with whom he may be, by partiality or accident, the most familiar.

But taking poets and poetry as they exist, (excluding from

view, of course, that numerous tribe which have swarmed in every generation, whose sole claim to such a classification, lies in the antic mimicry of, with them, the only imitable freaks of genius,) we affirm that there is displayed between poets, as a class, and the truly pious, more genuine sympathy, more spiritual affinity, than between any other classes of men, separated by the same moral distinction. We appeal here to the positive demonstration of facts, as well as to the inward consciousness of every devout mind. We refer to the peculiar *sensation* awakened by the career of a great and gifted poet, who wields the spell of genius and controls the fountains of human sympathy—a sensation distinct and different from that which attends the person of one great and gifted in another capacity. Take, for example, Byron and Burns, with Napoleon and Cromwell. Who is ignorant of the peculiar interest awakened by the character of the poet above that of the hero, especially in the religious community! His waywardness may excite censure. His immoralities may incur rebuke. His crimes may demand exposure and denunciation; but associated with the firmness of Christian principle, which condemns the offender, there glows, in the benevolence of a pious heart, a tender sympathy, a sorrowful affection, an anxious solicitude, expressing itself in regrets, and tears, and ardent prayers, in behalf of the erring and unhappy poet. Witness, as a touching exemplification of this remark, that beautiful and tender prayer, written in behalf of Lord Byron, found among the papers of a pure and pious lady after her death; which, being communicated to the poet, called forth that noble and thrilling response, that, like a transient revelation from the mysterious depths of his trou-

bled spirit, sent forth an alleviating light over the darkness of his past career, and cast almost the only gleam of hope over his final destiny.* This is but a solitary instance, yet it accords with a general truth.

How shall we explain this special sympathy, this tender and affectionate solicitude, which follows the career of the wayward and wicked poet? Is it owing to the public notoriety of the object, or to a view of the vast means and resources of usefulness, that lie within the compass of his power, which are perverted to an evil purpose? No, there are others equal in these respects, who are not thus regarded. There is a sympathetic discernment of high gifts and faculties which belong to another sphere—of tastes and tendencies and aspirations which are excluded from their congenial element—a glowing heart, an eagle eye, a soaring wing, fitted to scale the summits of faith, to bask in the sunlight of immortality, and expand with the raptures of devotion! Here lies the burden of Christian sympathy for the poet. And the secret sighs of this sorrowful solicitude bear testimony to a conscious affinity between the spirit of Poetry and the spirit of Christianity.

The true poet, according to our conception of the character, is one endowed with the highest order of human faculties. To the ancients, he seemed a man inspired. He possesses, indeed, a sort of inspiration; but it is the inspiration of truth—at least of partial truth. He is actuated by no mystic

* In glancing over a late religious journal, the writer met with the following, which occurs in a review of Byron's *Childe Harold*. In remarking with admiration on the noted stanza, commencing, "Our life is a false nature," &c, the reviewer adds, "We are sorry to think that he has too probably painted from his own bosom. But if his soul is 'sick,' we trust it is not 'immedicable.' At least, we can assure him *there is a balm in Gilead, there is a Physician there.*"

afflatus ; neither is he inspired by the touch of a divine influence, as were the prophets of old, through whom were transmitted the revelations of heaven. With him, as it is the rational inspiration of a gifted mind, impressed truthfully by the living realities arrayed in all their thrilling import before his vision. He sees not only their outward form, but their inward life and significance. He views them not as isolated facts, barren and lifeless, under a microscopic inspection, but as joined in the harmony of their clustering associations, and eloquent in the depth of their spiritual teachings. His knowledge is not as minute, is more profound and comprehensive, than that imparted by cold scientific discovery. His mind grapples at once the high and mighty *inferences* of Science. The electric speed and power of his associations, the intensity of his mental vision, the elevation and comprehensiveness of his observant faculties amid the beauties, wonders and glories of this visible scene, awaken within him the consistent and rational inspiration of poetry. The powers of his mind, and the emotions of his heart, move in glowing unison. The very preëminence of his intellectual energies awaken the spontaneous glow of admiration, the tenderness of sympathy, and the ardor of aspiration in his own breast. These thrilling sentiments, these ideas and emotions, demand a peculiar medium for their transmission. In their conception, they are termed, *imagination*—in their utterance, *poetry*. Thus this lovely Iris of the mind springs forth in its glory, as the sunlight of reason bursts over the cloud-land of emotion. Thus originates the element and form of poetry. It is the embodied harmony of Nature's spiritual voices—the glowing picture-land

guage of her hidden prophecies. The poet is the self annointed priest of Nature. His preëmiuence consists in the privilege of closer approach to her shrine, and of deeper access to her mysteries, and the consequent power of more lucid interpretation ; so that the vivid realities of his disclosure are substituted instead of the shadows of conjecture, that floated dimly over the minds of others. He reads the records of a higher wisdom in Nature, than that which governs the interests of mere physical existence. He mingles with the elements of a higher life. He beholds the thrilling testimony, amid " things seen and temporal," of a state of being more refined, exalted and enduring than the present. Thus, at least, an undefined ethereal aspiration is awakened. But wo ! to the poet who feels the glow only, and sees not the light ; who is impelled by an aspiration unsanctioned by truth ; who, impressed by the testimony of Nature to a destiny above and beyond the present, plunges recklessly onward amidst darkness and delusion ; who, bounding afar from the region of reality, loses his way amid the spectres of a visionary scene ; who, with mental discernment to read the vanity of this mortal abode, which sin has blasted with a curse, has not the moral tendency to lead him onward to a region of purity and peace ; who, with a wing of aspiration to lift him from earth, has not an eye of faith to guide him to Heaven. Better, for his own happiness, to have delved, like a mole, in the dust, than to flounder thus, like an eagle lost in an element of darkness ! Here we meet the solution of a fact that pertains to the poetical character—the proverbial gloom and wretchedness of poets. We believe such an impression has arisen mainly

from the experience of those of an immoral and irreligious character. But even here, in the inward discord and mental agony awakened by poetry, when abused and perverted in an impure element, we may discover traces of a latent affinity, which point to the pure and spiritual faith of Christianity as the abode of its peace, and the sphere of its harmony.

Poetry is preëminently spiritual in its tendencies. It coincides with religion, at least in this, that it seeks to elevate man "above the world." It repudiates all base and "beggarly elements." It selects, refines, and exalts the objects of its worship, and invests them with an element of spirituality. The essential feature of poetry is *admiration*. But the homage which it yields is a rational tribute of the soul. It worships beauty and sublimity in the vast temple of Nature. But these are not mere attributes of gross materialism. The beautiful and the sublime are but shadows of the spiritual and infinite resting on the surface of the physical world. Beauty and sublimity are not qualities inherent in matter. They exist in the latent associations of the mind, which refer to higher moral elements.

There is an implied recognition of a loftier spiritual sphere of existence in all that charms the eye and enraptures the soul of the poet on this visible scene. Everything poetical under heaven gleams in a spiritual radiance. Let the idea of a God be expunged from the universe, and what high charm of association would hallow its scenes, in the contemplation of the poet? With Sadducean incredulity, deny all spiritual existences, and reduce Nature and life to a mere moving mass of visible and tangible materialism, and the fountains of poetry

would at once disappear. Detach this mortal state from the vision and the hope of future immortality, let the pleasures of life be confined to the sensations of the body, and the prospects of earth all terminate in the grave, and the affections, the sympathies, the aspirations of humanity, which poetry embalms and consecrates, would all be extinguished ! Poetry, in every age, has recognized these lofty spiritual relations. The fabled beings of ancient mythology, were the poetical revelations of a religious faith. They were the representative images of qualities and conceptions in the obscure heathen mind, pertaining to a region of existence above and beyond the present. They have vanished, like painted cloud-racks from the eastern sky, before the effulgence of the rising sun. The spiritual elements, thus dimly shadowed forth on the firmament of pagan poetry, find their full realization in the sublime and glorious revelations of divine truth. The poetical creations of a superstitious credulity give place to the higher realities of Christian faith.

A spiritual world, an invisible God, an immortal destiny—these are now the only fountains of light that impart radiance to the brilliant and beautiful dominion of poetry. Indeed, no stroke more deadly, no blight more withering, could possibly fall upon all that is beautiful and excellent in the material world, and all that is refined and poetical in human life, than that which severed all connection between man and a higher order of beings, and cut away every hope associated with eternal existence. The starry firmament of poetry borrows its radiance from a distant and invisible sun. Let that sun be extinguished, and a deep midnight of cheerless gloom, ray-

less and starless, curtains the heavens ! And if one vestige of poetry still remains, it linger like the phosphorescent gleam around the place of tombs, the pale and ghastly halo of decay and death.

It would seem that poetry included, almost by necessity, a belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. There may not be the definite conception, the confident faith, the consistent peace, and the triumphant hope, which belong exclusively to the genuine Christian, in the personal views and feelings of the poet. His idea of God may be but the shadowy conception of a perverted imagination. His views of immortality may be unworthy, inconsistent, and confused. He may be blind to the glorious economy of Christian redemption, which intervenes, with harmonizing light, between an infinite God and apostate man. He may be ignorant, through unbelief, of the divine interposition, which opens a way of access to a future state of felicity and glory. But these fatal deficiencies of character must be traced to his personal perversity as a moral agent ; and not to the legitimate tendency of the poetical element. He maintains this unchristian attitude, to his peril as a man, and to his disparagement as a poet.

In conclusion, we would appeal to the Christian community. The final inference from this discussion points especially to them. We have attempted to describe the legitimate tendency of the spirit of poetry ; and, with a candid acknowledgment of its frequent and sad perversions, we have labored to exhibit its native affinity with all that is pure, spiritual, and Christian. The sober and rational conclusion, which we

would urge, is, *that the peculiar department of literature, over which this element presides, should not be hopelessly discarded from the patronage of Christian principle ; but that as far as possible, it should be rescued from the illegitimate usurpation of corruption and lust : and be made to contribute to the triumph of religious truth.* Under a just view of the corrupt and disorganizing tendency of a large proportion of modern literature, it has become fashionable in certain quarters, to denounce and prohibit *en masse* every thing that assumes the title, or wears the fascinating garb of polite letters. But an entirely false issue is thus made. The purpose, although pure in its origin, is both futile in its attempt, and mistaken in its aim ; if it is designed to excommunicate the whole æsthetic region over which poetry presides, from the enclosure of Christian approbation. These alluring forms of literature will continue to be circulated and read, in spite of all the denunciations that may be thundered from the pulpit and the religious press. They will exert a most potent agency in the formation of character. Their influence will be exclusively evil, if they are given over, forsaken and reprobated by the Christian community. It becomes, then, a question of no little practical importance, whether this spirit may not in a measure be reclaimed under the dominion of religious principle, so as to minister to the advancement of moral purity, and counteract its own desolating tendency, when under the blind guidance of irreligion and lust ? Surely it is no trifling suggestion, to inquire whether the refined pleasures of taste, and the beautiful hues of imagination, must be all surrendered in despair, as the brilliant retinue of iniquity, and may not be

secured as the propitious attendants of virtue ; whether these inviting and alluring avenues to the human soul must be open only to the approach of error and delusion, and be shut for ever against the entrance of truth and piety ?

But in addition to the advantage thus forfeited, and the injury thus allowed, in the department of literature, there is a twofold calamity, arising from this indiscriminate rejection of taste and poetry, which affects unfavorably the peculiar department of religion. Under such a prejudice, religious truth is contracted in its dimensions, and mutilated, deformed, degraded in its utterance ; and Christianity, shrunk to a skeleton, is clothed in the rags of a beggar.

True it is, the conditions of our salvation do not rest on the laws of literary taste. A poetical genius is not essential to saving faith. There is a wise and benevolent adaptation in the fundamental provisions of Christianity to men of all grades of intellectual cultivation. The rude, the ignorant, the illiterate may comprehend the lucid revelations of the divine mind sufficiently for their salvation. To proclaim, unfold, and enforce these plain and essential doctrines of religion, is moreover the engrossing duty of those appointed to stand forth amongst men as " the ambassadors of God." A knowledge of these is sufficient to enlighten and save the most obscure. Their cordial acceptance is indispensable to the salvation of all. We suggest no disparagement to this high and peculiar vocation. Nor would we detract from the exclusive efficiency of these essential truths of Christianity. But, investing them with their purest sacredness, allowing them their infinite importance, we would

ask, whether *they* might not be presented with greater comprehensiveness and dignity of thought, and arrayed in a more becoming and appropriate style of dress, than is sometimes the case in public discourses and in religious books ? If Christianity cannot be so gracefully adorned, as to win admiration and love, may she not at least be so decently attired, as to avoid disgust and contempt ? Her presence, of course, is unwelcome to the depraved ; but let not her dialect and her dress serve as pretexts for their abhorrence !

But while we yield a just ascendancy to these channels of instruction ; while we admit the absolute importance and essential efficacy of systematic religious truth ; while we look to the ministrations of the pulpit, and the teachings of strictly religious books for the chief and leading agency in the world's regeneration ; yet we would advert to other indirect but accordant influences, which should be valued, employed, and consecrated by Christian principle. We refer to the elements of taste, imagination and poetry, which include the beautiful forms of nature, the tender sympathies and affections of the heart, and all the thousand humanities of our daily existence. That these elements may be wielded by the hand of Christian integrity, will not admit of a doubt. That these elements do exert, and, as knowledge extends and society improves, will increasingly exert a powerful influence, especially on young, ardent, and susceptible minds, in moulding human character, is still less questionable. The present may be termed emphatically the age of books. The multitude, the promiscuous mass, through all grades of society, now resort to reading, not only for instruction, but for amusement and diversion. Lit-

erature, and especially those forms which come under the designation of polite or poetical literature, is fast becoming one of the most prevalent, uniform, and potent agencies that impress the plastic mind of man, and move the mighty fabric of society. It is silent and gradual, but constant, insidious and irresistible in its power. It appeals to the taste, the imagination and the passions, with more efficient success, than if it made its naked approach to the sterner judgment. It forms and fosters, by a secret fascination on the heart, predispositions, prejudices, propensities, habits and tendencies of moral association, which in the formation of character and the government of life, have a more permanent and practical control, than all the lucid demonstrations of reason and all the impressive appeals of truth.

With such an impression of the importance of this agency, when we consider what is the moral character of the most prevalent and popular class of such productions, at present disseminated through society, we honestly believe, that, next to the original obstruction of human depravity, a darker and firmer impediment against the access of religious light to the conscience and heart, is reared by this silent and pervading influence, than by all other agencies combined. But what shall be done? Denounce, without discrimination? Condemn, without exception? And totally excommunicate, as profane and reprobate, the entire form and compass of polite literature? As well attempt to exclude the atmosphere, because infected by a prevailing epidemic! As well undertake to prohibit the element of water, because at one time it rages in destructive torrents, and at another exhales in putrid va-

pors! While man exists, water will be drunk and the air will be inhaled. While the earth continues adorned with verdure and flowers, diversified with aspects of beauty and sublimity, with hills and streams and seas and mountains; and the gorgeous blazonry of the firmament bends over all; while human life is warmed and brightened by the glowing interchange of its genial sympathies, its tender ties, its thrilling affections, and the undefined aspirations that reach beyond the limits of its present circumference; so long will the spirit of poetry, with all the colored forms of literature that move within the charmed circle of its radiant dominion, be perpetuated in its power for good or for evil!

The conclusion is inevitable, and has in part been anticipated. Let Christian enterprise and genius redeem this element from its moral enthrallment; vindicate, maintain, and manifest to the world, by the successful rivalship of piety, its pure, rational, legitimate, Christian affinities. All this can be accomplished, without relaxing the firmness of Christian integrity, or departing from the peculiar sphere and sacred vocation of the Christian Church. There is nothing in the element itself; there is nothing in its coloring or form; there is nothing in the fascinating methods of its adaptation to literary taste, which in the least degree prohibits this high and harmonious union between poetry and religion. Already we perceive propitious indications of its approaching consummation. In the higher forms of literature—those which come more strictly under the classification of poetry—the ascendancy of a pure Christian spirit is widely asserted. It is chiefly in its lower forms, that this ascendancy is disowned.

As they have degenerated in quality, they have multiplied in number. In the sickly trash, which pours in floods over the land—the offspring of corrupt talent, and the food of disguised sensuality—we discover even here a hope of reformation in the very excess of the evil. In its descent to moral pollution, it is sinking beneath the dignity of literary taste; and as it drains out the dregs of its defilement, the element of genius escapes and vanishes.

We are proud of the high distinction of American genius in this respect. The demoralizing literature to which we refer, is chiefly of foreign production. The contributions of our own gifted authors to the department of polite letters, have, for the most part, been unexceptionable in moral tendency. Many, and they the noblest and best, are consecrated by the pure spirit of the Christian religion. Let American genius retain and perpetuate this highest honor! And while, as a nation, we hold forth to the world an example of free and flourishing civil institutions, unencumbered by despotism, and rejoicing in the enlargement of equal liberty, let us, at the same time, exhibit a pure and vigorous literature, unstained by the breath of moral pollution, and hallowed by the purity of Christian principle; the spirit of the one, and the policy of the other, drawn alike from the great fountain of truth—the *Bible*.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

FALSE IMPRESSIONS AS TO THE MORAL INSUBORDINATION OF
POETICAL GENIUS, AND THE INTELLECTUAL TAMENESS IM-
PLIED IN SUBJECTION TO CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE.

HAVING traced the moral and religious tendency of the poetical element, we now turn to consider the bearing and influence of Christianity, as it affects propitiously the interests of poetry. In entering on this second department of our subject, we encounter, at the outset, a prevalent impression as to the inherent lawlessness of poetical genius. We must first dispose of this prejudice. For whatever demonstrations may be given of the pure and propitious influence of Christianity, they will be insufficient to produce conviction, while this secret obstruction remains in the estimate of poetical character. We have attempted hitherto to distinguish between the legitimate tendency of poetry, and the personal character of poets. And such a distinction is essential to a just and

rational consideration of the subject. Poetry may be pure in its essence, although it be occasionally found associated with corrupt materials in the moral character of individuals. These are evidently alien to its spirit. It may be opposed to such qualities, even when it does not overcome them. They may exist in the character of some eminent poets. But yet, in so far as they do exist, they are an incumbrance to the noblest aspirations of poetry, and the poet as such, is eminent in spite of their existence. The fact that the poetical element is sometimes possessed by impure characters, and devoted to immoral purposes, is therefore no evidence of the impure and immoral tendency of the element itself; for such an association is a corruption of its nature, and such an application is a perversion of its office.

But if, on the contrary, the impression to which we refer be founded in truth; if poetry necessarily implies an exemption from the restraints of moral obligation; if it is essential to the exercise of genius, the indispensable prerogative of the poet, a proof of his originality and the effect of his inspiration, that he should not only rise above the common level of mankind, in their views, passions and pursuits, but do violence to the relations of society and disregard the laws of God; then the question as to the beneficial influence of Christianity is foreclosed and forever settled. For whatever may be its effect in forming a saint, it most assuredly, on such a supposition, destroys the poet. The prominent influence of religion on poetry must be exercised through the moral character of the poet, must be displayed in the sentiments and tastes, the aspirations and hopes, which are cherished in his heart, and

unfolded in his productions. Doubtless there is a general modification given to every department of literature by the surrounding light of the gospel, which is in a measure independent of honest convictions of its truth and a cordial compliance with its duties ; in the elevation and extension of intellectual operations, in the increased dignity of social relations, in the new aspect given to human life, and the new prospect opened beyond the grave.

But it is not our purpose to consider at present this indirect and general influence of Christianity. It accomplishes its high design, not merely when it enforces its theory on the intellectual assent of mankind, and moulds the habits and customs of society ; but when it impresses its divine image on the moral character, and infuses its pure spirit within the human soul. In the department of poetry, especially, the true influence of its inspiration is felt only, when the fire that glows upon its altar at once quickens and purifies the heart. The poet imparts the impress of his own character to his productions. Through the medium of imagination he conveys the sympathies of his moral nature to that of his reader. His language embodies the ideas of emotion that glow in his own breast ; and the sphere of his art includes, by necessity, the moral tastes and sentiments that spring from the fountains of his own heart. Whatever influence modifies the moral nature of the poet must therefore affect, in a signal manner, the character of his productions. As the chords of his inward spirit are shattered by the violence of passion, or attuned to the harmony of moral excellence ; so must his harp give corresponding utterance to the discordant notes of vice, or the

enchancing melody of virtue. If purity enhances the charm of beauty, if truth and moral dignity add to the elevation of sublimity, if the pure motives and high aspirations of Christianity impart harmony and majesty to the mental and moral nature of man ; then the conclusion is inevitable, that the unsullied sacredness of religion, when attached to the personal character, quickens the vigor of poetical genius, and beautifies, adorns, and elevates its productions. Such is a rational deduction from premises which are generally admitted. But notwithstanding this, there is a prevalent impression, as to the inherent waywardness of genius, and the depressing influence of Christian principle on all the finer faculties of the human soul. It is seldom announced as a positive opinion. It is rather a vague impression, a smothered prejudice, disguised in its manifestation, but still as strongly influential among certain circles of authorship, as the most established maxim of truth. Undefined in its shape, the reasons for its entertainment unexamined, and the tendency of its results unquestioned ; it is as firmly retained, as it is blindly adopted, and as efficient in its influence, as it is baseless in its authority.

It is surprising with what reckless inconsideration even intelligent and gifted minds assume impressions, and cherish views and feelings on such a subject. They adopt a hasty prejudice, without regarding its relations to acknowledged truth, or considering the consequences that flow from its admission. It retains a secret sway over their minds, even when it stands at positive variance with the whole order of truth, to which they are accustomed to yield unhesitating assent. Many cherish the impression to which we refer, who admit the existence of

God, the moral obligations of his law, and the sacred claims of religion. But the impression is at positive variance with all these high realities ; for if immorality and irreligion be essential to poetical genius, if it be the indispensable prerogative of the poet that he should “ neither fear God, nor regard man,” then we must conclude either, that there is no God, and that the universe, radiant with the images and vocal with the notes of poetry, sprang into existence by accident, and moves on with all its events in a whirl of chance—or that He formed the most gifted of his creatures to wander erratic and aimless, to bring dishonor on Himself, to introduce disorder into His government and spread moral pestilence and death amongst mankind—or that poetry is essentially evil, and that the poet is, by the very constitution of his nature, an outcast from Heaven, degraded in his position, disordered in his faculties, desolating in his career, sunk beneath the dignity of reason and the harmony of rectitude, that the glory of his genius arises from the glimmer of fancy and the phrenzy of passion ; and that he passes away like a meteor streaming on the troubled air, and vanishing in darkness.

But neither conclusion is embraced by those, who yet cherish an impression, in which one or the other is involved by a necessary inference. They are not atheists, nor infidels, nor despisers of poetry. They admit the high authority of religion and the sacred obligations of rectitude. They admire poetry as the highest offspring of the human mind, and hail the poet as a prodigy of genius, endowed with “ a capacious soul,” and possessing “ the vision and the faculty divine.” But yet to be a poet, he must disregard the dictates of reason, be

blind to the light of truth, violate the obligations of morality, and spurn away the relations of society. These are the necessary conditions of his eminence. Such the inevitable scope of his unfettered genius. Morality and religion belong to ordinary mortals. Compliance with rectitude implies intellectual tameness; and Christianity fetters the wings of an aspiring mind. Such trammels are unworthy the nature of the poet, who excites wonder and imparts entertainment and rapture by his lofty endowments. *His* mission demands that he should shock mankind by his example, defile the world by his productions, and offend Heaven by his impiety! What shadow of reason can exist for an opinion involving consequences so absurd and monstrous? What pretext, or show of plausibility, can be conceived for an impression, thus at war with the first principles of reason, and the established order of the universe? When reduced to the alternative, (as we are by the evident issues of the case,) of rejecting religious truth and moral obligation, or of denouncing poetry, as the offspring of evil and the source of disorder and ruin, who can hesitate—we do not ask, as to which term of the alternative he shall embrace? But who can hesitate in adopting the conclusion, that the supposition as to the inherent lawlessness of genius is groundless and false; that the legitimate and necessary sphere of poetry does not conflict with truth, reason and religion; that the moral recklessness of the poet, so far from being essential to his character, and an evidence of his greatness, is a corruption of his nature, and an incumbrance to his faculties? Surely those facts must be misconceived, those examples must be mis-

applied, which the history of perverted talent, alas ! too frequently presents, if they are so interpreted, as to support an impression in conflict with the plainest deductions of reason !

But leaving this high ground of authority, on which the question at issue may be maintained to the satisfaction of every reflecting mind, let us notice some of the sources of this delusion, and examine the validity of some of the pretexts which impart to it an air of plausibility. Encouragement is given to this impression, from the number of such examples in the known character of poets. But the frequent association of immorality and irreligion, with rare gifts of genius, affords no proof of the *necessary* union of such qualities, unless they be found to be *universally* in conjunction, and unless moreover the moral state of the world be shown to be exempt from *all other* sources of corruption, but the fountain of poetry. But neither of these conditions can be affirmed. Dark and mournful as are the annals of Genius, frequent and fearful as have been the instances in which the highest gifts of the Creator have been desecrated to impiety, and perverted to the misery of their possessor and the injury of society ; yet there are names, not a few, which shine forth in the lustre of unsullied fame, and there are examples, by no means rare, in which the loftiest endowments of nature have been consecrated to the service of religion and signalized by the integrity of virtue. Such characters must forever shame the scorn, if not silence the cavillings of those who would degrade truth and dishonor God, in order to exalt themselves. They impress the conviction that moral pollution is not essential to intellectual greatness, and that the discordant waywardness of

crime forms no necessary accompaniment of the elegance of taste, or the harmony of poetry. They prove incontestably, that whatever impurities may defile the character of some men of genius, they must be traced to some foreign source—some dark foundation of depravity in the moral nature of man.

Indeed there is no more impressive evidence of the present fallen and corrupt state of humanity, than the ruinous perversion of its highest faculties, so frequently displayed in the history of Genius. One would suppose that the loftier the mental eminence, the clearer must be the discernment of moral rectitude; and that in proportion to the superior gifts and faculties with which man is endowed by the Creator, must be felt a stronger obligation to love and reverence their unseen Author, and to use them in subservience to His glory and the good of His creatures. But how often are such obligations perverted so as to become stimulants to false pride, and incentives to reckless impiety. There must be some secret current of alienation, some corrupt tendency in the moral nature, which, in order to gratify its taste and give scope to its impetuosity, thus counteracts the guidance and nullifies the control of a brilliant intellect over the heart and life; which, in order to feed a diseased appetite and flatter a blind vanity, forces genius itself to glory in the presumption of ignorance, and triumph in the antics of folly!

Admiration and humility are the fruit of the highest intelligence in man. Admiration of the visible glory of the universe, rising upward into adoration of the invisible glory of its Author, veiled behind the material drapery of His works. And humility, springing from the overwhelming con-

trast between that glory and the attitude of the beholder, between the immensity of the Creator and the insignificance of the creature—a contrast that widens in proportion, as man rises in the faculties of his nature : for the circumference of his vision extends as he reaches a higher point of observation. The conscious possession of genius involves no necessity of self-idolatry or atheistic pride. The lofty sphere of an original and gifted intellect demands no conflict with truth, no defiance of moral obligation, no reckless abandonment to frantic impulses in a career of insubordination—in an eccentric orbit, apart from the established order of nature. There is nothing in the altitude or compass of the most enlarged and towering mental capacity to prompt its possessor either to rise in proud presumption above the prerogative of God, or to sink in sensual passion beneath the sphere of a brute. It is no inherent law of the mental organization, but the counteracting force of a pitiable moral perversity, which unites these opposite extremes of arrogance and debasement in the personal character of so many pretenders to genius, and occasionally, too, of some highly gifted intellects, whose superior endowments would seem to demand an exemption from so base an enthrallment.

Vain boast of originality and independence ! Singular eccentricity of genius, indeed ! One would suppose that it would at least be consistent with itself, if inconsistent with all things else. The eccentricity that springs from a superior nature, even if erratic in its career, should, we think, be uniformly aspiring in its tendency. And while it boasts of seraph wings to mount into the air, it is surely surprising that it

should at the same time manifest a tendency to crawl in the dust! Whence this compromise of antipathies? Is virtue so prevalent, and vice so rare, that the only prospect of singularity lies within the territory of the latter? Is piety so common-place, and social purity so uniform, that the only proof of originality consists in simultaneously rising above the faith of the one, and sinking beneath the sphere of the other? And must a genius, towering beyond the level of ordinary minds, become a heterogeneous compound of the ethereal and the sensual; and resemble nothing else under heaven, unless it be that strange visitant which came, commissioned as a curse, to smite the Israelites—a fiery serpent with wings? Alas! the actual results of human depravity bear a striking analogy to the scriptural account of its origin. The various forms of moral perversity display the image of the great prototype of evil. When Satan entered Paradise to beguile our first parents, he did not present himself in his native form. He disguised his real essence and assumed the visible shape of a serpent. His image in Paradise has been perpetuated in the history of our fallen race; and man, in his wayward impiety, displays a strange combination of the lofty pride of a demon with the groveling tendency of a reptile.

But this absurd impression is maintained on another ground. We are referred to the peculiar constitutional organization of the poet. There is discovered, it is thought, some inherent necessity of sinning in what is termed, “the poetical temperament.” This view is held by many who still profess a firm conviction of the truth of religion and a high regard for the obligations of morality as applicable to society

at large. But the poet is an exception to the general rule. His genius belongs to a higher sphere, and must come under a different regimen. His impulsive nature demands excess. His winged spirit forbids restraint. Convulsive irregularity, impetuous waywardness, and reckless impiety, are the necessary features of his earthly history—the inevitable consequences of the lodgment of his rare spirit in so incommensurable a tenement as the body, and its residence in so humble a sphere as the earth. Those actions which would be censurable as gross vices in others, are excusable in him, when designated by a milder epithet, as “the infirmities of genius.” As in the exercise of his art he is allowed a poetic licence to violate the laws of grammar, so in the conduct of his life, he demands an equal privilege to disregard the laws of God. Society must patiently endure his eccentricities. The rigor of a censorious criticism must not be applied to his character. Immorality and irreligion are the conditions of his greatness. The abandonment of his life is a necessary sacrifice to his genius, and the degradation of his nature is the price of his fame. He must consume himself in order to give light to others. The beauty of his genius may well hide the deformities of his character. The glory of his fame redeems the impurity of his life. And the brilliant and tasteful delight which he leaves as a legacy in the productions of his pen, more than repays the world for the moral injury inflicted by his example! Such is a sample of the reasoning frequently employed on this subject.

Before attempting to expose the secret fallacy involved in this hypothesis, we shall suggest briefly two considerations,

which, in the full extent of their bearing and significance, we shall reserve for a future examination. First, can the personal character of the poet be viewed as totally distinct from the moral tendency of his productions? He writes from the fulness of his own heart. His eminence arises from the sincerity and depth of the sentiments which expand his breast and inspire his verse. Will not the stream partake of the character of the fountain? Will not a kindred tone, a corresponding cast and coloring be imparted into his effusions, which, if evil, will only dazzle to mislead, and charm to corrupt? In addition to this moral image of the author's character, which naturally impresses itself on his writings, is not a reference to his private history uniformly associated with his book in the mind of the reader; so that the example of his life stands as a silent commentary on the volumes he has given to the world? But could these associations be kept asunder, how far shall the, at best, neutral moral influences, and the high literary merit of his productions be considered as a recompense for the solitary influence of his corrupt example on the world? It is a question worthy of thought, whether some men of genius have not injured mankind more by a knowledge of their personal history, than by the diffused contamination of their writings. How many Byronisms in fashionable life, as well as in modern literature, may be traced backward to the fantastic cut of an original pattern.

Again, supposing the lenient judgment of human society to be satisfied by such considerations, is there not a higher tribunal before which man must appear? And will the decision *there* be swayed by the literary entertainment his genius

may have afforded mankind, to acquit of personal guilt the impurity of his life and the contagion of his example? Or is earthly fame *the only* reward of the poet? Or is that final reward, whose issues are immortal, to be granted, in his instance, on some new and special condition as the high prerogative of genius, in virtue of its rare gifts and faculties? But, with the possession of such gifts, is there not increased obligation, and with their abuse, is there not aggravated guilt?

Let us return to the hypothesis in question. As to the necessity of moral aberration supposed to be involved in the poetical character, it may be asked, does such a necessity originate in the physical, or the mental organization of the poet? Not, certainly, in the former. For how can a law so peculiar, be attached to a class so diversified. How can a physical tendency so unique and specific, be affirmed of that endless variety of feature and form, complexion and temperament, displayed in the physical constitution of the poetic tribe? Indeed, poets conform to no specific law of classification, as to their bodily functions. As to those vices, which consist in the indulgence of physical appetites, to which many poets have been addicted, they are by no means peculiar to themselves as a class. Others, besides those distinguished for poetic genius, are guilty of such grovelling excesses. Nay, it will generally be found, that those farthest removed from such a distinction—the ignorant, the rude, the torpid, those in whom the animal part of their nature seems to reign over the mental and the spiritual, are of all others most noted for subjection to brutal propensities and passions.

There is nothing consequently in the physical nature of the poet to distinguish it as a necessary source of such impurities.

But vices of this class may perhaps be regarded as habits, formed in consequence of some unhappy state of mind, which seeks relief in opiates administered through the bodily senses, to stupify the pangs of inward anguish. So that to disorders inherent in the mental constitution may be traced those external irregularities of life, as well as those vices of temper and disposition, with which they are often attended. Does there then exist any conceivable necessity in the intellectual nature of the poet as the cause of such results? Here we must insist on a distinction between *an absolute necessity of nature and a peculiar liability to temptation*. Even admitting this peculiar liability to exist in the case of the poet, yet the excesses which flow from it may be denied to be the inevitable accompaniments of his genius. For with an exposure to temptation, there are the means of resistance, and a neglect of the one will not justify a submission to the other.

But this peculiar liability to temptation itself arises from previous defects of character, which are not the constitutional or necessary ingredients of poetical genius. It springs from an antecedent moral perversity, which claims no affinity or connection with the elements of poetry; but which, on the contrary, whenever constrained into such an unnatural association, ensures a tendency to deterioration and decay. In such cases the high authority of religious principle is first rejected, the harmonizing influence of Christian faith is discarded, the charities, the consolations and the hopes, which attend a spirit of humble and fervent piety, are forsaken;

and the character of the poet, thus rendered destitute both of defence and support adequate to its position, and left alone to the lower motives and restraints of human society, with its vivid powers, refined sensibilities and glowing emotions, will of course be more liable to break beyond such limits, than others who are equally alien to the spirit of religion, but who are not distinguished by the same elevation and force of mental faculties.

Exalt the intellectual powers, enlarge the capacities of the soul, quicken its sensibilities, intensify its emotions, and etherealize its aspirations, and unless controlled by Christian principle in the lofty sphere of true virtue, it will be perpetually liable to run wild by the force of its impulsive and unbalanced powers. While genuine religion comprehends all true virtue and holds forth the highest security for social order: Yet there may be a degree of outward propriety and a species of inferior consistency maintained from mere selfish and secular motives, where the loftier principle of religious obligation is habitually discarded. Such virtues, however, are merely negative in their character. As the world is, even *they* are not to be depreciated. Verily they have their reward. They secure present quietude and afford the opportunity to those who may be impelled by noble motives, of ascending, without conflict or injury, to a purer element. But in such cases an exemption from wayward impulses results from a partial deprivation of inward life. An avoidance of vice is owing to the absence of temptation, and not to the ascendancy of virtue. The surface of life is calm and smooth, because the current is contracted to a pool and covered with ice. In

many instances a partial compliance with the standard of social order is indebted to no higher cause than spiritual decrepitude and depression; and there may be cases in which the soul has just vigor and energy enough to break the bondage of ordinary influences, without wisdom and purity sufficient to lead it to the freedom and harmony of a higher element. It may disown the sway of Mammon, and dissolve the apathy of stoicism, but fail to subject itself to the legitimate control of moral principle and religious truth. If such be the position and character of the poet, there will be of course with him a peculiar liability to temptation. But his position is previously wrong. His character is swayed by an antecedent perversion. And it is to this perverted and vitiated condition of his moral nature, and not to the original force and tendency of genius, that we are to attribute all his waywardness and guilt.

We are aware that in making this admission of a peculiar liability to temptation in such cases, we seemingly give sanction to a prevalent pretext employed by depraved pretenders to genius, to vindicate and encourage their abominable profligacy. With such a warrant to foster presumption, many ambitious aspirants after literary fame, who hold forth no higher claim to such a distinction than that displayed in habits of reckless dissipation, are enabled to avail themselves of a condition of greatness, which is both cheap and agreeable. There is discovered an easy ascent to that eminence, "where Fame's proud temple shines afar." By a process, which has the threefold advantage of gratifying a corrupt taste, soothing a guilty conscience and flattering a stupid pride, the man

rises in his own estimation to the attitude of one endowed with superhuman faculties and begins to figure before the world in those *peculiar* eccentricities, which are conceived to be appropriate to such a character. If society should prove blind to the imposing demonstration, he looks with contempt on its heartless stupidity, and scowls with misanthropic defiance in return for its envy and malice. Should it still remain unimpressed, after these additional manifestations of his inspired mission, he then laments the tyranny of circumstances and sighs over the mournful fatality of gifted minds, under which they are doomed to desolation by their own convulsive energies ; and, despairing of other methods of demonstration, he determines to become a martyr of genius, plunges onward to greater excesses in pollution, until he falls a wreck of shame and guilt, and crowns the proof of his preëminence by consummating a career, which had already impressed the world as both foolish and wicked—a career which depravity first instigated, and vanity subsequently encouraged under the charm of a fascinating, but willful delusion.

It is true some highly-gifted poets have been the victims of such wayward and ruinous propensities. And there is no human history which should be traced with a more sorrowful sympathy, than the dark and downward career of perverted genius. But generally the shallow pretenders to the possession of superior gifts, who are instigated solely by the impertinent presumption of diseased vanity, will be most liable to such demoralizing tendencies, and most prone to seek refuge in the seeming shelter of so baseless a pretext for their indulgence.

As to the latter it is useless to expostulate. And even with the former there will be a pertinacity in clinging to so flattering a delusion. That it is a delusion, must be manifest to all capable of reflection, and disposed to rectitude. Otherwise, moral obligation and religious truth, the sources of piety, are opposed to beauty and sublimity, the fountains of poetry; and both being emanations of the Deity, we must suppose a contrariety in his plans, a discordance in his works, to justify us in embracing the one and discarding the other.

But to be more minute.—Let it be considered that the tendency to licentiousness, which is supposed to exist, is directly contrary to the legitimate tendency of the element of poetry, and cannot, therefore, be justly attributed to it as a source. It is a physical, brutal, stupifying, degrading tendency, manifested, it is true, by some eminent poets, but manifested equally by the most obtuse and torpid of the race, and manifested in its perfection by the beasts that perish. But the elements of poetry are refined, ethereal, elevating, and spiritual. Their legitimate tendency leads the soul upward in its aspirations. They cannot, therefore, be justly regarded as the direct causes of a tendency so manifestly opposite. Again, let it be remembered, that this peculiar liability to temptation, which we have admitted conditionally to exist, does exist only on condition of a previous defect of character, for which the poet is responsible—a defect of moral principle, a destitution of religious life. This deficiency is radical and essential in its nature. It is no mere innocent misfortune, which serves to palliate all the consequences which flow from its existence. Even under the un-

alleviated doom of original apostacy, a moral agent would be culpable in acting according to those depraved propensities to which our fallen nature is heir. But under the provisions and remedies of divine mercy, such reckless infatuation is without the shadow of an apology.

There is a proneness to regard the prevalent standard of social virtue, as an exclusive test of moral integrity—to look no higher as a source of obligation, and to consider nothing beyond in the light of a duty. The spiritual elements of religion are ordinary discarded from our estimate of human character, and we regard the visible deportment of man in the relations of society as alone amenable to praise or blame. Such a system of calculation is admissible, perhaps, when we consider the incapacity of man as a judge of the inward motives and purposes of his fellow-creatures, and the great importance of even the outward aspect of such virtues to the peace and order of society. But it is obvious that the ordinary relations of life may, to a certain passable extent, be fulfilled in the visible deportment, while the most selfish and sordid purposes reign in the heart. Moreover, there may be an abstinence from certain vicious excesses secured, as before stated, from an inward contraction of soul—a distinction (not censurable, of course, as to the form in which it is manifested) which arises solely from a want of intellectual and moral capacity for any higher distinction. But while such conditions are sufficient under the jurisdiction of human law, and should for the most part satisfy the charitable judgment to be exercised between man and man in society; yet in the discernment of an enlightened conscience, true to its office of

self-scrutiny, still higher obligations should be regarded, and the spiritual elements of faith and piety should be held essential to the production of genuine moral worth and the development of a consistent and perfect character. At least we are assured that such conditions alone will stand the investigation of a higher tribunal, when the secret springs of human conduct are unveiled in the light of eternity. Nor is there any evasion of such a prospect in the sentiment sung by an unhappy poet—so true in itself, and so tenderly consoling to the sincere and suffering—

—“ Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us.
He knows each chord, its various tone—
Each spring, its various bias.”

Admit every palliation, which is supposed to be derived from the natural tone and bias of character, from constitutional temperament and tendency, from the force of circumstances and the power of temptation; and at the same time admit that the obligations of faith and piety are as direct and urgent as those of social virtue—that inward religion is as much a duty as external propriety in life; and we ask, will any plea, however derived, suffice to extenuate the guilt of a radical destitution of religious life in the soul? In the case of the poet, the force of any argument drawn from the tone and bias of character, the endowment of rare gifts and faculties, the possession of refined tastes and ethereal aspirations, would only bring to bear upon his conscience an increased power of obligation, constraining him to a pious life—for which he is more fully equipped and furnished by nature than others—

to which he is attracted by more congenial tastes and tendencies, urged by stronger motives, and impelled by a deeper sense of duty.

If the propensities of nature are to have any weight in determining the measure of personal obligation, and modifying our estimate of human character, we are forced to the conclusion, that he who is endowed with the genius of a poet, is of all others most strongly bound to be a pious man, and consequently most culpable in assuming an opposite character. But if the element of true religion secures the consistency of social virtue ; and if the waywardness of poetical character is owing to a primary deficiency in this respect ; then those consequent immoralities, which incur the censure of society, cannot be palliated as the necessary appendages of genius. If destitute of piety, the poet may be more liable to temptations, to reckless abandonment ; but he is more culpable than others for that antecedent destitution which occasions such a liability. His waywardness is owing, not to qualities possessed, but to qualities discarded—not to the presence of the elements of poetry, but to the absence of the elements of religion, which exhibit a congenial affinity, and demand an inseparable union. The tame and the torpid may be equally destitute of religious principle, and yet less liable to external impropriety. While they deserve no greater credit for their abstinence, he can demand no lighter condemnation for his excesses. As to the higher purposes of existence, both are abortive, although from different causes. Both fail to reach the prize of immortality, while one lingers listlessly around the shores of time, and the other drives madly before the tempest, amid vacancy

and darkness, to meet the doom of shipwreck. A frail pleasure-boat may escape the agitation of the waves and the fury of the storm by clinging near the quiet shore ; but it moulders away in its contracted position, and never crosses the mighty deep to anchor on the coast of another hemisphere. The nobler vessel built for a deeper element and more distant voyage, may lose its course, be driven by the tempest on quicksands and rocks, and finally float a dismal wreck on the stormy sea. But, if at the outset, it was unprovided with helm and compass and anchor—if these indispensable provisions for security were recklessly thrown away—shall the final catastrophe be charged upon the lofty dimensions of the vessel, the wide expanse of its sails, or the fury of the wind and tide, which swept it onward to its doom ? Yea, the poet, destitute of the guiding and sustaining influences of religion, is unfit to brave the storms of life. But wherefore ? Not because he is a poet ; but because he is not a Christian. Without the panoply needful for the contest, when he encounters the stern realities of experience, it is not surprising if he be wounded and conquered. Sensitive, impulsive, and aspiring, the very superiority of his nature, which lifts him above the tame and sluggish security of ordinary minds, renders him exposed to peculiar dangers. The energies which nerve his character are prone to wayward excess, and the very excellencies which adorn it, are liable, under the fatal re-action of disappointment, to be transformed into bitterness and gloom. The unshielded soul, pierced and bleeding in the conflict of life, often completes its misery, by sinking under the shelter of

physical propensities, and administering the poison of lust as a balm to its wounds.

Besides these ruinous propensities within, there is an array of adverse external influences, which combine their power in hastening on so dire a catastrophe—the sway of fashion, the current of popular prejudice, the force of evil example, and the contagion of corrupt society. But all this exposure to danger arises from a primary destitution in the character of the poet. This destitution moreover implies, by necessity, a process of perversion. The absence of religious qualities not only leaves the native elements of poetry naked and defenceless, under the power of temptation, but the very void in the soul, thus occasioned, insures a distortion of its faculties and a deterioration in its tastes. The presiding influence of religion would harmonize the powers of the mind, correct its vacillations, and guide its ardent impulses aright. The character, thus equipped with appropriate armor (not clogged and crippled with oppressive incumbrance, but “shielded and helmed and panoplied in truth,”) goes forth not only less exposed to danger, but also provided with remedies for every injury experienced in the conflict. For while religion prepares the soul for security in its earthly career, it exerts a modifying power over all external influences. It blunts the shafts of adversity, soothes the pangs of sorrow, and amid all the agitations of this world, sustains the soul in tranquillity and peace by the steadfast anchor of a heavenly hope.

We repeat, it is by a process of perversion that the nature of the poet is thus cut loose from such a support, and all his peculiar liability to vacillating waywardness arises from this

fatal dislodgment of his spirit from its appropriate reliance and refuge. The luxuriant vine, by its very structure, demands some object to sustain its branches in their vigorous growth. It entwines its tendrils around the massive and towering oak; and thus upborne from the earth, it flourishes unharmed amid warring elements, strong in its dependence, and beautiful in its security. But let it be rudely severed from its support, and trailing helplessly in the dust, it is tossed and torn by every fitful breeze, and crushed and mangled by every passing foot. The worthless weed that shoots forth its stiff and meagre stalk from the earth, escapes without injury. The vine suffers not from its luxuriance, but from its severance from the oak, by which it should have been sustained.

By observing the vices to which poets are most liable, it will be seen that they arise from the perversion and abuse of qualities, which, if corrected and sustained by religious principle, would have secured the greatest excellence of character. But such perversion is not necessary to the growth and vigor of poetical genius. It is from no native tendency in the elements of poetry, that they are thrown loose from so salutary a connection, in order to give scope to their expansive luxuriance. The pure and lofty spirit of religion, which lifts the soul in its security above surrounding evils, does not at the same time impede the growth of its higher faculties. Such a supposition is as repulsive to reason, as it is false to history. Is the vigorous vegetation of the vine arrested by its coming in contact with the tree, around which its tendrils are entwined? Is the majestic ship encumbered in its motions by being provided with helm and compass, and anchor? Does it glide less

swiftly or gracefully over the heaving billows, when thus shielded from the dangers of the deep? And when the dependent spirit of man entwines its confidence around the throne of God, and sends up its devout aspirations to Heaven, is its life impaired—are its energies paralyzed? When guided by reason and truth, and sustained by a Christian hope, are the discursive faculties of the soul clogged and encumbered, as they launch forth amid the surrounding amplitude of nature and life? Preposterous absurdity! as well as impious blasphemy, to indulge for a moment the thought! No, the genius of the poet does not necessarily divest itself of security, by the very process of unfolding its charms and maturing its powers. It is from no inherent tendency to poetical perfection that the mind is thus propelled aloof from the centre of truth and the sphere of duty. It is a deteriorating tendency, which originates in some foreign quarter, apart from the fountains of poetry, and perverts their native sympathy, and counteracts their original affinity.

If then it be admitted, that the exclusion of the poet from the influences of religion is not strictly attributable to the tendency of his genius; and if the subsequent irregularities of his life originate in this primary deficiency, then the conclusion is inevitable, that the prevalent impression, as to the necessary waywardness of the poetical character, is false and groundless. Thus we expose the touching extenuation, uttered by the poet, from whom we have already quoted, in behalf of his unhappy irregularities:

“I saw thy pulses' mad'ning play,
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,

Misled by Fancy's meteor ray,
By passion driven ;
And yet the light, that led astray,
Was light from Heaven."

The literal import of this apology, if we apprehend aright, amounts to this—Those qualities, which constituted him a poet, impelled him to vice. His ardent temperament, his brilliant imagination, his glowing emotions, were the light from Heaven, which led him astray. His merit, as a poet, consequently cancelled his demerit as a man. In a certain sense, all high gifts and faculties may be traced to a heavenly origin, but this is strictly true only when regarded in their original purity, as exempt from a state of subsequent corruption, which arises from an opposite quarter, and springs from an admixture with the impure elements of earth. Thus natural light may be traced to the sun as its origin. But light undergoes a thousand modifications as to its appearance and results, from its combination with foreign qualities. From the stormy cloud there is emitted a lurid glare, to terrify and consume. From the putrid vapors of the marsh, there is sent forth an *ignis fatuus* to bewilder the gaze. And from the impure and turbid atmosphere above, brilliant meteors are enkindled, to dazzle and lead astray. Ah! the faithful phraseology of the poet betrays the lurking delusion of his pretext. It is a "meteor-ray," which misleads—a light born of pollution and springing from contact with foul and turbid elements. It is owing not to the rare gifts of his nature as they came originally "a light from heaven," but to their subsequent combination with corruption and lust, that the poet is led astray. Such a doom is not the native destiny of genius. Such a

desolating career is not its original orbit. Religion holds forth its inviting prospects, its purifying and restraining influences, its precious consolations and immortal hopes. This true light from Heaven shines over the darkness of earth, dispels its delusions and leads the human mind in the line of rectitude to the port of peace. Shall fitful meteors, exploding in a corrupt atmosphere, be responsible for all the dire evils of shipwreck, when the steadfast firmament is gemmed over with the guiding stars of heaven? Shall impure hallucinations kindled in the diseased imagination of the poet, be chargeable for his guilty aberrations, when the divine precepts and holy influences of religion are carelessly disregarded, or blindly rejected? No! let the corrupt elements, which kindled the delusive glare and the wilful blindness which shrouded the heavenly light, bear the sole burden of so fatal a calamity!

CHAPTER II.

ADDITIONAL PREJUDICES CONSIDERED—FALSE IMPRESSIONS AS TO THE MORAL AIMLESSNESS OF POETRY, AS A MERE ART; AND THE SEPARATE PROVINCE OF CHRISTIANITY—SOURCES OF PREJUDICE—INFERIORITY OF DEVOTIONAL POETRY—DR. JOHNSON'S OPINION EXAMINED—INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT CLASSICS—RELATION OF THE BIBLE TO LITERARY TASTE—ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER SUPPOSED UNPOETICAL.

AN enlightened Pagan might become familiar with a large portion of our polite literature, without forming a clear conception of the distinctive character of our religion. And yet that literature professes to portray our best thoughts and purest sentiments—our noblest virtues and highest interests. Or could we imagine such a Pagan to be the shade of some ancient poet of Greece or Rome, permitted for a time to revisit the earth, he would perhaps conclude, while reviewing that portion of our literature, which gives no intimation of a higher and holier faith, that an obscure fragment of his own once gorgeous mythology was perpetuated in the belief of a degenerated people. It is a source of regret to every serious

mind, familiar with the subject, that much of the poetry and fine writing in nominally Christian lands, bears no faithful impress of the prevailing religion. How has this come to pass? When other religions have pervaded all the forms of literature in other times, why does Christianity refuse to blend with so large a compass of modern literature? When the light of superstition sent its rays through all the avenues of ancient life, and colored all the forms of art and all the images of poetry; why does the light of a brighter and better faith now shine for the most part through a separate medium; and why, with us, is the beautiful domain of elegant literature shrouded in earth-born mists and shadows, or illuminated only by the floating gas-lights of its own production? Have our men of taste and genius, the authors of this elegant literature, discarded Christianity as false? Or assenting, as they do generally, to its truth, is it from any law of exclusiveness, in the exercise of their art, as poets, that they are prohibited all reference to the themes of piety? Do Christianity and polite literature constitute two distinct departments—two hostile territories, between which all intercourse is excluded? No! it is not thus we may explain this anomaly. The difference between Christianity and the other systems of religion, as it regards a connection with literature, so far from being a disparagement of its nature, is rather an evidence of its truth. It is of divine origin. Other systems are of human growth. It aims to regenerate and restore man to purity and peace; and as a remedy divinely adapted to its end, it encounters antipathy in the diseases of our nature. Other systems accord with the morbid taste of that nature, which gave them

birth ; and, instead of counteracting, foster and feed its perverted tendencies. Christianity claims among its true adherents a comparatively small number of partially transformed and assimilated characters, who have realized its regenerating power while multitudes carelessly assent to its truth, but remain strangers to its spirit and life. Other systems, presenting no conflict between conviction and impulse, in so far as they gain an ascendancy over the understanding, carry with them, in full consent, the passions of the devoted multitude. Many, who in theory acknowledge the truth of Christianity, do yet practically refuse to submit to its authority. As a remedy adapted to restore fallen man to the image and favor of God, the gospel will of course be uncongenial to the propensities of his unrenewed nature ; and, even after a formal assent is yielded to its truth, the heart will spontaneously rebel against the remedy, until it has felt its transforming efficacy. And if, in the mean time, *a position of indifference* can be maintained, between such formal assent to the truth of the system on the one hand, and a cordial compliance with its duties on the other, that position will become the chosen attitude of multitudes, in a nominally Christian land. From these ranks of *practical unbelief*, a large proportion of our polite literature is derived. Hence the frequent exclusion of Christianity from its pages.

The condition of the moral nature—the state of the heart—will modify our literary, as well as our moral tastes. The intellectual beauty that charms the soul depends, not so much on a combination of certain inherent qualities in an object, as on a secret law of congeniality between the desires and ten-

dencies of the individual mind, and the nature of the object; which law is as variable as the shades of human character. If the heart be perverted by evil propensities, a preference will be awarded in point of excellence to objects which do not intrinsically merit such a distinction. Hence in that divine character, held forth as a model for humanity to admire and imitate, many "see no beauty, that they should desire him," although it is adorned with perfect loveliness, with infinite attractions. Hence, also, the themes and topics, the sentiments and virtues peculiar to Christianity, are to a great extent practically excluded from the department of polite literature. How far this exclusion extends, we shall not pause to determine. Its prevalence is such at least, as to give rise to an impression of some inherent hostility between the two departments of poetry and religion—an impression which, if true, explains the origin of the evil deplored; but, at the same time, renders its existence perpetual.

But we by no means sanction an impression which is as melancholy in its results, as it is baseless in its origin. Two distinct parties are thus thrown asunder, and confirmed in mutual hostility. But the final issues of the contest are not fairly met, nor fully anticipated on either hand. The Christian reprobates polite literature, as hostile to his cause, or at best, as occasionally neutral in its position, and altogether as hopeless in efficiency for good. He discards its glittering weapons in his warfare, and renounces all its brilliant advantages, and to avoid the suspicion of parleying with the enemy, or of symbolizing with the profane, he seeks perhaps an opposite extreme, in selecting means and instrumentalities of use-

fulness; while the territory, thus defined as peculiar to the enemy, is occasionally visited to indulge an idle curiosity, or to gain an allowable relaxation from severer pursuits. But he forgets, in the mean time, that the constant, silent, swelling stream of this reprobated literature is rolling onward with accelerated force and accumulated poison, when thus abandoned entirely to the guidance of evil.

On the other hand, the devotee of polite literature, satisfied with an undefined impression as to some inherent hostility between the claims of Christianity and the interests of his art, turns away in proud indifference from the obligations of piety, as appropriate to the capacity of vulgar minds, and not reaching so high as his peculiar sphere—yields himself to the engrossing fascination of the one pursuit; while a careless contradictory assent is given to the truth of religion. But he forgets, in the meantime, that on the supposition of such an antipathy between the two interests, his avowed preference for the one involves a decided rejection of the other; and that by such a rejection, he forfeits to himself all the immortal blessings revealed in the gospel; and that by the exercise of his perverted genius, so far as his influence prevails, he robs his fellowmen of the same inestimable treasure.

Such is the question at issue. Such is the present attitude of the two parties, placed by misconception and prejudice in mutual hostility. That such hostility does not exist really in the things themselves, we are fully convinced. It would be an important service to mankind, to investigate and settle the question thus raised—to expose the prejudice and delusion which would cast a cloud over the bright face of our blessed

religion—to take from Taste and Genius a pretended license, assumed in virtue of their office, to spurn the obligations of faith, and revel in impiety, and to go forth, in the “livery of Heaven,” in the bright colors of poetry, and with the polished arms of wit, to wage war on the present purity and peace, and the immortal hopes of mankind—all, with the hideous mockery of a purpose to *impart literary entertainment*.

So far from this prejudice having any foundation in reason, we believe the very reverse to be the truth. So far from Christianity being adverse to the interests of poetry, we believe, and shall endeavor to show, that poetical literature derives its noblest inspiration, its highest excellence, from the spirit and motives of the gospel. The prejudices which we encounter on this point assume different forms, and are variously expressed! Such an impression is sometimes urged, on the ground that *poetry is a mere art*, designed to impart pleasure by gratifying the taste; and that therefore it has no immediate connection with the office of Christianity. But admitting poetry to be an art, in the sense intended, it may be asked: does Christianity afford no suitable materials for its exercise? And why should *this*, the most intellectual and spiritual of all the fine arts, *alone* refuse an alliance with that sacred cause, which involves our highest spiritual interests! In modern times especially, architecture, painting and music have rejoiced in a consecration to the service of religion—have found their choicest themes, and achieved their noblest triumphs, in the department of Christianity. What reason then can be assigned for the profane isolation demanded for poetry in this respect? Why should it, the only rebel in the ranks,

the only infidel art, refuse to bow to the temple of devotion, and receive a purer inspiration from the fire that burns upon its altar? No! The supposition is without plausibility in theory, and without foundation in fact. It derives no support from reason, and none from history.

Perverted and abused, as poetry too often has been, to unworthy purposes, yet, in many instances, it has nobly vindicated its high relationship and maintained its legitimate attitude. Many of our best and greatest poets have born the Christian name and breathed the Christian spirit. Need we mention Cowper, Young, Milton, and a long list of earlier and later names? Need we point to their productions, as among the noblest, best-sustained, most popular and influential poems in our language? Or need we advert to the significant fact, that in the works of irreligious poets their finest passages are those in which they rise to the elevation of Christian sentiment; and that the earthly Muse never takes so sublime a flight, as when she mounts on the borrowed wings of religious faith! Christianity has refined and exalted every art and science. But more than all others, poetry is indebted to its quickening power for new life and nobler dignity.

We, however, more than question the propriety of designating poetry as a mere art. If it be an art, it must be in a sense different from that in which the term is employed in other cases. True, it is governed by the rules of versification and certain laws of propriety in language. But something beyond this is implied in poetry. It involves something more than mechanical skill, something more than sensible imitation.

To confine the idea of poetry to such a definition, would convert it into a senseless harlequin, with his gaudy cap and jingling bells, his antic gestures and unmeaning grimace. The very instrument employed by poetry, includes something more than art. It employs language to effect its purpose ; and its excellence is found in the use of language, with the greatest propriety, fitness and force. But language is a medium of expression—a sign of thought—and when used with propriety, must convey either truth or error, and extend an influence for good or evil through society. An intellectual and a moral significance enters into the very structure of poetry. The essence of poetry is thought, feeling, sentiment—developed in the appropriate form of verse. This thought, feeling and sentiment, moreover, must be of a refined or elevated character. It must be of a nature to captivate or thrill—to melt or inflame the heart. Poetry, therefore, converses with our highest relations and most important interests ; for it is only in connection with these that the peculiar emotions which it awakens are found associated.

Those who attach a friivolous character to poetry, know nothing of its real nature. True, it embraces all moods, “ from grave to gay, from lively to severe ;” but it is only in moments of relaxation that it indulges in levity. When it girds itself for its proper work, its aspect is thoughtful, its step majestic, its tones earnest and solemn. The sphere of poetry is enlarged, elevated, and endlessly diversified. It embraces all objects that are beautiful or sublime—all themes that are lofty or thrilling, grand or pathetic, tender or triumphant. If, then Christianity has no connection with the

department of poetry, it must be because it embraces no themes and topic of the character just named, and furnishes no subjects of thought calculated to awaken lofty, thrilling, or pathetic emotions. Hence, to maintain the dignity of poetry and at the same time its exclusion from Christianity, the latter must suffer disparagement. It must be represented as a cold, contracted, cheerless spirit, presiding over a bleak and barren island, remote from the main land of human existence, severed from the sunny clime in which the imagination unfolds its glowing colors, and the heart expands its luxuriant emotions, by a shadowy sea, sailed over only by the mystic vessel of faith. Such, in effect, is the view taken of Christianity by those who maintain its exclusion from the province of poetry. But the nature of Christianity is blindly misconceived and grossly misrepresented.

This libel on our holy religion has perhaps gained greater currency from the seeming sanction given to it by the famous dictatorial announcement of Dr. Johnson on the subject. But his meaning is not rightly apprehended by those who understand him as designing to exclude every feature of Christianity from polite literature. He does not make the general assertion that the spirit and precepts of the gospel are inimical to poetry. He does not refer, in the connection, to religious or Christian poetry, as a whole; but to a particular branch, a specific kind. He alludes to *devotional* poetry—the poetry of hymn books. He is remarking on the inferior character of such poetry. Taking this as a fact, in his own opinion, he makes this the occasion of philosophizing as to its cause, and builds a theory for its explanation. But this is not

the only instance of his assuming more majesty than the occasion required, and dealing forth decisions more pompous than correct, more plausible than true, and more dogmatic than wise. Yet admitting the accuracy of his judgment on this point, his decision does not include the whole field of religious poetry. Surely no one would confine the idea of religious or Christian poetry exclusively to " psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Religion is not a transient impulse, expressed in occasional acts of devotion. It is a spirit which animates the life. It is a law which pervades the universe. All the relations of human society—all the topics of human thought are included within its circumference.

As a general fact, the inferiority of devotional poetry, as contained in our common version of hymns, may perhaps be admitted ; but it is a fact which required no parade of philosophy or sweeping generalization of theory for its explanation. There are obvious reasons to account for inferior poetical merit in such productions, without concluding that religion itself disowns all fellowship with poetry. In the manner in which such collections are formed—in the purpose to which they are devoted—in the promiscuous tastes and capacities of the multitude who join in their use, in the public exercises of devotion, we see causes which forbid the highest poetic excellence. Indeed, the gratification of taste, by poetic fascination, if an object at all, is a secondary object in such productions. The chief design in their composition is to present the most scriptural truth in the greatest simplicity of expression, adapted to the comprehension of the humblest capacity ; and they assume the form of verse for the convenience of

measure in singing. The hymns in common use are mostly compilations from various sources. Many of them were written by men destitute of the talent, and even of the title of poets; and the principle which governed their selection, was conformity to the test of truth, more than to the standard of taste—the subject more than the style.*

But while this general concession is made of inferiority in the mass of existing devotional poetry, yet we deny that such poetry is from its nature incapable of assuming the highest form of excellence. The efforts of many gifted poets, in this department, do not fall beneath their noblest flights on other occasions. Many of the hymns of Watts, and those of Cowper, Heber, and others, rank with justice among the brightest gems of true poetry. But to see the utter emptiness of the plea, turn to the devotional parts of the Bible—the psalms of David—portions of the book of Job—the song of praise at the Red Sea—the prayers of Habakuk, and of Daniel—the holy aspirations, pathetic lamentations, and rapturous praises that occur in all the prophets; and say if here we do not find specimens of poetry purely devotional, which, in elevation of sentiment, splendor of imagery and power of language, rise above the highest efforts of ancient or modern art? How

* As a practical illustration of our meaning, read the following apology of Dr. Watts, for omitting certain pieces in his collection of hymns, and publishing them in a volume of miscellaneous poetry :—

“ In the first book are many odes, which were written to assist the meditations and worship of vulgar Christians; and with a design to be published in a volume of Hymns, which have now passed a second impression. But upon review, I found *some expressions that were not suited to the plainest capacity; and the metaphors are too bold to please the weaker Christian;* therefore I have allowed them a place here.—*Preface to Lyrical Poems.*

then, in the face of facts like these, can it be affirmed, even by the authority of a Johnson, that the pulsations of a pious heart, the breathings of a devout spirit, are incapable of utterance in poetry ?

But if we examine minutely the response of this oracle, it will be found to be nothing more imposing than a splendid sophism. Let us notice some of his expressions; for the plausibility of the argument rests on the ambiguity of the terms employed. His proposition is thus announced—"Poetical devotion cannot often please." Why? it might be asked. And *one* obvious answer *might* be—"Not because the poetry is inferior, but because the devotion is distasteful." A taste for poetry, and a relish for devotion are not always united in the same character. There are thousands who, when piety is the theme, resemble "the deaf adder which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely." But he argues in support of a different proposition from that announced. He aims to show that devotional feeling cannot be appropriately expressed in poetry—not that, when so expressed, it often fails to please; for this, as we have seen, may be explained without denying the excellence of the poetry itself. He admits that "the doctrines of religion may be defended, the beauty and the grandeur of nature, the flowers of spring and the harvests of autumn, the vicissitudes of the tide and the revolutions of the sky, may be described, and the Maker be praised for his works," by the poet. Yet he contends that in this the theme is "not piety, but the motives to piety—not God, but the works of God." But where is the propriety of such a distinction? Can we, in

reality, separate piety from its motives, or God from his works? Is not piety awakened by motives? Is not God seen in his works, which display his image, and declare his glory? Are these things *ever* disunited in the exercises of a pious mind? Are they *ever* placed asunder, except by those who remain impious in spite of all motive, and who forget God in the midst of his works?

Again he says, "the essence of poetry is invention. By producing something unexpected, it surprises and delights." But, he pleads, the topics of devotion are few and familiar—can neither be enlarged nor increased; and, therefore, they are not suitable for the exercise of poetic invention. But what is here meant by *invention*, as the essence of poetry? Is it meant that poetry brings to light facts before unknown to the world? This is the appropriate work of scientific discovery. Or is it meant that poetry imagines fictitious scenes and events? These, unless designed to represent some corresponding reality in nature and life, would be absurd, fantastic, or monstrous; and poetry would become an artifice, instead of an art—a contemptible trick of mental jugglery, unworthy the attention of a rational mind. Or is it meant that poetry exaggerates and exceeds the truth, and presents an image brighter than the reality? This may be an exercise of poetry, when it converses with inferior topics—but this is not its common, nor its highest exercise. We utterly repudiate that irrational conception of poetry, which makes it consist in exaggerated ideas, unnatural emotions, and farcical airs and attitudes. No wonder it becomes contemptible as an affectation, instead of honorable as an art, when such an idea

is entertained of its nature. Poetry is not driven to such pitiable resorts of exaggeration and falsehood, in order to afford entertainment. The invention of human fancy cannot surpass nature, the creation of God. The glimmer of human fiction cannot outshine truth, the emanation of divine intelligence. But while nature cannot be excelled, our conceptions of nature may be enlarged. While truth cannot be beautified, our apprehensions of truth may be brightened. Beauty is but the visible complexion of truth. And poetry produces its brightest picture, when it paints her portrait. Here we find the proper office of poetry—not in imagining unreal objects, and fictitious scenery, and painting the prospect in fantastic and glaring colors ; but in elevating the level of our thoughts, and clustering together the kindred trains of association and feeling, in some higher degree of approximation to the dignity of nature and truth ; and thus producing a faithful image of realities, the dim outlines of which lie darkened and degraded in the grovelling conceptions of ordinary minds. In this sense alone, the true poet invents and creates—not by producing a vision more exalted than truth—but *a vision of truth*, more exalted than our previous inadequate conceptions. And thus he surprises and delights not by the novelties of fiction, or “ the foreign aid of ornament,” but by originating new and nobler trains of thought, and awakening more profound and thrilling emotions, by communicating to others the conceptions and feelings of his own gifted spirit, which utters itself in poetry, only because it sees the beauty and feels the melody of things, that are in themselves poetical. Poetry, as an agent, is but the interpreter of nature—as an instrument, but

the mirror of truth. It is only, therefore, by a double misconception of the nature both of poetry and religion, that there is any significance in the conclusion, that because the topics of devotion are few and familiar, they cannot become the fit themes of poetry. If they be familiar, are our conceptions and emotions with regard to them, always adequately exalted? If the topics of devotion may not be increased nor enlarged, surely our devotional thoughts and feelings may be! But it is not true that the topics of devotion are few; nor, as he expresses the same idea in different terms, "is faith invariably uniform in its exercise." Faith converses primarily with the vital and central truths of Christianity; and these are the main elements of true devotion. But stationed thus at the glowing centre, faith looks abroad over a mighty circle of truth—surveys glories that are unseen and eternal—and sees things visible and temporal in their true light, their relative magnitude and value, and their just order and connection, as parts of one general system; and from every quarter within the vast circumference, it gathers themes of devout meditation and motives to adoring praise.

Again, it is stated to the same effect, "Omnipotence cannot be exalted. Infinity cannot be amplified. Perfection cannot be improved." Very true. But may not *our ideas* of Omnipotence be exalted? May not *our conceptions* of infinity be amplified? May not *our views* of perfection be improved? And may not poetry, by supplying worthier apprehensions of these attributes of the Deity, furnish additional motives to more ardent devotion?

But we cannot follow this celebrated writer any further at

present. This double fallacy as to the nature of Christianity and the office of poetry, underlies, like a surface of ice, the whole fabric of his brilliant reflections on this subject. Let the light of truth shine upon it and the superstructure sinks. We have paused to consider this remarkable passage, more out of regard to the authority of the name than the force of the argument of the writer. Thousands will plead the sanction of his opinion to justify their contempt of a subject which he always venerated, and which he lived long enough at last to appreciate and enjoy. If any should still hesitate in rejecting his opinion on this topic, we would refer them to a minute and masterly refutation of this argument, by Prof. Wilson of Edinburg, in his *Essay on Sacred Poetry*. The same point is ably discussed by James Montgomery and others.

We however regard this decision of Dr. Johnson, as but the echo of a prevailing prejudice in the public mind, which takes a wider latitude than he gave it, so as to exclude all Christian themes and sentiments from the sphere of poetry. This prejudice must be supported by certain pretexts, which give it at least an air of plausibility. We shall notice some considerations which have served to encourage the delusion. We have already adverted to one fact of the kind, viz., the inferior poetical merit of much of the devotional poetry in our common collections of hymns; and we have given, we think, a satisfactory explanation.

Another influence, which has doubtless operated to the prejudice of Christianity among modern poets, may be styled *a habit of veneration for the example of those ancient heathen authors, whose writings have been regarded as classic models in*

every succeeding age. We will not say how far this veneration is misplaced or extravagant; although we believe its undue indulgence has served no little to retard the progress of modern literature toward perfection. We do not deny the utility of a study of the ancient classics, as an important branch of liberal education. Every student who masters their language will secure a valuable aid in mental discipline, and acquire a greater facility in the use of his own tongue; and by becoming familiar with their style, imagery and sentiments, the taste will be improved and the art of elegant composition will be more readily acquired. But to exalt these ancient poets on a throne of infallible authority—to imitate them in every feature as models of perfection, instead of using them as means of improvement—to adopt their style, their sentiments, their subjects, their creed, their spirit, and discard every thing else as incompatible with refined taste and lofty poetic genius, is surely an instance of the grossest servility. Yet, is not this in a measure realized in the prevalent habit of referring to these ancient models as standards in taste and criticism, from whose authority there is no appeal? Do we not thus witness the practical acknowledgment of a test purely Pagan, by which it is ascertained what sentiments and virtues, what trains of thought and models of character, what supernatural machinery and spiritual beings are suitable for a modern poet in a Christian land, to introduce in a work of genius? With such a test acknowledged, of course all the peculiar and distinctive features of Christianity, every thing that renders it divine in contrast with mere human systems, must be discarded as unsuitable for poetry; for such peculiarities are not

found in these ancient models. That the false virtues and false heroism portrayed by ancient poets, should be reproduced in modern poetry, even after the world has been taught by the religion of Christ the virtues of a new and nobler heroism, is more a matter of regret than of surprise, when we consider the natural propensity of the human heart and the sway of worldly fashion.

But that beyond this, an attempt should be made to reconstruct the exploded systems of ancient superstition, and retain the fables and deities of heathen mythology, which have not a shade of credulity left for their support among the most ignorant of the present age, is, to say the least, a most impracticable absurdity. Still more absurd would be the conclusion which seems to be gaining favor in some circles, to discard all religion, to banish all supernatural agency from the sphere of poetry. A far different conclusion should be drawn from these ancient examples. A far higher lesson is taught by the union of Pagan mythology with poetry. It shows that the spirit of poetry claims fellowship with religion—that it converses with the spiritual and the divine—that its aspirations lift it from the earth, and it mounts heavenward in its flight. The fables and deities, embalmed in ancient song, were not the mere creations of poetic fancy, to serve the purpose of embellishment in art, but they were the sacred realities of religious faith to the heathen mind—the traditional forms in which its dim conceptions of the invisible, the spiritual and the divine were embodied. Now that the light of truth has dispelled these floating visions forever—now that we have revealed a brighter prospect of life and immortality, and

more exalted views of the character and government of God—now that a more glorious vision of the unseen and the eternal rises before the eye of faith, peopled with higher intelligencies and pervaded by a purer element; surely poetry should rejoice in the light; expatiate amid the surrounding glories, and seek its greatest triumphs amid such inspiring realities! The fabled Muses have vanished from their earthly retreats. The genii of the grove, and stream, and mountain, have departed. The Elysian Fields, peopled with the shades of bloody heroes, and the shapes of lascivious gods have faded from the sky. A new order of spiritual beings traverse the air. A new scene rises in glory above the heavens. And “we are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born; and to God, the judge of all; and to the spirit of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.” To what quarter shall poetry now turn for high inspiration and worthy employment? Shall she wander among the tombs of departed mythologies? If so, she will not be followed by the faith and sympathies of mankind. Disowning then all relation to the spiritual and the divine, shall she crawl contented on the earth; or roam the air in vacancy and darkness? Alas! such too often seems to be the sad alternative! And we pronounce that in this fact, we discover the cause of the general decline of modern poetry. The reign of superstition has terminated; but the dominion of truth is not supreme. The inspiration of fable has ceased; but the inspiration of faith does not fully prevail. Under the dazzling glare of “the

dry light of science," a glittering array of sordid material interests fills the public eye, and the glories of the unseen and the eternal are eclipsed. The genius of poetry is sustained by no high inspiration. It has not risen to the summits of heavenly truth. It has not surveyed the scenery of the better land. It has not welcomed the light of a pure, spiritual, divine dispensation. The modern Muse is of the earth, earthy ; or of the air, visionary. But on neither condition can poetry live and triumph. It cannot dwell forever in the dust. The passions of earth, the fascinations of love, the pomp of chivalry, and the pride of heroism, as materials for poetry, are soon exhausted. The labor of genius becomes a tiresome task of repetition, and society at length grows weary of its tasteless productions. Neither can poetry live in utter vacaney and darkness. Though it sweeps in a lofty circuit through the air, yet, like the eagle, it must face the sun in its upward flight, and repose at intervals on its mountain eyrie. The discursive imagination requires the fixed realities of religious faith to sustain and guide its adventurous wing, in exploring such a region. Divest the spirit land of all such scenery and objects in the conception of the poet, and the prospect, otherwise transporting, becomes a dismal blank. His career is arbitrary and aimless, and his unintelligible song awakens no responsive sympathy in the hearts of his fellow men. Thus, excluded from the fountains of spiritual life, an exile in captivity, under the prevailing power of mammon, which reigns over modern society, the spirit of poetry languishes in gloom and hangs its silent harp on the willows : and we have no hope of its permanent resuscitation, until it

becomes quickened by the divine energy of Christian faith, and is "baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire from heaven."

But this poetical prejudice against Christianity professes to derive a sanction from the Bible itself. It is intimated that the authority of a standard of taste is not recognized in the Bible. Nay, that compliance with such a standard is forbidden, as inconsistent with the sacredness of its spirit and the austerity of its doctrines. In proof of this, we are referred to those scriptural expressions which repudiate "the wisdom of this world"—"the words which man's wisdom teacheth," and "the excellency of speech and of knowledge." And we are reminded that in many instances the rules of modern rhetoric are violated by the sacred writers. It will be seen that the old ground is here assumed, on which folly and ignorance were wont formerly to elaim their exclusive right to the patronage of Christianity. Indeed science and philosophy might lament their banishment from the Christian fold, with far greater reason than poetry, for *its* adoption is practically exemplified in many portions of the sacred volume, which shine in all the glories of inspired song.

The truth is, neither science, philosophy, nor poetry is disowned as essentially alien to the gospel. Only false science, proud and shallow wisdom, and fantastic extravagance of style are reprobated. As to instances of rhetorical blemish, supposed discernible in the Bible, if we except such as are of human origin in the English translation of the original text, they will be found to be inseparable from the subjects discussed. These are not always of an agreeable nature. The

Bible was not designed to be an elegant treatise on select themes, to afford entertainment to the educated and refined. It is a message from heaven to earth—from God to our guilty race, portraying our moral debasement and ruin, and pointing to a way of hope and salvation. We discover in all its parts, the harmony of a divine adaptation to the great purpose of a revelation to mankind. Even its seeming blemishes are in keeping with this leading design. We might with equal justice, arraign a volume on medicine for inelegancies of style in describing the various diseases of the body, as censure the Bible for violating the laws of literary taste, in treating of the darker maladies of our moral nature. To adopt the language of a profound writer—"God would speak to man directly as a creature standing before him, and not as if he were regarding man as a creature placed in refined society, and to be addressed in language modified according to its rules, and as if he were considerate of the creature's dignity or taste. Some of the more trivial of the infidel tribe have attempted on this account to detract from the venerableness and dignity of the Bible, talking about its dealing in coarse language and images. As well might the vain spirits in the prophet's time have been shocked that Elijah would not put on a court dress when he had to appear, in the name of the Almighty, before kings and queens and princes ; or that John the Baptist came in so coarse a garb to preach repentance and announce the kingdom of God. Yet, after all this, it is a perfectly obvious fact that the scriptures do abound in every kind of beauty and sublimity of sentiments, images and language. As in the case of Elijah, there was his rough man-

tle, but also the chariot and horses of fire. But then it is most remarkably characteristic of the sacred writings, that these beauties seem to come with no manner of design to please the taste and fancy. They appear as most simply spontaneous from the subject."

There is a divine consistency in the word of God, which attests its origin. It appreciates all objects according to their real value. It classifies all qualities according to their intrinsic merit. It places truth before taste. It exalts moral distinctions above those that are intellectual or physical. The world adopts a different standard, and arranges qualities according to an opposite scale of appreciation. It exalts supreme in its regard, those distinctions that are really secondary and subordinate. It places first and foremost those qualities that are exterior, incidental and transient in their nature, while the essential elements of character, the primary features of the moral man, which alone are permanent, are not suffered to pass current in its esteem, unless attended by these mere outward and visible appendages. The distinctions of learning, wealth, rank, fashion, refinement and taste, are elevated above all moral considerations in the world's regard. In the Word of God, moral distinctions alone are treated as essentially important. The Bible does not stoop to pay a flattering tribute to any of these external and transient classifications amongst men. And in this respect a consistent harmony pervades the contents and the style of the sacred volume—the doctrines of religion and the mode of their communication—the birth, life, and teachings of our Saviour—the dispensation of his grace—the experience of his people, and

the history of his church. Man is viewed in the moral aspect of his nature, which alone is uniform and common to the race. All subordinate distinctions vanish in the sight of him who looks upon the heart, and judgeth not according to the appearance. The whole race are regarded in the same relation to him as creatures; subjects of the same law and expectants of the same destiny. No mere external classifications are regarded in the settlement of this common interest. The transient social distinctions, recognized by men, do not include a corresponding moral difference. Superiority in physical or intellectual attainments does not imply superior excellence of character, or greater purity of heart. On the contrary, the reverse of this seems to be the general law of association. Those distinguishing gifts of a benign providence, which form the basis of such social distinctions, are too often perverted by human depravity into sources of ungodliness and worldly lusts. Hence, so far from paying a flattering tribute of homage to such external distinctions amongst men, it accords with a higher consistency, that God, in the dispensations of His providence and word, should cast a degree of seeming contempt on these transient accomplishments which constitute the pride and glory of man.

This fact, which lies as a stepping-stone, at the very entrance of that spiritual temple, erected amid the ruins of our fallen nature, is often "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to the proud heart of man. The adoption of the Jews, a nation comparatively obscure in regard to attainments in the arts and sciences, as the repository of the sacred oracles; and the selection of their land as the birth-place of

the Messiah, was an offence to the refined Greek and the haughty Roman ; and gave to the gospel, in advance of any candid investigation of its claims, an aspect of foolishness in their estimation. The lowly birth of the Saviour in a manger—the extreme poverty of his life, so that, although “foxes had holes and birds of the air had nests, yet the Son of man had not where to lay his head”—his condescending intercourse and compassionate sympathy with the vile outcasts of earth, so as to be called “the friend of publicans and sinners”—his especial benevolence to the poor, afflicted, and oppressed amongst men, as he went about doing good, and proclaiming the message of mercy, so as to place it among the prominent proofs of his divine mission, that “to the poor the gospel was preached”—the abject humiliation of his life and death, by which his divinity was eclipsed to human view, except in transient flashes of glory emitted at intervals in his career, so as to show that his “kingdom was not of this world,” but based on spiritual conditions in the pure hearts of his people ;—in all this, the carnal conceptions of the Jews, who expected a Messiah to come surrounded by all the appendages of earthly pomp and power, to magnify their national pride, and minister to their worldly lusts ; encountered “a stumbling block” which offended their prejudice and exasperated their malignity.

Corresponding to these peculiarities, which pertain more especially to the past, there are similar features displayed in the career of the Christian church, which are no less offensive to the modern prejudices of the world. In every age the poor, the ignorant and the obscure have constituted the larger

proportion of the professed followers of Christ. Wealth, power, learning, taste and genius have never yet been so generally attracted around the cross, as to confer their peculiar honors on the Christian name. The human heart, prone to prize such distinctions above their intrinsic value, would desire a different policy ; but, in every feature of the mighty plan, is displayed the wisdom of Him, whose thoughts and ways are as much above ours, as the heavens are above the earth. The human heart would have a Bible for the noble, the learned, and the gifted ; but it would be a revelation of human pride, and not of divine purity. The human heart would have a Saviour somewhat after the Jewish model, arrayed at his coming in all the splendor of earthly pomp, associating in his life with the higher circles of society, whispering the accents of mercy in the ear of taste, unfolding the glories of heaven to the eye of genius, and collecting the jewels of his final crown from gew-gaws of earthly magnificence. But what a Saviour would this be ? With the weakness of human folly—the perversion of human passion—the prejudice of human pride—and the contracted partiality of human benevolence ! No, we need a *divine* Saviour !—who, with the dignity of divine condescension, when he stoops from heaven to earth, can disregard the little distinctions amongst men, as unworthy of his concern, and take his station on the lowest level of human life—who, with the discrimination of divine purity, passing by all outward diversity of circumstance, looks alone on the moral attributes of character, and meets the Scribe and Pharisee on the same footing with the publican and the sinner—who, with the enlarged capacity of

divine benevolence, can embrace "a world lying in wickedness," and whose mercy, not confined to a favored few (such as in their outward circumstances, can least appreciate, and in their moral qualities may least merit, the distinction.) extends, in all the fullness of its treasures, to the poor, the humble, and the vile.

In like manner, man would construct the model of a Christian church. All vulgar elements would be excluded. A temple would arise in the symmetrical proportions of a classic dome. Its walls would be hung with the tapestry of earthly splendor and adorned with the trophies of human art. The great, the noble, and the refined alone should tread its aisles and bow before its altar; while the music of praise and the message of truth, should alike fall in modulated tones of softest melody on ears polite. But in such a temple, though the eye, the ear, and the taste might find pleasure in the forms of an idolatrous fascination, the heart would remain dumb as to true devotion. No! the divine policy displayed in the structure of the Bible, the conditions of the gospel, and the history of the church, surpasses the devices of human fancy, alike in the discrimination of its wisdom, the holiness of its aim, and the comprehensiveness of its benevolence. The qualities that pertain to human character are here arranged in their proper classification. What is essential and vital is made supreme. What is incidental is made subordinate. The physical and the mental sink below the moral. Taste, learning and genius become subservient to spiritual life. Who can say there is injustice, or violence to nature in this arrangement? The soul rises in new dignity and unfolds its

powers in more vigorous existence. Order and harmony mark all its movements, and taste and genius themselves rejoice in their appropriate subordination to higher elements. — In the preceding remarks, we have in part anticipated the ground of this prejudice, as presented in another form. This has reference to the practical development of Christianity in the character and life of its professors. It is maintained that *there is something essentially unpoetical in the elements of Christian character* : as if the form or mould of doctrine, by which the moral nature of the believer is impressed with the image of a new character, obliterated every feature of taste and genius. This charge, which amounts to a general libel on the Christian name, is yet so indefinite in its nature, as to forbid a direct refutation. We gather it only from current epithets of derision, and cant phrases of contempt, coined in the mint of prejudice, and circulated in the commerce of polite literature—such as “narrow creed,” “sectarian bigotry,” “vulgar superstition,” “fierce intolerance,” and “gloomy fanaticism.”

To affirm that the history of the Church has never presented samples of character to which such terms were appropriate, would be as far from truth, as to maintain that such terms were faithfully descriptive of the general aspect of Christian character. The exclusive application of such epithets is found in certain unfavorable exhibitions of mere nominal Christianity. A mind destitute of piety is perverted by prejudice on such a subject. Hence the irreligious are inevitably prone to a false estimate of Christian character. A judge thus biased will find some objectionable features in the fairest cause. The world has never fully approved any model of genuine piety that has

been presented to its notice. As in the days of John the Baptist and the Saviour, when at one time it assumes an aspect of austere sanctity, it is met with the exclamation—"lo! it hath a devil!" and when at another, it appears in the form of affable benignity, it is hailed with the cry, "behold a friend of publicans and sinners!" Thus disqualified for impartial investigation, the world takes its impression of the doctrines and spirit of the gospel, not from the Bible, in which they are revealed, but from that imperfect visible expression of them found in the prevailing party or sect with which it may be at the time familiar. But no creed, sect, or party has ever presented a perfect image of the divine original. The flowing stream, however pure, gathers corruptions in its course, which are not found in the living fountain.

In every age the visible church has contained within its pale corrupt materials. At different times, entire branches of the church have degenerated, and become heretical and impure. So that even truth and purity, in seeking to perpetuate the integrity of the Christian cause, have been forced into conflict with such hostile elements in the body itself; and have thus been compelled to assume a belligerent aspect, which is foreign to their nature. Hence agitations, controversies, and revolutions have arisen in the Church. These features, moreover, receive an unhappy prominence in the written record of the Church's history. These, indeed, constitute its history. The evils, blemishes, and corruptions of the Church alone form events and eras in its career. Pure, peaceful, prosperous piety has no annals. Consequently, in surveying the past progress of Christianity, and looking over

the present aspect of the Church, the mind is liable to a deception, similar to that which befalls the eye of an observer, when cast over a region of country intersected by mountains. The rugged prominences in the landscape alone are visible. The quiet valleys, smiling in beauty, and teeming with luxuriance, are concealed from view.

In addition to this, we are to consider that the piety of the Church at different periods has been prone to peculiar extremes in its manifestation. Under the pressure of existing influences it has tended to certain human excesses, which have served to obscure its original brightness. Hence each succeeding age may be traced by some peculiar phase of Christianity, which has for the time prevailed. Thus a period of excitement has been succeeded by a period of speculation—a time of showy observance in forms and ceremonies, by a time of rigid simplicity and austere puritanism. These passing phases of piety, growing out of the circumstances of the age, have furnished food for prejudice, given occasion to malignant caricature to paint distortions of Christian character, and supplied materials for the logic of epithet to darken the Christian name. When under such circumstances pictures of vital Christianity are drawn by an unfriendly hand, not every mind has the candor or the discrimination to conceive it, as it existed, *in contrast* with the opposing impiety of the age in which it appeared. Witness in point the caricatures of so-called puritanism, presented in the hostile literature of succeeding times. As we look upon its rigid features, we are prone to forget, on the other hand, the bloated sensuality, the haughty insolence, and the blood-thirsty rage,

which reigned supreme in the opposite ranks of society. And yet this ungainly puritanism, with its Calvinistic creed, its sanctimonious aspect, and its uncompromising spirit, gave birth to the genius of a Milton and a Bunyan, and contained within itself the plastic germ of whatever increased intellectual dignity, civil liberty, and social progress, have since distinguished the modern history of the world.

Taste and genius are not recognized as conditions of saving grace, we admit. But in this they are treated with no disparagement. True dignity consists in proper subordination, and the noblest freedom is found when every object obeys its appropriate laws and moves harmoniously in its legitimate sphere. The provisions of the gospel are adapted to the humblest condition of human life; but they are equally adapted to the highest human capacity. The poor and the ignorant, from the highways and hedges, may more readily obey the invitation, and come in greater numbers to the feast; but there is room also for the great and gifted, and ample provisions spread for their nourishment. Yet they too seldom heed the invitation, because they have greater attractions at home to plead as pretexts for refusal. It is not, therefore, because of any thing vulgar or unpoetical in the system of Christian faith, or in the structure of Christian character, that the poor and illiterate are attracted, and the refined and gifted are repelled. The mere predilections of literary taste do not determine such a distinction. There are deeper causes at work in the nature of man, both attractive and repellant, in connection with this subject.

Christianity is not responsible for the distortions of charac-

ter, which human ignorance, superstition and fanaticism have produced under its name. It is admitted that there have been unlovely exhibitions of character and ungenial manifestations of spirit, in connection with the Christian Church. Corresponding to these there have been human moulds of doctrine—formal creeds, constructed from disjointed fragments of the divine system of truth, which rise in gloomy and forbidding disproportion, and frown defiance on all enlarged and lofty views of the universe, and all the pure and generous emotions of our nature. But the sublime system of Christian truth stands forth distinct and separate from all such human fabrications. The spirit it infuses into human life is warm, generous and expansive. The shape it impresses on human character is bright and lovely in all its lineaments. That system, as its outlines are revealed in the sacred Scriptures, rises in its simplicity, purity and majesty above all other forms of truth, and yet harmonizes with every other department of truth in the universe. The same Divine Mind formed the nature of man, built the structure of the universe, conducts the agency of providence, and revealed the system of truth in the gospel. There is a correspondence, a unity, a harmony, pervading all the varied departments of his works. Christianity deals prominently with vital and central truths, regarding man in his moral relations. But in attaching primary importance to the great truths of the gospel, the Christian does not close his eyes on appropriate views of life—relinquish all the generous affections of his nature, and, retiring apart to some frigid zone, congeal into stiff conformity to a cold, isolated, contracted creed. No, man becomes a Christian, not by a

process of compression, but of expansion—not by the extinction, but by the resuscitation of life. The gospel is not a remote, secluded, solitary system. It comprehends all the relations and interests of humanity. It is the mighty reservoir into which all the streams of nature, providence and human life are continually pouring. It is not a hermit's well, hidden, remote in the solitude of a mountain wilderness; but the wide and all-embracing ocean, collecting the streams of earth into its arms, and reflecting the glory of heaven in its breast.

It is true, there is, *in one sense*, a separation from the world, and a renunciation of its interests, on the part of the Christian. There are false views of life—delusive worldly prospects—extravagant worldly attachments—unworthy, but imposing worldly qualities—and *these* are often painted by the art of genius, and arrayed in the brilliant colors of poetry. These are renounced, and so far as poetry may be composed of such elements, it also must be relinquished. But who will pretend that poetry is found necessarily and only in such a connection? Who will say that it is born of error and delusion—that it feeds on false views of life—that it fosters extravagant and guilty excesses of the passions—and that while it is the highest product of human genius, it tends inevitably to the degradation and ruin of mankind? If so, then Christianity disowns its fellowship. But, while there may be *a kind* of poetry of this description, which is to be deprecated and disowned; yet, who does not see it is poetry under perversion—nay, *under an eclipse—shrouded and sunk in the shame of an unholy prostitution?* No, error is cold and contracted—delu

sion is dark and cheerless. Truth is vast, bright, variegated, beautiful and boundless. And Christianity, harmonizing with all subordinate truth, unfolds before the vision of poetry the most inviting prospect to allure its flight, and, with its pure, pervading spirit, quickens and sustains its high career, by the most ennobling inspiration. This we shall proceed to show by a number of conclusive considerations.

CHAPTER III.

THE POETICAL INSPIRATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND FEELING.

WE trust that those who have followed us in our previous investigations, will be at no loss to determine in what sense we use the term *Christianity*. We employ it with no evasive, indefinite, mystical signification. We mean the religion of the Bible—the religion of Christ—the doctrines of which he taught ; the spirit of which he breathed ; the virtues of which he exemplified, during his earthly ministry ; and the high immortal hopes of which all cluster around his cross ;—a religion, which acknowledges the fallen moral state of mankind ; while it looks to the merciful mediation of an appointed Saviour as an open door of reconciliation with God ; and seeks the purifying and quickening energy of the Divine Spirit to restore the moral life and purity of the soul. It is a religion, therefore, which places humility and repentance among its primary duties ; which takes faith as the foundation of all its hopes ; which employs prayer as the instrument of all its supplies ; which fills the relations of life with cheerful, active benevo-

lence, and, regarding the earth as a scene of training and discipline, looks above it with holy aspiration and immortal hope.

Notwithstanding the masks assumed by its secret enemies, and the distortions displayed by its deluded friends, there is a manifest harmony in the gospel, through all the pages of its inspired testimony ; and there is a prevalent unity in the faith of evangelical Christendom. The Bible in all its teachings is one. The Christian life, in all its manifestations, is one. " There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." This religion, bearing " the image and superscription" of divinity, symmetrical in all its proportions, harmonious in all its parts, so beautiful in its adaptation, and so blessed in its results, instead of fettering the wings of an aspiring mind and smothering the fires of poetic genius, imparts to poetry new life and nobler inspiration.

We propose now to point out some of the sources of this inspiration. But we feel, that here we enter on the most difficult branch of our subject—difficult, however, not because of any insufficiency or obscurity in the evidence which supports our position, but from a conscious want of our capacity to do justice to the theme, in all its fulness and majesty. Every mind forms its own standard of poetry. The character of this standard depends on previous tastes and habits of thought. A vision of the poetical arises from the shades and colors of individual experience. Thus every one endowed with poetic genius surrounds himself with an ideal world, in which all objects receive a given local adjustment, and assume a special air and coloring. If this ideal world, this surrounding intellectual element, in which the man moves, and where his thoughts

and feelings are accustomed to shape themselves into poetry, be practically closed against the tastes and habits of devotion; if the presence of God be there unknown: then to anticipate such a change—to expect such a revolution, as would constitute the man a devout Christian, would seem to overthrow all order, destroy all harmony, and desolate all loveliness, that before existed; and poetry would seem to be banished from the scene, by the intrusion of so awful a presence.

Every mind, moreover, forms to itself an image of Christianity. This is not always derived from personal experience. Nor is it drawn often from any genuine or authoritative source. It is not taken from the great original image. Its features are not transferred from the model portraits of apostles and primitive saints, suspended in the scripture gallery. Religion itself wears a gloomy and forbidding aspect to those who shun its presence. Such minds may readily find, in the distortions of Christian character, that sometimes appear in the church, or in the caricatures of piety sketched by a scoffing literature, images that seem to sanction so dark a misconception. Under such disadvantages, it seems almost a hopeless attempt to vindicate the high character and claims of Christianity. You cannot reason against laws of association. You cannot argue with the tastes and habits of the soul; and therefore you cannot convince the mind of one, destitute of piety, that, by possessing a spirit of devotion, (although the relations and conditions of poetry may be somewhat altered,) poetry itself will not be sacrificed, or impaired; but, on the contrary, refined and invigorated—exalted to new dignity, endowed with higher powers, and admitted to a nobler and wider do-

minion. But while we may not convince those, whose poetical faith has been formed so as to exclude every element of Christian piety, yet we can state the grounds of our own belief, and show reasons to prove the delusion of those who cherish an unworthy prejudice.

There are two ways in which Christianity may extend a propitious influence to poetry; by supplying new trains of thought, and opening a wide field of truth before its view. And again, by its direct influence on the heart, purifying, harmonizing, and elevating its tastes, affections, and aspirations. Both these influences, however, may be regarded as one. Both unite in moulding Christian character. Truth transforms and sanctifies, when it is believed; and it is mainly by its moral effect on the tastes and sentiments of the soul, that the benign influence of religion is extended to poetry.

1. *The spirituality of religion releases the mind from the dominion of the senses, and elevates the range of its faculties to a level with the higher regions of truth.* Man, possessing a two-fold nature, stands related to two worlds--the one material and visible; the other comprehending this--as an island amid an encircling sea--immaterial and spiritual. Piety is the habit of the soul, holding communion with invisible and spiritual objects. Faith is a complex spiritual exercise, at once intellectual and emotional, by which the mind converses with that invisible scene, the existence and glory of which have been revealed by Divine inspiration. It is not an exercise prompted by a vague impulse of curiosity, to explore the wonders of a region, remote from our sphere and disconnected with our interests. The objects and beings of that invisible

world are associated with man in the most intimate moral relationship—bound to his heart and conscience by the strongest ties of obligation and interest. There is the glorious dwelling-place of the great Father of our spirits; the holy habitation of high orders of angelic intelligence and beatified spirits of the just from earth ascended; there is the final home of all the pure and faithful from amongst men; where the raptures and glories of an immortal destiny shall be unfolded through eternity. Consequently the tastes, the sentiments and the aspirations of the pious heart are inseparably connected with the vision of faith, which surveys this invisible scene. The devout mind is habitually drawn thither by the strong fascination of love, desire, and hope. “Walking by faith and not by sight,” “looking not at things seen and temporal, but at things unseen and eternal,” the humble believer moves abroad on the earth in the light of a higher existence, and walks among his fellow men, encompassed by a cloud of nobler witnesses from heaven. To this sublime and boundless theatre the kindling vision of faith habitually turns. It is not the dull and dreamy gaze of an empty mind, fixed on a region of vacancy and gloom. It is not the downcast scowling glance of a morose spirit, looking along a cold and narrow avenue, from which the light and love, the sights and sounds of the living universe are all excluded. Nor is it yet, the illusory vision of a poetic genius, exploring the Elysian Fields of ancient mythology, conversing with the gods and heroes of a departed faith, or constructing in the air some floating fancy-realm, peopled with fairies, muses and genii—the transient sport of a capricious imagination. No. It is

the intelligent, believing, devout apprehension of a scene of existence, the reality of which is amply attested; the beauties and wonders of which infinitely exceed the noblest creations of human fancy; inhabited by beings of surpassing intelligence and radiant loveliness; by swift-winged ministering spirits, angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim, amid "thrones, principalities and powers;" where, "in light inaccessible and full of glory," the great Eternal Spirit presides, veiled in the awful mystery of his infinite nature, crowned with the radiance of his own perfections, and dispensing light and love over a dependent universe.

It is true, every mind familiar with the disclosures of Divine revelation, has some vague discernment of this invisible scene and these spiritual beings. But their existence and glory are not fully realized—they do not become permanent objects of affection, desire, and hope, until they have first become objects of enlightened Christian faith. Now it is mainly through the medium of the affections that ideas and associations impress their image on the character. Society, natural scenery, and the events of personal experience stamp their impression on the mind, by means of a fusion, produced under the glowing emotions of the heart. The society must be that of endeared companionship. The scenery must lie around the home of our youth. The events of personal experience must be connected with our deepest emotions and fondest hopes. In a word, there must be fascination, as well as familiarity, in order to produce an assimilation of character. When we survey this infinite expanse of vision, with its sublime grandeurs and dazzling glories, with its lofty intelli-

gences, and its incomprehensible Deity, what mighty conceptions exalt the mind and expand the heart! And when we remember that, in the case of the devout Christian, this scene is surveyed, not by occasional transient glances, such as a traveller in a foreign land might cast over the surrounding country; but with the prolonged, eager, loving gaze, with which one beholds the scenery of his native land; and that this prospect, in all its elevation and grandeur, is habitually within the range of his vision; so that his character is matured and moulded under its presiding influence! how can it be otherwise, than that a mental, as well as a moral assimilation should take place in his experience? How can it be otherwise, than that under this transporting prospect, there should be a progressive transformation of the mind and heart—when “beholding thus with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory?”

This course of reasoning was amply sustained by the testimony of facts. There may have been contracted and grovelling spirits, who under the mask of piety, have displayed the fruits of superstition, bigotry and fanaticism; but the humblest and rudest capacity has never yet been quickened by the light, warmed by the love and animated by the hope of the gospel, without manifesting a visible mental enlargement. The mind may remain ignorant as to the details of human science, but there is a liberality of sentiment and a loftiness of conception on general subjects, which bear testimony to intellectual improvement. Indeed, religion as we conceive, forms the basis of true mental independence, and fosters the noblest growth of the intellect. The progress of

the mind is shaped by the moral tastes and sentiments ; and by a reference to these, we may distinguish the various grades of human intelligence. There is a *secular* turn of mind—with a proneness to seek its gratification in the region of politics, commerce or agriculture. This is shaped by a love of wealth ; and all its exercise is subservient to accumulation. There is a scientific turn of mind—exploring the lifeless forms of matter, and spurning all spiritual inferences, as lying beyond its peculiar province. This is swayed by vanity—and collects its stores for the purpose of ostentation. There is again a *romantic* or *poetic* turn of mind—inconstant and vascillating, unless when joined in meet fellowship with piety ; actuated by a love for the sublime and beautiful, but untaught, as to the sphere of their highest manifestation ; seeking in vain its fruition amid present and visible things, and swayed perpetually from its aim, by the controlling spirit of worldliness. All these grades of intelligence fall short of the higher regions of truth. They are associated with no pure spiritual taste—sustained by no lofty desire or hope, which would incline the thoughts to mount to such an elevation.

When any worldly interest is made the reliance and refuge of the soul, for the most part, the time and attention are engrossed in secular pursuits ; and seasons of leisure are devoted to frivolity and dissipation—the false glitter of unseemly wit, or the gaudy fascinations of sensual pleasure ; and when any intellectual exercise is attempted, beyond that which is directly subservient to physical necessities, (as in their case of those scientific explorers, who fail to discern God in their scrutiny of His works, and who disown the obligations

of piety and the hopes of a future life, in their observations on man's nature and destiny,) what else can it be, but the blind exhibition of mere power—the false triumph of fruitless skill, converging in self, and terminating in vanity? The mind looking to the present scene alone as a source of satisfaction, encumbered by downward moral tendencies, is destitute of that high aspiration towards a congenial element—that fervent admiration and homage of the soul for truth, in its spiritual manifestations, which alone can properly invigorate its energies, and sustain their worthy and consistent exercise. Its movements are crippled and abortive. It either crawls sluggishly on the ground, or its flight is lowly and broken; like the ineffectual struggles of some mighty bird fettered to the earth, and free to rise only as far as the length of its chain will permit. Vain is the wide sweep of its wing! Vain the elastic energy that nerves its frame! Its strength is expended in futile and frantic volutions in a contracted circle. Its plumage is soiled by a ceaseless contact with the dust. It can take no continuous flight. It can rise to no becoming altitude. It cannot give full scope to its native capacities; nor inhabit that high element in which it was formed to move. The lofty summits of truth are unscathed. The ethereal regions of a higher life are unexplored! In the experience of the devout Christian, the mind, released from the enthrallment of a worldly spirit, finds its congenial element in this exalted sphere; and is sustained in its sublime excursions by the higher habit of religious faith.

II. But not only does this spiritual scene, with its glorious beings, as contemplated by faith, extend an elevating and

inspiring influence over the mind. *The scenery of nature, and the events of human life are, at the same time invested with a spiritual atmosphere.* Some may be ready to ask—"will not religious devotion to unseen spiritual objects weaken the ties and affections that bind us to the present scene, and produce a frigid insensibility of soul to the endearments of nature and life?" By no means! Religion, it is true, breaks the bondage of a blind and sordid idolatry to this world; and teaches the estimation of its true value; but at the same time exalts its objects to a nobler attitude, and endows them with a higher significance. It connects them with spiritual associations, and crowns them with a light of an immortal destiny. No! We degrade, when we idolize the present scene. We mar its beauty, we destroy the dignity, we dispel the charm of its high poetic interest when we look upon surrounding nature, as a moving mass of unconscious matter, isolated from all spiritual existence. Human life sinks to an inferior level of mere animal being, when disjoined from the prospect of immortality. Beauty and sublimity are not material qualities. They are the visible expressions, in the type of matter, of some veiled spiritual element, which assumes this mode of manifestation. They find their interpretation in those trains of association which lead the mind to moral qualities, or to the glorious attributes of God. Religion sanctifies and renders immortal the tenderest ties and best affections of our nature. They may be subject to earthly vicissitude. They may seem to terminate at death; but they will be restored and perpetuated on another scene of being. As some mountain streams flow for a short distance in their channels, then suddenly sink

under the surface of the earth ; and after holding a subterranean course rise again and flow along the landscape in deeper, stronger and brighter currents, so the affections which spring up in this life, if sanctified by faith, though they sink in the grave, will rise again and flow with greater depth and power over the fields of immortality.

What sublime associations surround the scenery of nature under the pervading presence of God, as a reconciled Father, "whose tender mercies are over all His works !" The earth with its vales and mountains, its caves and cliffs, its fields and forests, its rills and rivers, its lakes and oceans becomes radiant with His glory and vocal with His praise. "The spacious firmament on high," with sun, moon and "stars which are the poetry of heaven," beams with a brighter splendor, and peals forth the music of a nobler anthem. The events of human life, and the revolving train of the variegated seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter, with infancy, youth, manhood and age, as they roll along under the guardianship of a merciful providence and bear the soul onward to an immortal paradise, all by their transporting testimony, prompt the exclamation from the pious heart—

"These as they change, Almighty Father! these
Are but the varied God—the rolling year
Is full of thee!"

How cold, dim, and cheerless, in comparison with this glorious reality of faith, is that abstract creation of an un-devout fancy, so languidly invoked and so listlessly adored by its poetic worshippers under the title of NATURE! At best but a dreamy, superficial admiration of certain vague qualities, floating like shadows on the air ; such as

power, wisdom, goodness—the unconscious fragments of a God, disjoined from moral attributes; without the purity, without the majesty, without the personality and the prerogative of God ! How meagre and frivolous the fabled beings of ancient song, as reproduced in modern poetry, in contrast with those “ quick spirits of the universe,” beings of spotless purity and towering intelligence, leagued in sympathy with man, which in radiant ranks, bow and veil their faces with their wings before the throne above ; or bend from Heaven to hail with joy the return of every prodigal ; or encamp in watchful guard around the habitations of the just ; or on missions of love and mercy to man, traverse the air with winged speed, or “ walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep.” How free the access of the Christian to the temple of nature—how close his approach to her shrine—how intimate his communion with her veiled mysteries ! How legible to him her sacred lessons, as imprinted on the page of every landscape !

“ He looks abroad into the varied field
 Of Nature, and though poor perhaps compare d
 With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
 Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
 His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
 And the resplendent rivers, his to enjoy
 With a propriety which none can feel,
 But who with filial confidence inspired,
 Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
 And smiling say—*My Father made them all !*
 * * * * *
 Acquaint thyself with God, if thou would’st taste
 His works ! Admitted once to His embrace,
 Thou shalt perceive that thou wast blind before.
 Thine eye shall be instructed, and thy heart
 Made pure, shall relish with divine light
 ’Til then unfelt, what hands divine have wrought !”

III. Connected with the views already presented, there is another propitious influence springing from Christian piety to foster the genius of the poet. *It preserves the sensibilities of the heart pure and fresh amid the perverting influences of life; and perpetuates the capacity of admiration amid the deadening encroachments of familiarity and experience.* Religion implies purity of heart. It corrects unworthy tastes, harmonizes discordant passions, and arrests evil propensities. It opens the fountains of right feeling, directs the affections to proper objects, and awakens lofty aspirations in the soul. The indulgence of corrupt dispositions hardens the heart, blunts the sensibilities, and produces a state of premature torpor and decay. The same law applies to the moral as to the physical constitution. The regular healthy action of its powers promotes the tone and vigor of the system, while irregular diseased action gives place to succeeding languor and feebleness. Impure passions produce a subsequent apathy proportionate to the degree of their excitement. Their evil fires scathe and burn and desolate the soul, and the victim of licentious indulgence soon sighs over the ruin of a spirit, shrunk, shrivelled and blasted within him. The testimony of all experience has demonstrated the truth, that piety fosters and invigorates, while vice sears and hardens the human heart. Insomuch that, if forgetful of all higher considerations, it would still be THE POLICY of a poet, in order to success in an art which so much requires the exercise of our finest sensibilities, to obey the dictates of piety, and cultivate purity of heart. An erring poet has left a beacon in his own verse to

warn the world of these hidden rocks, on which many a gallant vessel has been wrecked.

“I waive the quantum o’ the sin,
The hazard o’ concealing.
But och! *it hardens a’ within,*
And petrifies the feeling!”

Coleridge has defined genius to consist in the capacity “to carry the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood—to combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty, with every day appearances which experience has rendered familiar.” Macaulay, in a passage which we noticed in an early part of this discussion, has advanced substantially the same idea; although it is done with a design to disparage the dignity of poetry. He says: “he that, in an enlightened age, aspires to be a great poet, must first become as a little child.” This remark is based on the recognition of a melancholy fact in human experience. His error consisted in regarding this fact as the honorable distinction of wisdom, instead of a shameful result of infirmity. The character of man changes unconsciously as he advances in life. But alas! if he grows wiser he seldom grows better in his experience. Many, in moments of sad review, have sighed more over what they have lost than they have exulted over what they have gained in the transition from youth to manhood. Indeed that acquired wisdom is of most questionable dignity and worth, in attaining which we part with what may be called the youthful poetry of our nature. It is rather a partial and superficial knowledge which has assumed the title of wisdom. It consists not of deep and full supplies from “the Pierian spring,”

but of those "slight draughts which intoxicate the brain." Yet as the world goes such wisdom carries the day. "Nil admirari," is the motto of modern science and philosophy. But the ardent enthusiasm of youth is not entirely the offspring of ignorance and weakness. Nor is the stoical indifference of mature age altogether the result of accumulated knowledge. It is well that the superstitious fears of childhood should vanish away, for *they* spring from ignorance, or rather they are perversions (caused by ignorance) of a principle as yet not developed or matured amid sufficient light. But the vivid emotions and the glowing admiration characteristic of early life are not disproportionate to the objects which call them forth. They are the ready responses of a nature not yet benumbed by familiarity, nor corroded by care, nor blinded by habit, nor stiffened by pride—at once the vivid realization of the present, and the prophetic intuition of a future state of felicity and wisdom.

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of our prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing boy,
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy!
 * * * *
 At length the man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day."

In childhood visible objects are colored with hues of loveliness and glory, reflected from an invisible sphere. The inquisitive mind looks beyond the horizon of our senses. It extends to unseen spiritual relations. It asks of every passing phenomenon—whence?—why? and whither? These

silent questionings, these far-reaching, exploring glances of an immortal mind as it moves abroad amid scenes of novelty and wonder, are the rational sources of that quick susceptibility and kindling admiration peculiar to the morning of life : and these, when matured into the powers of manhood, constitute the high prerogative of genius. But, alas ! man soon learns to stifle and smother these inward questionings, as absurd and extravagant, and in their stead to cultivate more *practical* and *substantial* qualities, as better adapted to success in life ! He plucks the eagle wing of his spirit, to avoid the flights of a wayward imagination ! He dims the eagle eye of his mind, to prevent its rolling in poetic phrensy ; and, at length adapted to his sphere, he learns to strut upon his dunghill, a tame companion of ordinary fowls ! As man grows up under the dominion of a worldly spirit, and engages in the pursuits and passions of earth, a thousand causes combine to darken the generous susceptibilities of his heart, and blot out the bright capacity of admiration from his mind—without concluding them to be eclipsed and extinguished, as glimmering night-fires, by the meridian light of perfect knowledge !

We are supposing the case of one destitute of vital piety. And when we look at the dark array of hostile forces with which genius, unsustained by the quickening energy of faith, is called to contend in its earthly career, it is no cause of wonder, that it should be dimmed and soiled, and wounded in the conflict, even if it should not be overcome and taken captive. Familiarity, custom, the sway of fashion, the influence of society, corroding care, conflicting passion, pride of

intellect, and worship of Mammon—all these attend the career of man, and gradually consume the susceptibility and vigor of youthful genius. When associated with these qualities, even progressive knowledge tends to destroy the capacity of admiration. Knowledge in such a character must be superficial. It may be exact as to the details of science. It may be clear and comprehensive as to the compass of philosophy. It may cover a wide range of subjects, in every department of human discovery. And yet it may be profoundly ignorant of all. There are questions connected with every topic of investigation left untouched. There are depths unfathomed in every quarter of that sea, over the surface of which he has sailed, marking its tides, dotting its islands, and defining its coasts. “There are things in heaven and earth not dreamt of in such philosophy.” Truth is perceived only in its visible form and substance. The trunk of the tree is measured, and its roots, as they penetrate the earth are explored; but its invisible branches stretch abroad in every direction, adorned with leaves and blossoms; and its viewless top towers to heaven, laden with fruit. Hence, because the trunk alone is visible, and the top and branches reach out of sight, the tree is considered nothing more than a dry and lifeless trunk!

There is profound falsehood under that stupid self-flattery, which induces the belief that increasing experience and knowledge destroy the capacity of admiration—that science and learning are incompatible with genius—and that a poet cannot exist in an enlightened age! What has the age to do with the poet? Does it breathe and eat for him? Does it think and feel for him? No! His thoughts and feelings

are his own—independent, self-conscious, thrilling, high above the heads of the multitude! The true poet is always in advance of his age. He stands alone, on an eminence, “and sees the distant tops of thoughts, that men of common stature never saw.” There may be familiarity, without knowledge. Nay, there may be a familiarity, which opposes knowledge; inasmuch as when once induced, it smothers future investigation. The mind may be familiar with the surface of facts, and yet remain ignorant of the profound truth involved therein. Its knowledge may be like the acquaintance a stranger would form with a company of foreigners residing in the same house, but of whose language he was totally ignorant, and with whom he had no means of intercourse. He would at first feel some curiosity in beholding their singular appearance and dress, and hearing the strange jargon in which they conversed; but at length accustomed to this, he passes them by in silent indifference, familiar with their faces, but ignorant of their minds. It is such *ignorant familiarity*, and not thorough knowledge, that destroys the sense of novelty and wonder experienced in childhood, and blights the bloom of poetic genius. Many of those early questionings of the mind are never answered in the subsequent attainments of the man. He learns to disregard them as childish or extravagant, and having acquired the habit of indifference to such topics, he confines his attention to what he conceives a *more important* and *practical* range of inquiry. In his superficial attainments in secular and scientific knowledge, he becomes *intellectually proud*. His penetration is *so keen*, his knowledge is *so extensive*, that little remains for him to discover,

and nothing to admire! For what remains unknown he can easily adjust by an intuitive decision as to what it *ought* to be, and consequently what it is! His intellect is so *towering*, that it can perceive nothing *higher* than itself, to which it can *look up* with admiration! All its glances are either directed around on its own level in self-complacent indifference, or bent down on things beneath, in silent contempt. Such is the character of that worldly wisdom, which scoffs at the higher exercise of genius, as eccentric and visionary. But genius has a brighter eye. Its glance penetrates beneath the outward surface of things, and reaches beyond the boundary of the senses. It looks upon objects more in their true light. It traces truth in its remote relations—in forms of beauty and sublimity. And there are heights all radiant with glory, continually rising before his vision, as he advances; so that his kindling eye is ever lifted upward in admiring wonder and delight! Thus while genius preserves the vigor of its powers, it maintains an humble and child-like attitude.

But if genius be destitute of faith, if the poet be a stranger to vital piety, there are manifold and mighty causes in operation to crush the vigor of his powers—causes that arise, not only around him, in the habits and customs of society, and the sobering influence of time and experience; but causes that originate in the evil habits of his own life, and the perverted state of his moral nature. His heart clings to earth. His affections bind him to visible things. His desires, like an opposing current, resist his ascending progress. He has no high, constant aspiration, tending upward. He has no immortal hope “anchored within the veil”—no “correspon-

dence fixed with heaven." He has no habit of high communion with God—no confiding filial trust in Him, as a tender and compassionate Father in Heaven! Under all these disadvantages, through all these *opposing* influences, his genius must *force* its way to find a congenial element. And if, *intellectually*, his gifted spirit still mounts toward the higher regions of truth, and converses with spiritual forms and associations, it wanders thither *as an exile in a foreign land!* *The ties of his heart—the attractions of his home are not there!* And if, *as a poet*, he should still cherish a child-like capacity *to feel and admire* amid the surrounding glories of the universe; alas! it must be *as an orphan child!* God is not known and loved as a Father. And without piety, man exists in a state of moral orphanage!

But in the case of the devout Christian, all such considerations become propitious to poetic genius. The entire frame and habit of his piety inclines in the same direction. The moral change which constitutes him a Christian, is described as a return to the state of childhood—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." In the subsequent experience of the Christian, God is recognized as an unseen but ever-present Father. The confiding spirit of adoption, and the humble attitude of a child, are maintained through life. And not only does the awful mystery and infinite glory of the Divine character, like a pillar of cloud and fire, attend the Christian through all his journey; but the visible works of nature are associated with the Divine perfections, and every part of the vast universe is pervaded by the presence of its author. Ado-

ration of the character, and admiration of the works of God, are the habitual exercises of Christian faith. Under these high and sacred influences, the susceptibility and ardor of poetic genius find the most fostering encouragement.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VITAL HARMONY OF TRUTH—DEFECTS OF BYRON'S POETRY—SELF-COMMUNION—PRAYER.

IV. ANOTHER high advantage derived from Christian faith consists in the fact that *it enables the soul to comprehend and realize the vital harmony of truth.* If, as the poet sings,

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever,”

in itself considered; if truth shines with radiant loveliness, even in its fragmentary forms; surely truth is more attractive, and beauty is more divine, when seen associated in the fair proportion and symmetry of a consistent plan. A solitary feature may be fair, but how much fairer does it appear, in the full expression of a living countenance, beaming in the light, and varied in the emotions of an indwelling spirit! Music may be sweet in the fall of a single note; but how much sweeter in the prolonged melody of the mighty anthem, uttering the high raptures of the soul, and lifting the thoughts in adoration and praise! A lonely and broken pillar, standing amid a scene of ruins, may be beautiful in itself; but how much more beautiful when joined in just proportion, and fit-

ted to exact symmetry, it rises in its place to form a part of some glorious temple! To a mind destitute of faith, truth appears in detached and fragmentary forms. A dismal chaos prevails around. Wandering lights are seen fitting here and there, crossing and recrossing in strange confusion. Inarticulate sounds, plaintive or gay, fall at intervals on his distracted ear, without concord and without significance. Nature, providence and human life, in their changing aspects, move around him in bewildering perplexity; and he comprehends not their combined import—he feels not their united inspiration. Faith collects these scattered lights into a starry firmament of truth—arranges these stray notes in the scale of a harmonious system—and builds, from the confused materials of the present scene, a mighty pantheon for the worship and hopes of mankind.

Doubt, perplexity, unsatisfying conjecture, and unceasing contrariety, must necessarily characterize the mind, whose views of the present system of things conform not to the gospel economy. To every mind intent on the attainment of knowledge, but especially to the poet, whose genius seeks sympathy with the deeper elements of life, and holds communion with the mighty heart of nature; such a state of darkness and discord must be disastrous in the extreme. Bound on a fruitless voyage of discovery, drifting over an unknown sea, without chart, or compass, or anchor, the sport of every wave, “tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine;” and uncertain as to what final haven shall be gained; it is not surprising that the soul should grow weary in its restless course, or sink in utter shipwreck amid the

wild war of conflicting elements. There is no sublime satisfaction in surveying the present. There is no immortal hope in anticipating the future. Yet these conditions are essential to the healthful exercise of every earnest, truth-seeking spirit. In vain do we speak of the inspiration of truth and the love of nature ; when truth is not found in the harmony of a connected system, and nature is not known in its high and hidden import.

Human reason has pretended to construct for itself system after system—such as Deism, Pantheism and the like, with endless variation—to answer the eager questionings of an immortal mind, and to interpret the conflicting voices of nature and Providence. But discord still reigned around. Darkness still hung over the destiny of man. And the soul, sighing amid its unavailing conjectures, and recoiling from the dreary visions of unbelief, has sought, but never found *peace* in the order and harmony of its faith and *hope*, in the brightness and glory of its prospects, until it lifts its joyful eye and exclaims, *Eureka ! eureka !* at the cross of Christ ! There “mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace embrace each other.” There “life and immortality are brought to light.” There “peace on earth, good will to men, and glory to God in the highest,” becomes the chorus of awakened nature. There we find a key to the hidden harmonies of the universe—an index to the manifold mysteries of life ! The high and holy *doctrines* of the gospel explain the varied aspects of nature and Providence. The pure, humble and benevolent *virtues* of the gospel secure the order of society and the harmony of human life. Now we are enabled to an-

swer these thrilling questions:—Whence the origin of this stupendous and variegated scene of being? What the import of the conflicting aspects of things around us—of storm, and darkness, and tempest blended with sunshine and tranquil peace and smiling beauty—of affliction and tears mingled with consolation and joys—of severity interchanged with goodness? What the high import of life? What the hidden meaning of death? What our sacred mission here? What our final destiny hereafter? God is the creator and preserver of all things that exist—the moral governor of the universe. Man is a fallen being. Sin prevails over the race; having “brought death into the world, with all our woe.” Life is a scene of probation and discipline, where the judgments of Heaven fall as parental chastisements, and where mercy bends over the wandering to woo them back to the confidence and love of our reconciled Father—where holy aspirations are fostered, evil tendencies restrained, and patient deeds of charity performed; while death is but a dark doorway into the mansions of immortal light.

What other system so consistent in itself, so accordant with the realities of nature and life, so harmonizing in its interpretation of surrounding mysteries, so satisfying in its adaptation to the wants of man’s nature, and so cheering in the prospects which it unfolds in the future, can be found as a substitute for this? Shall a poet adopt the dark creed which disowns the author of the universe? Or that shallow system, scarcely less dark, which denies a Saviour to the guilty? Shall he hold that man walks upright in moral innocence, and expatiates in joy over a scene framed and fitted up as his final

residence—that *here* he finds supreme delight in gratifying the earthly instincts of his nature—with no element of gratitude in his joys—with no cup of consolation in his sorrows—with no noble purpose in life—with no sustaining hope in death—with no home of blessedness in Heaven? Alas! for the poet whose inspiration is derived from fountains of feeling no deeper, and whose verse is moulded by a spirit of harmony no higher than comports with a creed so shallow and so conflicting! Well may he exclaim in the bitter contradiction of his own experience, as a mighty but miserable poet of such a creed has exclaimed,

“ Our life is a false nature—’tis not in
The harmony of things!”

He may affect much rapture in swelling phrase over the mystery of life and the spirit of nature; but he knows nothing of either. He may exhibit the sudden impulses of wayward passion. He may depict fragmentary images of beauty and sublimity. He may manifest the fitful elements of a lawless power. But he is a stranger to the beautiful symmetry of accordant truth; and his unbelieving ear has never caught the sustained spiritual harmony of nature and life. Passing visions of “the tempest, the earthquake and the fire” have fittted by him in their bewildering power, and at once he has gone forth to prophesy in his madness, without waiting to hear “the still small voice of God,” whispering in the secret harmony of all things; but audible only to the quickened ear of Christian faith.

If the spirit of poetry bears any affinity to its outward form, it is essentially a spirit of harmony. Hence it “moves

harmonious numbers." . But the poet without faith, however gifted in the capacities of genius, rebels against the laws of moral harmony in his inward experience, and inhabits intellectually a region of discord and confusion. Such a poet, therefore, must inevitably labor under a twofold defect—first, in the nature of his inspiration, and secondly in the structure of his works. The sentiments of his heart and the visions of his mind are not conformed to the laws of eternal harmony. And the materials with which he " builds the lofty verse" are not hewn from the quarry of truth, nor squared to the beautiful symmetry and sublime proportion displayed in the great temple of nature. The inspiration of such a genius is discordant, fitful and self-conflicting. And whatever monument he may rear in verse is fragmentary, disproportionate and insecure. We are aware that many of our distinguished poets have been of this description. But great as they were, these defects so far obscured their genius and marred their productions. They were great in spite of these defects. They would have been greater without them.

Perhaps Lord Byron was the most noted example of this class. His was undoubtedly a mind of extraordinary power, but fearfully perverted and sadly eclipsed. Even before the close of his brief career, his mental energies were visibly on the decline, sinking dimly under self-consuming decay. His works have acquired an adventitious popularity, partly from causes independent of their intrinsic poetical merit. That popularity is gradually growing less as the world advances in moral purity. And the time may come when, if Byron be not entirely forgotten, he will be remembered only as the monster

product of a past age. The spirit that breathes in his works is uncongenial with the purer tastes and loftier moods of the human mind. To sympathize with that spirit the soul must be at war with itself—at war with society—at war with nature—at war with God ! The reader rises from under the spell of his wandlike pen not a wiser and a better man, prepared to encounter patiently and cheerfully the realities of life ; but with a scowl on his brow—with bitterness in his heart—with darkness on the face of all things around him !

If ever there was, by special designation, a poet of discord and darkness, that poet was Byron. Endowed originally with superior genius and generous susceptibilities, joined with an indomitable pride and an insubordinate will ; when, finding his youthful visions of paradise unrealized in nature and his sanguine dreams of perfection unfulfilled in human life, the disappointment, instead of serving to chasten and purify, served only to exasperate and poison—the discovery, instead of including the guilty defects of his own nature and leading him to bow in humble penitence at the footstool of Divine mercy, while his faith was transferred from man to God, and his hopes from earth to heaven, prompted his proud spirit, blind in its impotent rage, to feel itself aggrieved and injured in its doom. His rebel will, disowning the subordination of a creature, cast defiance in the face of the Creator. Because his capricious demands had not been consulted in the arrangement of the universe, with the fury of a fretted child he rejected every advance, spurned every compromise, and renounced faith in all things ! His wounded spirit recoiled inwardly to prey

upon itself. And with towering pride and dark defiant will he went forth to mock and deride every thing held sacred in the hearts of men. Here was the great defect in Byron's character, and corresponding to this we find the radical defect of his poetry. He had no faith in man, in nature, or in God. Not that he was an avowed atheist like Shelley; but unlike Shelley, with a more fatal inconsistency, he cherished a spirit of utter and universal unbelief. He looked abroad with a scowling, scoffing scorn on all things in earth and heaven! He consequently had *no definite poetical creed*. He had no cherished image of purity and loveliness enshrined within his heart, the exemplification of which, in nature or life, called forth his sympathy and admiration. He had no bright beau ideal of perfection presiding over the creations of his genius, and moulding in conformity to its standard the visions unfolded in his works. His poetry contains nothing consistent, complete, or accordant with itself. No clear continuous stream of thought and sentiment flows in his verse. But, like some witch's caldron, it is filled with contradictory and conflicting elements, fermenting in dire confusion, over which presides some dark spirit of discord and defiance. The only consistent element in his works is that of storm and darkness. Their only definite result is the majesty of moral disorder—the triumph of universal desolation! He could discern what was false and hollow, but he had no conception of the opposite beautiful and good. He could *hate* but he could not *admire*! With no perennial fountain of love, sympathy, or admiration flowing from his heart, there could be no pure and healthful inspiration in his poetry. Most he has

written may be characterized as extravagant common-place, or "admired disorder." The beauties of Byron are his inconsistencies—his sublimities are his contradictions. These inconsistencies and contradictions are manifold ; occurring on almost every page. They lie deeper than mere variations of language. They are contrarieties of sentiment—tergiversations of the soul itself, proving either a pitiable pliability of principle, or a more pitiable state of insincerity and affectation.

At one time he strikes his harp in honor of the hero and the patriot. He hovers in lofty meditation over ancient battle fields, and describes the deeds of heroism there achieved. But when he paints his living hero, and brings to view his model patriot, what is the image he portrays? Some roving exile—or some ruffian bandit—or some ruthless corsair! A patriot without home or country—an Ishmaelitic hero, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him!

At another time, he sings the praise of nature, and describes her scenes of beauty and sublimity. But forthwith he introduces some dark, malignant spirit at variance with the order of nature, and a rebel against the throne of God—some guilty Cain, who hates the earth because it testifies of his brother's blood, and who shudders at nature because it reveals the presence of an Almighty Avenger. Some moody misanthrope, without complacency and without sympathy in aught that exists, visible or invisible, whose will, if it had the power, would spread darkness and desolation over the universe!

Again, he essays to portray the tenderness and devotion of

human love. He paints a passionate and romantic picture. But underneath he writes in scorn—" *Love is lust, beastly and base.*" In heartless mockery, he sports with the sacred ties of wedlock ; and revels, with exultation, in the vile acts of adultery. Anon, he depicts images of female beauty. The colors glow and melt under his magic touch. Life-like forms of radiant loveliness shine upon the canvas. But while we gaze, lo ! with sudden and startling transformation, instead of virgin purity and delicacy of spirit veiled in its appropriate outward drapery, we behold images of gross, carnal, corrupt fascination—the *tainted beauties of a harem!*

Thus we perceive the union of antagonistic and conflicting qualities to be the grand characteristic of Byron's poetry. Its elements have no congenial affinity ; but discordantly associated, they are mutually repellant and destructive. The direct tendency of this unnatural combination, was to destroy all interest and all inspiration—to consume the very life and soul of poetry—and cause genius itself to sicken with disgust at its own triumphs. This was the actual result in Byron's experience :

" His goddess nature, wooed, embraced, enjoyed,
Fell from his arms abhorr'd. His passions died—
Died, all but dreary, solitary pride,
And all his sympathies in being died."

But Byron was a poet in spite of himself. His mighty genius was imprisoned by a proud heart and perverted will in an element of moral darkness. Yet it emitted lurid flashes of glory that startle with their vividness, and cause us to lament the doom by which it was so fatally eclipsed. Its light burned in an unhealthy atmosphere, agitated by inces-

sant gusts and infected by deadly gases. His disordered moral sentiments, his dark, religious views, and his loose, irregular habits, were so many traitors to his genius. They poisoned the fountains of his inspiration, crippled his faculties, perverted their exercise, and gradually undermined their very existence. Evidences of this fact abound in his works. Whatever traces of fitful and startling power they may exhibit, they are deficient in the higher elements of true poetry. *They are destitute of sustained and elevated spiritual harmony.*

How then, it will be asked, do we account for the popularity of Byron? In answering this question, we are led to the discovery of a mournful secret in our common nature. We have already intimated that the popularity of Byron was, to a great extent, owing to causes independent of his poetical merit. These consist in the dark and corrupt moral sympathies of the poet, which are disguised under the enticing charms of his poetry. These too readily find an echo in the human heart. The perverted nature of man, in too many instances, contains within itself the same conflicting and discordant elements that we find united in the poetry of Byron. Even the purest characters may relapse into occasional moods of congeniality, (or at least there have been such moods in their former experience, which may be remembered,) so as to enable them to sympathize, for a time, with such unworthy elements. But with the impure and the vicious, the sympathy is entire, and the fascination is complete.

"Thou speak'st to me of things that oft have swam
In visions through my thought."

! But in the poetry of Byron, the impure elements of our

common nature appear redeemed from their inherent debasement. Low and lustful appetites are disguised under a veil of florid beauty. Dark and malignant tempers of mind are sustained by lofty genius, and arrayed in brilliant colors of poetry. "The unclean spirit," which, at one time raves in rage and madness among the tombs, and, at another, enters even a herd of swine, here lays aside its appropriate forms of degradation, and appears "transformed into an angel of light." Hence, the double charm of a sympathy, which flatters, while it corrupts.

But while the power of Byron's genius is confessedly great, and in a certain sense, peculiar, in conjunction with these impure moral sympathies; who can fail to perceive, that they were an incumbrance to his faculties? The same, nay, we believe, far greater poetical power might have been displayed, if joined with pure moral antipathies, instead of corrupt moral sympathies, in delineating the dark pictures displayed in his works. Milton has portrayed the image of a proud and fallen spirit—the prototype of that, which, identified with the personal sympathies of the author, appears under a human form, in the poetry of Byron. But the picture, as drawn by Milton, exercises no dangerous fascination over our sympathy.

We admit an immoral poet may become more congenial, and consequently more popular, with a certain class of admirers; by associating his impure personal sympathies with the images unfolded in his poetry. But we do contend, that these personal sympathies confer no new gift of genius; neither do they quicken or exalt the gifts already possessed by the poet. A failure to discriminate at this point has given rise to many

absurd notions, as to the characteristic features of poetic genius. We were sorry to find in a recent work of great originality and power,* that the author, in alluding to Byron, has failed to exercise his usual discrimination, and has sanctioned a sentiment which we believe to be both false and pernicious—"We think," says he, "it should be admitted in all these cases, that we could not have the one set of qualities without the other—the genius and the feeling *in the particular form*, without the previous history, the disordered temperament and the melancholy experience. We could not have had these throes, so indicative of strength, without the accompanying fever." We have italicised a phrase in the above extract, because the author there admits a qualification, which destroys the entire force of his remark. If we could not have the genius and the feeling "*in that particular form*," might we not have them in a higher and better form? Might we not have the strength without the fever—the poetry without the vice? Both the idea and the illustration are based on delusion. It is not true, either physically or intellectually, that disease is stronger than health. There may be throes, indicative of strength, in fever; but, in its most convulsive spasm—in its most frantic paroxysm, disease can never rise to the towering strength displayed in a state of health, when nerved by a determined will, and inspired by heroic courage, the body puts forth all its energies, in some deed of high achievement. Nay, the very existence of fever presupposes a deranged organization and an enfeebled system. But even were it capable of putting forth superior strength, it could be

* "Method of Divine Government, Physical and Moral," by Rev. J. McCosh.

only during one brief spasm—the first in a descending series. For at every succeeding reaction, the system grows feebler, and still feebler, until it sinks in death. The healthful exercise of the system, on the contrary, develops its powers and enlarges its capacity for vigorous action. What is the policy of those who make physical strength an object of pride or ambition? What was the policy pursued by the ancient Athlete? Did they stimulate and excite the system to feverish action? Or, by sobriety and temperance, by nourishing diet, and manly exercise, did they mature and maintain those mighty energies of frame, which, when put forth in contest on the public arena, elicited the acclamations of admiring crowds? But the analogy holds true in a much higher sense, when applied to the powers of the mind. It is indeed high time that genius had found the true policy, and adopted the proper regimen in maturing its sublime energies. Let it not madly seek to develop its strength by stimulating with deadly poisons; or to achieve its triumphs by exulting in the violence of disordered passions! For even this pitiable pretext is denied to perverted genius; when prostituting its powers, and polluting society by its pestilential breath, it indulges the mad hope of achieving, by this means, some original and peculiar triumph in the department of poetry. Let the poet drink invigorating inspiration from the pure fountains of truth. Let him guide his life, and tune his harp in accordance with the laws of eternal harmony.

We have thus far considered some of the prominent features of Christian piety, in their connection with the interests of poetry. In addition to these, there are what may be

termed, *the peculiar habits of piety*, which exercise a propiti-ous influence in the development of poetic genius.

First, piety implies *a habit of self-communion*. “Commune with thine own heart and be still,” is at the same time a dictate of Christian duty and a trait of poetic genius. Indeed it is, to some extent, an attribute of every earnest and lofty spirit, conscious of the hidden treasures of its own nature. The heart can be known only by a process of introspection. In human intercourse its intricate labyrinths are often disguised by artifice and darkened by concealment. Nature has hung a veil over that inner sanctuary, and no man voluntarily draws that veil entirely aside, or permits it to be lifted by others. We admit special friends to closer degrees of intimacy in our confidence. But that veil still hangs over an inviolable recess within. The heart of man resembles the sacred temple of the Jews. In its front there is an open area, where the promiscuous multitude are permitted to assemble, and to gaze on the public spectacles that were intended to meet their view. Back of this, there is another and more sacred apartment, where a *few attending priests* are permitted to enter ; but still back of this, there is yet another apartment, more sacred than all, “the holy of holies,” where no profane eye can penetrate—where no unhallowed footstep can intrude : “the great high priest,” the man himself, alone enters it : and there, in the awful presence of God, he communes with his own nature and the mysteries around him !

He who is a stranger to such habits of self-communion, must continue ignorant of his own nature. The fountains of poetic inspiration remain sealed and smothered in his experi-

ence. But such habits cannot be faithfully maintained, unless conducted in a frame of piety, and an attitude of devotion. He who enters within that holy place, must bow adoringly before the glorious Shekinah, which shines there on the altar, between the cherubim. Thus piety not only purifies and elevates the sentiments of the heart;—it not only creates a new class of refined and rapturous emotions peculiar to itself; but by fostering a habit of self-communion, it produces a conscious familiarity with the inward workings of the soul, which endows the poet with an apt facility in the exercise of his art. He is thus enabled to catch the tuneful key of his own spirit, and to touch aright the latent chords which yield the richest music in the hearts of others. But besides the ready command over the sources of human sympathy thus acquired, the fountains of poetic inspiration are opened and flow forth in deeper and stronger currents, under the silent influence of self-communion. The inner world of emotional experience remains formless and void, when no such habit is indulged. But light, order and harmony pervade the scene, when the soul broods in quickening meditation over the mysteries of its own nature. The true poet derives much of the inspiration and many elements of his verse, from the secret fountains of his own heart. It is said of such,

“They learn in suffering what they teach in song.”

But it is only by means of silent self-communion that these elements are rendered available. The language of the inspired Psalmist describes the origin of those happier moods of conception and utterance, as experienced at times by every

genuine poet—" *While I was musing the fire burned : then spake I with my tongue.*"

We shall conclude the present article by adverting to another peculiar habit of piety, as intimately connected with poetic inspiration—the *habit of prayer*. We can readily imagine the smile of derision with which this proposition will be met by many a flippant devotee of fashionable literature. But their derision, even if rational, is certainly not wisely directed. It does not strike at the vulnerable point. It should fall on the principles which give rise to the habit. The absurdity lies, if any where, in the system of faith, which gives encouragement to prayer, and enjoins it as a duty. But if that system be rational and true, the habit is perfectly consistent and legitimate. We suggest then to our flippant scoffers, that their ridicule comes too late. It should have been excited sooner. They must go back to the first principles of the Christian faith, and prove them to be absurd and contemptible, before they affect to make light of this sacred privilege, which every earnest and honest spirit, that has tested its efficacy, will pronounce to be the very highest it can claim on earth. But leaving out of view the principles on which prayer is founded, it is surely as rational and dignified an exercise of mind in the poet who seeks inspiration, to implore humbly the quickening influence of divine energy, as to invoke a propitious afflatus from some visionary muse after the approved poetic fashion ?

Prayer is prompted by conscious dependence. It is sanctioned by the revealed will of God. We are taught to believe, "not only that He is, but that He is a rewarder of all who

diligently seek Him." If God has the will, He surely has the power to interpose in answer to prayer. It is reasonable to conclude, that He who originally formed the human mind, and furnished all its wonderful faculties, is capable of influencing, quickening or inspiring that mind, in the sense in which the poet seeks inspiration. Every poet is conscious of peculiar states or moods of mind, which are propitious to the exercise of his genius. These are affected by a variety of external causes. Why may they not be induced directly by that invisible, divine influence, which works in and through all things and brings events to pass according to its sovereign will? We seek that influence, in its moral efficacy, why not, also, in its mental invigoration? We seek it to quicken and purify the heart, why not also to enlighten and exalt the mind? We bow before the altar, and plead for an interest in atoning blood and propitiatory incense, why not ask also the application of "a live coal from the altar," like that

"Which touched Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire?"

Milton has furnished both an illustration and a proof of the efficacy of prayer, in securing the noblest poetic inspiration. His sublime invocation of the spirit of God stands as a suitable introduction to the most sublime poem in the English language :

"And chiefly thou, O Spirit; that dost prefer
 Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me. * * *
 * * * What in me is dark
 Illumine. What is low raise and support;
 That to the height of this great argument,
 I may assert eternal providence,
 And justify the ways of God to men!"

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIAN HEROISM AS AN ELEMENT OF POETRY—CHARACTERISTICS OF VULGAR HEROISM CONSIDERED—THE QUALITIES WHICH CONSTITUTE THE CHRISTIAN HERO—THE “CODE OF HONOR” AND THE CHARACTER OF THE DUELLIST ANALYZED—CONTRAST PRESENTED IN THE HIGHER VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN HEROISM.

POETRY not only embalms the emotions and sentiments of the soul, and consecrates the beautiful and sublime scenery of nature ; but it also celebrates the noble deeds and heroic achievements that transpire in human history. This last department presents a wide field before the genius of the poet. In considering the beneficial influence of Christianity, we are next to inquire what materials of this class it supplies to poetry, or what is its legitimate influence in producing the heroic in character and conduct ?

If we adopted, as a definition of heroism, the vulgar conception ordinarily attached to the term, of course there would be no propriety in discussing the question. If *this* be the only true heroism, then it must be frankly admitted, that Christianity has nothing to do with its production. What is

the heroism most readily recognized by the mass of mankind? the heroism, which has been crowned with wreaths of triumph, and hailed by acclamations of applause—whose praise has been sung by enraptured poets, and whose exploits have been emblazoned on the page of history? Is it not a heroism which consists mainly in one quality, viz. : *physical courage*, which is displayed only in one pursuit, viz. : *war* ; and which acknowledges but one law for its guidance, viz. : *public opinion* ? A heroism, which, if carried to its legitimate results, would place the highest elevation of humanity in the act of mutual destruction, and would realize its crowning achievement in universal extermination ?

But no intelligent or virtuous mind in the present age, will consider this the noblest form of heroism. Although the transforming spirit of Christian love has not so far prevailed as to realize the prophetic vision of its final triumph ; when “the sword shall be beaten into the ploughshare, and the spear into the pruning-hook, and nations shall learn war no more ;” yet, under its widening sway, attended by the increasing light of science and the growing arts and refinements of civilization ; the lustre of mere military heroism is fast fading away. “War,” said one of the greatest heroes of this class that the world has ever known, “war is the science of barbarians.” In its naked realities, it can never form a captivating picture to engross the homage of genius or excite the admiration of mankind. Disguise, concealment, or false coloring of some kind, must be employed, in presenting an image of war, which fails to shock our sensibilities ; or, in portraying the character of the mere warrior in any other

form than that which is painful and abhorrent to the soul. The name of such a hero may be (as it too often is in reality) "linked to one virtue and a thousand crimes." His reckless daring may lead on a train of ignoble passions—the foul brood of a selfish and bloody ambition. But by the flattering art of the poet who celebrates his praise, his one virtue is arrayed in such dazzling splendor, that his thousand crimes are eclipsed. We gaze on the exploits of his courage, and see not the corruption of his vices. And he who may be but a man, with the passions of a brute, rises before our imagination an idol endowed with every conceivable excellence.

A similar delusion is practised in those glowing representations of war, which so often fascinate the readers of romantic literature. The war may be unjust in its origin and terrible in its results; but sympathizing, perhaps by accident, with one of the contending parties, we lose sight of all the revolting horrors of the scene, and behold only "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war." We see only the imposing array and the brilliant colors, the rapid evolution and the impetuous assault. We hear only the martial music, the thundering artillery, and the thrilling shout of triumph. But the dark and hideous after-scene is omitted. We see not the maimed and mangled bodies of the dead. We hear not the groans and shrieks and blasphemies of the dying. The eye looks not over that dark *Aceldema*, so lately alive with all the splendid pomp and sublime tumult of contending armies, now covered with the carcasses, and drenched in the gore of slaughtered thousands; and as the tidings of victory are sounded in joyful acclamations abroad, the ear hears not that

awful undertone of lamentation and wailing, which arises from broken hearts and bereaved families all over the land which has been desolated by the scourge of so terrible a calamity. A time-serving literature, which employs its alluring arts to emblazon the splendors of war and disguise its terrors, which follows with fulsome adulations the train of the military hero, and sheds a false but fascinating glory over his career, is mainly responsible for the prevalence of those perverted tastes and false sentiments in the present day, which extend so prompt a patronage to this barbarous policy. The public mind, however, is gradually recovering from this perversion. And there are indications of the approach of that bright era—that truly heroic age—when the rational soul and its triumphs shall be regarded as the highest honor of humanity, and when mental power conjoined with moral excellence, shall be recognized as the essence of true heroism. But, in the present disordered moral condition of mankind, amid the turbulent elements which still mingle in the general ferments of society, defensive war will, perhaps, for a long period, continue to be a dark necessity among the nations of the earth. And when such a necessity is forced upon any people, he who, animated by pure and patriotic motives, proves himself, by the exploits of his military prowess, to be “his country’s stay in the day and hour of danger,” is worthy of the grateful homage of a generous people. Christianity itself crowns the triumphs of such a hero, having already furnished the principles which formed his character, and supplied the motives which sustained his career. But while Christianity supplies the virtues which alone constitute the glory of such a

hero, and thus furnishes the elements of all true greatness in war, when alone war is truly great, because it is just ; yet, in addition to all this, Christianity produces a new and nobler heroism peculiar to itself. That heroism was exhibited in its perfection by Him, who on earth, “ was despised and rejected of men.” And those who take his character as the object of their faith, and the model for their imitation, approach by degrees the highest standard of human greatness.

We are aware of the prejudices which beset this subject. But we believe it may be demonstrated to the satisfaction of all who are capable of reasoning, however uncongenial it may be to the tastes, and however offensive to the prejudices of those who are destitute of piety—that Christianity secures and produces the highest elevation of character. If a man be great from qualities possessed by himself, and not merely from the opinions entertained of him by others—great in the permanent structure of his own character, and not in the fluctuating impressions of it cherished by the ignorant multitude—if the qualities of the mind hold a higher rank than those of the body—if intellectual and moral elements constitute nobler ingredients in human greatness than those that are merely physical—if heroism is to be estimated according to the dignity of its powers, the elevation of its motives, and the grandeur of its results, and not according to its mere external circumstances, the magnificence of its parade, the popularity of its career, and the noise of its triumphs—then, with these terms and conditions of true heroism conceded, we may confidently assert the claims of Christianity to an unqualified præeminence. For whatever the prejudices and passions

arrayed against it, however unimposing its attitude and quiet its sphere, however unpretending may be its march, and unapplauded may be its triumphs; yet, enthroned in the inner chambers of the soul, it presides over the intellectual and moral energies of man, and supplying the loftiest motives, conducts to the noblest results.

Let us examine some of the qualities which Christianity supplies to human character; and, if these be admitted as essential to our estimate of heroism, we shall find that wherever the name or pretence may be assumed, here at least, the reality exists.

1. A certain sense of superiority—a conscious elevation of nature, is conceived to be an ingredient of heroism. Without this, man is supposed to be unequal to the fulfillment of a glorious destiny. *Christianity secures a lofty consciousness of the dignity of our nature*, even while it enjoins humility as one of its primary virtues. But humility is not a mere crouching instinct; it is a rational sentiment, based upon self-knowledge. Humility, indeed, springs from the lofty consciousness of the native dignity of the soul, contrasted with our actual attainments. Pride arises from low, meagre, contracted conceptions of our present sphere, and our ultimate destiny.

Everything truly great in man is, at the same time, humble. Wisdom is humble, because in proportion to its elevation, it perceives more clearly the wide distance that intervenes between the narrow confines of its knowledge, and the boundless range of its capacity. Genius is humble, because in proportion to its delicate taste and prophetic intuition, it

becomes more keenly alive to the contrast between the reality of its execution and the ideality of its vision—between the measure of its attainment and the standard of its aspiration. In a far higher sense Religion also is humble, because in proportion as the soul, awakened by its power, becomes conscious of its wonderful capacities, its exalted relations, and its immortal destiny, it perceives the deviations of its past career, and the distance of its present attitude from that exalted sphere, which it was originally formed to occupy, and towards which at length it now ardently aspires. There is no want of self-respect; there is no defect of conscious dignity; there is no particle of depressing meanness in Christian humility. It is not a disparagement of our nature; but a disavowal of our merit. It is because the soul is awakened to realize its native dignity, its high relationship, and its glorious destiny, that it sinks in self-condemnation under the consciousness of having bartered away so priceless a birth-right. It is because it aspires to regain an eminence so exalted, that it bows in humble prayer for grace to sustain its ascending career.

Christian humility presupposes an elevated consciousness and a quickened aspiration. It does not indicate the character of one, who, struck by a sense of inferiority before his fellow mortals droops in passive despondency, and shrinks away in silence to hide the shame of his comparative insignificance. But it marks the new career of him, who, awakened from the apathy of nature to a just discernment of his moral attitude before God, regardless of the opinions and the habits of men, consecrates his immortal energies in the pursuit of a prize infinite in value and eternal in duration. Pride,

arrogance, and vaunting self-sufficiency, belong to the devotee of a low, earthly ambition, whose views and motives are confined to the present life, and whose highest aim in existence is to gain a transient notoriety in the applause of the multitude. He has no purer taste, no brighter vision, no loftier aspiration, and, consequently, no standard sufficiently exalted, to exhibit in contrast, the meagreness of his own attainments.

Christianity invigorates and exalts the intellectual and moral energies of man. "Touched by the Cross, we live." The transition is from darkness to light, from bondage to enlargement, from debasement to dignity. The field of vision is enlarged. The theatre of existence rises to a higher level, and expands to a wider circumference. Life is animated by nobler motives, and directed to loftier ends. The soul, awakened to the consciousness of spiritual life, swells with the aspirations of a worthier ambition, and exhibits the magnanimity of a truer heroism. Impelled by considerations that derive their force from the throne of God, the Cross of Christ, and the "powers of a world to come," the character assumes a stability and a loftiness unknown to those whose career is swayed by the feeble and fluctuating impulses of earth. Such a character is prepared to act his part to the highest advantage in every relation of human life. In every social virtue, in every moral excellence—as a friend, a parent, a citizen, a patriot, a statesman, or a soldier—he is furnished with motives which ensure fidelity and conduct to preëminence. "Whatsoever things are true, just, honest, lovely, and of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise" in his life, they find their brightest exemplification. So that in

every form of mere earthly heroism, which is not marred by something radically wrong in its principle, or fatally ruinous in its results, the true Christian may be expected to be, of all men, the most proficient.

But beyond this he exhibits a heroism of which the world knows nothing. He is enlisted in a *spiritual warfare*. His career is attended with no outward parade. His struggles are unseen and unapplauded. "His warfare is within." There, unfatigued,

"His fervent spirit labors. There he fights,
And there obtains fresh triumphs o'er himself,
And never withering wreaths, compared with which
The laurels that a Cæsar reaps are weeds."

In loyalty to truth and to the God of truth, enlisted under the banner of the Prince of Peace, he goes forth in a life-long battle against error and sin in every form. Each day is signalized by new exploits, as he advances on to final victory. And he pauses not to lay down his arms, until his enemies are all vanquished, until his rebel passions are all subjected to the laws of moral harmony; and perfect purity is enthroned supreme over his entire nature. In conducting this spiritual warfare, the Christian contends against mightier enemies, and under darker discouragements, heavier trials, and a stronger tide of opposition; he displays greater fortitude, independence, and courage, than are ever exhibited by the earthly warrior. The one but obeys the instigation of his evil passions—the other opposes them. The one is surrounded by a multitude of exciting and encouraging influences, and moves in the midst of a mighty army to battle—

the other goes forth alone to face the terror of his enemies, and encounters adverse influences at every step of his progress. The one is greeted in his career by the applause of an admiring multitude—the other encounters, always, indifference, and often reproach and persecution, from his fellow men. Nay, allegiance to this sacred cause has not unfrequently produced a martyr and a hero in the same person.

But the Christian hero, not only has espoused a nobler cause, he is impelled by *higher motives* than those which actuate the hero of the sword. Animated by a spirit of universal benevolence, he seeks to advance the well-being of the world around him. His affections are not confined to his immediate relations or special friends. There may be closer bonds of intimacy and stronger ties of endearment connecting him with these, but at the same time, his heart expands with a wider love. He may be a friend, a father, and a patriot; but, at the same time, he is a philanthropist. He is kind, not only to the meritorious and the amiable, but also to the unthankful and the evil. He loves, not only where he approves, but compassionates even where he condemns. He is patient towards all men. He returns pity for malice, blessings for curses, and prayers for imprecations, even to his enemies. And amid the perplexities, provocations, and insults of daily life, he aims to maintain a lofty frame of serene, unruffled benevolence, superior to the vile passions of the vulgar throng.

Now, we affirm, that this heroism of Christian charity, both in the moral qualities of which it is composed, and the noble purposes to which it is directed, is of a far higher grade

than that of the mere warrior. He who prefers what is true and right to what may be fashionable or popular, and maintains his attitude, regardless of consequences—he, who amid the strifes and wrongs and slanders of the world, still preserves the law of kindness on his lips, and the spirit of charity in his heart—he, who, indifferent to the applause or censure of the world, and in spite of the ingratitude, treachery, and baseness which he encounters, still devotes his time, his means, or his talents, to instruct the ignorant, to relieve the afflicted, and reform the vicious of mankind ; such a character, in all the mental and moral attributes of human greatness, rises immeasurably superior to the vulgar hero of violence and blood. The Missionary of the Cross, who forsakes the endearments of kindred and home, and bears the glad tidings of mercy to some degraded heathen land ; and there, by his benevolent efforts, causes the intelligence, the order, and the social virtues of the gospel, to prevail around him, instead of pagan darkness and debasement ; manifests a heroism far above that of the stern soldier, who carries fire and sword into a foreign province, lays waste towns and cities, destroys the monuments of civilization, and spreads desolation and death over the scene of his triumphs !

But after all our legitimate reasoning from the intellectual and moral qualities, that constitute Christian heroism, yet the notorious fact remains, that such heroism meets with but little sympathy or appreciation from the world at large. This moral anomaly stands out in bold relief through all the history of the race. The fiery champion of the sword has always commanded the spontaneous admiration and homage

of the human heart. The sage is esteemed as wise ; the saint is approved as good ; but the warrior alone is *honored* as great, and worshipped as a hero. The heroism of romantic and poetical literature, is mostly of this low and savage character. And it is truly astonishing that genius should consent to adopt a model so unworthy of its homage. The hero of the modern novel and the poem is generally one whose noblest sentiments are contained in a so-called "code of honor," and whose highest exploits consist in fighting a duel with a friend, or commanding an army on a field of battle. True, it may perhaps be plead, that the diseased cravings of the popular taste demand the stimulus of such corrupt ingredients for its gratification ; that a higher heroism would fail to be appreciated ; and that the writer who attempted its vindication must sacrifice his popularity and fall into neglect. But surely, genius should not, for the sake of present notoriety, tamely surrender its high prerogative to correct, to improve, nay, to create a public taste that will appreciate its brighter revelations of superior excellence ! Surely, at least, genius should not meanly consent to sacrifice, at the same time, its independence and its truth ; and prostitute its powers to adorn, to gild, and paint up, in false and gaudy colors, low and mean materials, which in their naked deformity, would fail to pass current in public esteem. It is in this last respect, not only in selecting unworthy models, but in adorning them with unreal attractions, that the culpability and corrupting power of perverted genius, is most strikingly displayed.

Here we must advert to a process of self-deception in connection with this subject, which arises from the transforming

power of prejudice, aided by a want of candid discrimination in the observance of qualities, and of honest accuracy in the use of epithets. The qualities of that true heroism, which commends itself to the conscience and judgment, are vaguely blended with imaginary defects and vices, which seem to justify its repudiation ; while, on the other hand, that false heroism which, in its naked reality, cannot but be condemned, is clothed in unreal attributes of excellence, in order that the world may, with some show of propriety, continue to adore so unworthy an idol. The qualities of the Christian character, which have already been enumerated, when fairly presented before the mind, would command its instantaneous approval. But when the perverting power of prejudice begins to operate, in associating and confounding these with other and meaner qualities, the entire character is transformed from an object entitled to our admiration, to one that justifies the secret recoil and aversion of our hearts. Under this process, the various Christian virtues become changed into so many moral deformities. That elevated consciousness of the dignity of our nature, which gives rise to Christian humility, is transformed into an abject, crouching, cowering sense of servility and meanness. That pure and lofty aspiration which rises from the earth in pursuit of infinite excellence, and wages through life an inward war with adverse influences, becomes a mystic, moping, melancholy mood of austere fanaticism. That sublime spirit of universal love, which, rising superior to selfish considerations, and swelling beyond sectional limits and social classifications, embraces the entire race in the bond of a common brotherhood, and labors in its appropriate sphere to promote

the well being of the whole human family ; this, in its general manifestation, is represented as the vapory day-dream of utopian sentiment. As it puts forth efforts to enlighten the ignorant, reform the vile, and save the lost, it is stigmatized as superstitious bigotry. As it manifests patient good will toward the wayward and vicious, it is pronounced destitute of moral discrimination. As it exercises forgiveness toward enemies, it is declared wanting in self-respect and manly courage. In this manner, human prejudice transfuses and commingles the virtues of the Christian character with certain contemptible qualities, from which they stand totally distinct. In like manner, the faults and vices of vulgar heroism, are transformed and arrayed in the garb of certain lofty virtues, which bear the sanction of universal approbation. So that what may be but a combination of stupid pride, corrupt passion, savage ferocity, and reckless hardihood, is represented as an assemblage of all sublime sentiments of honor and patriotism, crowned with generous magnanimity, patient fortitude, and a chivalrous contempt of danger and death.

But contrast the qualities of this vaunted heroism, with those which Christianity supplies ; and the former will be evidently surpassed, even on its own terms and conditions. In some points, the contrast has already been presented. Others remain to be noticed. In the ordinary conception of the character of a hero, it may be said to include the following qualities : *a sense of honor, patriotism, magnanimity and courage.* In each of these attributes, the Christian hero excels.

1. *Christianity supplies a higher and truer sense of honor.*

No term is of more frequent application to the character of a hero, than that of honor. It would seem, indeed, from the perpetual recurrence of the phrase, to constitute the grand pervading element of his nature. His whole existence is professedly governed by a peculiar system of laws, entitled "the code of honor." But what constitutes this "sense of honor?" What is the origin and character of this "code of honor?" What does it enjoin, and what forbid? What is the nature of its authority and the extent of its requirements? If it be real in its obligation, it is surely quite indefinite in its form. It is embodied in no tangible shape. It is reduced to no permanent record. It exists, if at all, in such a state of indefinite elasticity, as to afford an easy opportunity of indulging a flattering self-delusion. The image is veiled in such obscurity, that one may readily mistake, in conceiving his own features to wear a corresponding likeness. Existing in the shadowy form of thought and sentiment; and being, as otherwise expressed, an inward "sense of honor," it may be asked, is it found by a reference to the intuitive standard of each individual mind, and is each man thus "a law unto himself?" Or is it found by a reference to the average standard of opinion and feeling in surrounding society? and is it a mere index of public sentiment in the community? There is an invariable coincidence, if not an identity, between the two standards. The "sense of honor" in the individual, includes only what is esteemed honorable in the public mind. Does this "sense of honor" then, mean only a perception of what is held reputable in general society; and is it mere prudent regard to personal popularity? If this be so, then this sense

of honor is only a sort of moral barometer, which each one carries about his person, to indicate the state of the surrounding atmosphere. It must be perpetually fluctuating and variable, changing with every change of scene and society. For no two communities agree on all points of honor and virtue. And as the man moves from one society to another, this barometer alternately rises and sinks along all the degrees of its scale, from that which indicates the pure, serene, and bracing air of virtue, to that which marks the heavy, murky, and stormy atmosphere of vice.

But this view will not be admitted. It is contended that this sense of honor is an independent, personal prerogative; that each individual mind possesses its own standard, and exercises its own moral judgment, as something distinct from a time-serving accommodation to the tone of public sentiment. If this be so, what is the precise nature of this faculty or exercise of mind? If it has not exclusive reference to public opinion; if it does not regard merely what may be popular or unpopular in society; to what then, does it refer, and what qualities does it demand in an action, in order that it may be approved? If it does not refer to the mere accident of popularity, it must refer to the essence of duty, virtue, or rectitude. It must refer to the *moral* qualities of an action. And this sense of honor must be but another term for the faculty of *conscience*. When, therefore, we speak of one man as having a higher sense of honor than another, if there is any propriety in the terms employed, we mean that he has a more enlightened and faithful conscience. If it mean any thing distinct from a time-serving obsequiousness to public sentiment, it

must mean the faithful exercise of a pure, unperverted, unbiased conscience.

Taking the term, then, in this, the only sense in which it will bear investigation, we think it is clearly manifest that the Christian possesses a higher and truer sense of honor than the mere worldly hero. It is implied in the very process of his conversion, that his conscience is enlightened. It is rendered faithful in the discharge of its entire office. It extends its supervision over the whole range of obligation and duty. It recognizes not merely the relations between man and man in society, but also the higher obligations of piety that connect the soul of man with the character of God, and the invisible realities of a future state. It fosters not merely the lovely virtues that adorn man as a citizen of earth, but those nobler, spiritual graces, that prepare the soul for a residence in heaven. It enforces not only external propriety in the visible actions of life, but real purity in the secret motives of the heart. In contrast with this, the conscience or sense of honor in a worldly hero is limited and partial in its exercise.

We are not disposed to deny to the nature of man the possession of many instinctively noble and generous sentiments, even when a stranger to the spirit of true piety. But they are confined to his visible deportment in social intercourse—his achievements on the low theatre of this world. The spiritual obligations of faith and the unseen realities of a future world, are practically ignored. The supervision of conscience in such a case, extends over a low and limited scene of human life ; and whatever may be pretended as to its independence

of popular sentiment, yet, practically, its operation is confined within the same narrow circle of objects, and it moves on the same level in its approbation or censure. If it be not completely swayed by public opinion, it follows at least directly in its wake; but even this claim to independence, proves, in many cases, to be unfounded. Especially in those forms of heroism developed in a large class of modern novels, this vaunted sense of honor is discovered, on closer inspection, to be but a mere pliable servility of spirit, which bends to every caprice of popular opinion, and takes its character from the state of the surrounding social atmosphere. In proof of this, we refer to that *interesting dilemma* in which such heroes are so invariably thrown at some stage or other, in the works which describe them. Scarcely a novel, of the class to which we refer, is to be found, in which there is not introduced some scene of violence and blood in the form of a duel; or at least some practical vindication of the propriety of duelling. Now, what is the standing plea—the stereotyped apology of the duellist? He commits an act confessedly wrong in itself, but justified, he conceives, by the circumstances under which it was performed. He takes the life of a fellow-being, and pleads as a reason, the force of public opinion. He violates the law of God, and urges in his defence, “the law of honor.” Every duellist, not dead to the feelings of humanity, will deplore the deed, as contrary to his own convictions of rectitude, and the solemn injunctions of divine authority; but he feels constrained by the force of public sentiment to do what he disapproves, in order to maintain an honorable reputation. What becomes of the *independence* claimed for this sense of

honor, in such a case? His personal convictions and feelings all confessedly rebel against the act. The motive originates *ab extra*. He yields to a foreign force. He bends before a wind that blows upon him—the breath of the vulgar multitude. This is the only efficient law that operates in the experience of the duellist. Its sway is so supreme that it not only controls the entire man, but controls him in opposition to all other laws that operate upon him, in defiance of the laws of God, and the combined dictates of conscience, humanity, and self-interest. But this plea, servile as it is, is at the same time self-contradictory and absurd. The duellist fights to sustain his reputation. He has received an insult. He has been charged, perhaps, (for this is the usual form of provocation—the one insult which demands blood for its expiation,) with *falsehood*, which implies cowardice—a fear of facing public opinion by uttering the truth. Hence, lest society should give credit to the accusation, and his reputation be impaired, he proceeds forthwith to act under precisely the same motive, which, when previously charged upon him, had been resented as an insult; and in taking the life of another, to vindicate himself from the charge of cowardice in one form, he fastens the same charge upon himself in another and more aggravated form. Why is he sensible of the evil in the one case, and not in the other? Why does he take fire so promptly at the one charge of falsehood, which implies an unworthy fear of the face of man, and yet voluntarily subjects himself to the charge of murder, prompted by the same unworthy fear? Is falsehood so much more base and wicked than murder, that the one may be perpetrated in order to blot out the suspicion of the other?

The truth is, the man lays aside all independent, personal convictions on the subject ; and because, from a savage and brutal prejudice, society may frown upon the one act and sanction the other, he yields obsequiously to its sovereign decree. Such, in substance, is the sense of honor ; such the supreme, moral standard, acknowledged by that form of heroism which stands opposed to the spirit and motives of the gospel. Its avowed practical creed amounts to this and nothing more, viz. : *Public opinion is the supreme authority on all questions. Regard to reputation is the first of all duties. Every other interest must be sacrificed, every other principle violated, every other tie trampled under foot, rather than suffer a reproach to be cast upon the character !* Under all his blustering airs and arrogant self-gratulations, the sense of honor that swells the breast of such a hero, as he struts before the gaping crowd, includes nothing higher than this.

Are we wrong then, in asserting that Christianity supplies a nobler standard ? Is there not a higher rule of life, than the variable and conflicting decrees that issue at different times from the tribunal of public sentiment ? Have the vast majority of those who compose society, been invariably so wise and pure—so intellectually and morally elevated, that their capricious tastes and passions may be taken as an equivalent substitute for the only true standard of rectitude ? Rather, have not the truly wise and good been, in every age, an obscure minority compared with that mighty mass of moral corruption, whose lawless tide, as impelled by gusts of prejudice and passion, constitutes the sway of public opinion ? Are there not higher interests at stake than personal reputation—

treasures more closely identified with the well-being and dignity of man's nature, which should be held firm at the sacrifice of every earthly consideration? Nay, has it not often been necessary, in order to maintain truth, virtue and piety, that the purest and best of men, "of whom the world was not worthy," have had to suffer the loss of reputation, and to endure suspicion, contempt, persecution and death, in the midst of a perverse generation? And who will hesitate to admit that such men, by their bold integrity in the midst of temptation, by their patient fortitude under trial and suffering, and by their sublime devotion to principle before an opposing world, exhibited a far nobler style of heroism than has ever been displayed by the most flattered favorite of a corrupt and fawning multitude?

2. Christianity secures *a pure and noble patriotism* in the character of a hero. Because the gospel is adapted in its provisions to the entire race of man, and inculcates a spirit of universal benevolence, it does not forbid a special and ardent love of our own country. Our blessed Saviour, in his own person, has exemplified the spirit of his gospel. The warmest sympathies of his heart, and the most active labors of his life, were devoted to Jerusalem, a city sacred to the affections of every Jew; over it he shed the tears of his tenderest commiseration, and uttered the pathetic acclamation of his deepest sorrow as the vision of its coming desolation rose before him. When he sent forth the first heralds of that gospel which was designed to illuminate and transform a benighted world, at the head of every commission, to "go into all the world and

preach the gospel to every creature," was inscribed this significant direction—"beginning at Jerusalem."

True patriotism implies not only an affection for the scenery of our native land, but a regard for its civil institutions and a just appreciation of its social advantages. A rational love of freedom, a consistent devotion to the rights and liberties of the subject, together with a loyal regard to constituted authority, are intimately connected with an enlightened love of country. Christianity, in its conservative and yet progressive spirit—in the obedience it enjoins to the powers that be, on the one hand; and the value it attaches to the rights of conscience and the dignity it confers on individual man, as an heir to an immortal destiny on the other—in its calm submission to an overruling providence, and its cheerful contentment with our earthly allotments—in its humble, quiet and patient benevolence, uniting in the bonds of a common brotherhood, and in the infirmities and trials of a common probation, all classes and conditions of men; and yet in the high personal prerogative, it demands for the soul's development and "freedom to worship God,"—in a word, in its harmonizing influence over all the circles of earth, and in its elevating attraction toward the glories of heaven; Christianity fosters and promotes the only rational, consistent and enlarged spirit of liberty and patriotism. It produces

"Men, true-hearted men,
Men who their duties know, and know their rights."

There have been patriots in pagan lands. In every age there have been men who have displayed a lofty self-sacrificing devotion to their country. But while we admire their

heroic ardor, we mourn over their vices, and lament the reckless violence of their measures, which blasted their efficiency for permanent good. Apart from the harmonizing influence of the gospel, a love of our own land is prone to degenerate into jealous hatred of all the world beside, and a devotion to liberty is liable to run into a wild demand for universal license. The fiery impulses of nature, guided alone by the speculations of human reason, may produce a reckless agitator or a disorganizing revolutionist under the title of patriot. A feverish impatience of restraint, an indiscriminate defiance of all authority and a blind enthusiasm for universal change, are the prominent attributes of such patriotism. But whatever obsequious homage it may for a time receive, yet, in the end, the unhappy land which claims only such patriots for its defence, will be called to deplore the ravages of madmen, instead of honoring the memory of heroes.

In the present age of reforms and revolutions, such disastrous patriotism seems, in many places, to be in the ascendant. A restless spirit of insubordination rules the day. The incessant cry is "RIGHTS—LIBERTIES!" The old correlative terms—*duties, obligations*—have grown obsolete. An insane expectation is indulged that perfect fruition will flow from unbounded license. Hence, law, order and authority seem to be viewed as a flaming angel guard stationed with two-edged swords at the gate, to forbid all entrance to the earthly paradise. But the world will at length learn that society advances in true reform, and humanity rises in real development, and nations rejoice in genuine liberty, only when the spirit of the gospel, which holds as its motto—"peace on earth, good

will to men, and glory to God in the highest," guides the march of human improvement.

3. Again, Christianity imparts a *higher magnanimity* to heroism—the *magnanimity of forgiveness*. Quick resentment and crushing revenge are prominent attributes of worldly heroism. In contrast with this, the Christian hero displays higher moral qualities, assumes a loftier attitude, and imitates a nobler model of character. Christian forgiveness does not imply insensibility to insult, or a want of firmness to resist injury. There may be a firm determination to maintain our dignity and our rights by all proper measures. And yet there may be in our hearts a patient and pitying benevolence toward those who have injured us. Charity and conscience wielding their authority over the character, may keep in abeyance the blind and hasty impulses of resentful passion. Thus man may achieve the triumph of ruling his own spirit, by bringing higher principles of action to suppress those that are inferior. This sublime Christian virtue is not responsible for that absurd abuse to which it has sometimes been perverted by ignorant enthusiasts who have carried it to the extreme of absolute non-resistance. But using its own arms only for self-defence, it seeks in all other cases the shield of human law, or patiently submits the issue to the tribunal of Him who has said "vengeance is mine, I will repay." The two-fold duty of love to our neighbor and submission to the will of God, forbids the indulgence of vindictive passion against an enemy. And instead of seeking to crush him by instantaneous violence, we must look with compassion on his rage, and seek to overcome it by kindness. He who manifests such a

spirit and maintains both his piety and his charity unruffled before provocation, while he refuses to reciprocate the blind lusts and brutal passions that actuate his enemy, stands confessedly on a higher moral elevation, and his superiority is painfully felt in the mortifying consciousness of his antagonist. He maintains the highest principles of his nature in their ascendancy. His better self predominates ; and thus he obtains a double triumph over the low impulses of his own breast and the baser passions of his enemy. Instead of being "overcome by evil, he overcomes evil with good!" He stands on an eminence above the weakness and meanness that assail him. He refuses to sink to the same level, or to contend against malignity with its own unworthy weapons. By yielding to the instigations of revenge, man sinks to the same attitude with his enemy, meets him on his own ground, and assumes for the time, the same character of savage rage and violence : and should he conquer or fall in so disgraceful a contest, the same result of increased malice, confirmed by competition, will mark its termination.

Consider, moreover, the contrast in the model of character which is imitated. The heroism of revenge is a quality which finds its original type and prime perfection among the brutes that perish. Every feature of this magnanimity, its entire aspect, the full pomp of all its glory is displayed, not only in the blustering airs and rioting bravado of the drunken bully, who sinks the nature of man in the character of a brute ; but is displayed equally by the pompous cock that crows and struts supreme upon his dunghill, and by the majestic cur that growls and bristles and dilates with exultation over a van-

quished foe ! Such are the models of that magnanimity—such the types of the heroism which forms the proud distinction of vulgar minds ! In contrast with this, how truly noble is the moral dignity of Christian heroism ! One is the heroism of principle, the other the heroism of passion : one is the heroism of love, the other the heroism of hate : by the one, man imitates God—in the other, he resembles the brute !

4. Finally, we claim that Christianity secures *the highest degree of genuine courage*, as an element of heroism. This is regarded by the world at large, as the first of virtues. Among the ancients it held the very name of all virtue. True, there is something imposing even in the rudest forms of human courage ; and a character of meanness is inevitably attached to excessive timidity. To cower in fear, before the face of man—to shrink from the post of duty, from a dread of danger—to tremble in constant apprehension of death as a mere physical evil, is contemptible, under all circumstances. There may be occasions in which death, in any form, should be welcomed, as the least of evils. There may be interests involved which demand the sacrifice of life for their preservation. Indeed death, as a mere physical evil, ought not to be unduly dreaded. Christ has commanded, “ Fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” But death is something more than a physical evil. It is not a termination, but a transition of life—a passage from time into eternity—from a scene of probation to the presence of God, and the bar of judgment. Viewed in this, its true character, there is only one form of *rational* courage possible to man in the hour of death, viz., *that which rests on a foundation of*

genuine piety. Whatever general skepticism may be entertained with regard to a future state, yet no man, without piety, can encounter death, with *rational* composure. The conscious helplessness, if not the conscious guilt, which must be realized, as man sinks amid the vacancy and darkness of death, cannot but be appalling to a mind, capable of reflection and yet destitute of hope. We speak of a *rational* courage and a *rational* composure in facing death. There are different kinds and degrees of courage. Men, not only destitute of piety, but notorious for habits of profligacy and vice, have met death with undaunted defiance. But such cases have been examples, not of a rational courage, but of blind, unthinking, reckless hardihood. Such insensibility to danger may arise, either from gross stupidity of soul, as man sinks alone under the power of disease : or from the blinding, bewildering excitement of angry passion, as he engages in personal combat with his foe ; or from the dreams of ambition, and the thousand thrilling associations, which cast such an inspiration over a field of battle, as armies engage in deadly conflict. But in each of these cases, the absence of fear is owing to the stupifying effect produced by these several causes. Thought is suspended. The mind is blinded. The soul is lulled into forgetfulness of the realities of its condition. You search in vain, to find in such courage the slightest trace of an intellectual or moral quality. It is a gross compound of blind, physical, animal impulse.

Yet this courage is esteemed a virtue so high and sacred, that its exhibition at the closing scene of life, will cancel a long list of previous crimes : And "a bold, bad man" ap-

peases his offended Maker, by daring to rush unprepared into his awful presence! Lofty defiance of danger! Heroic contempt of death! The bear, the lion, or the wild boar of the forest, when brought to bay by their pursuers, display precisely the same virtue, in all its elements and proportions! A virtue that springs from a suspension of all the higher faculties of man's nature—a virtue, into the composition of which there enters not one intellectual or moral ingredient—a courage which is located exclusively in the blood and nerves and muscles of the body, in a state of excitement—a courage, in the exercise of which the mind has no agency. The man neither thinks nor feels, remembers nor anticipates, with reference to the event. His intelligent consciousness is laid aside; and he displays the firmness, having first assumed the stolidity of a rock. And *this* is that crowning virtue, which, when it graces the departure of a hero from the stage of action, will call forth the plaudits of attending angels, as they conduct his spirit to its home on high; and secure the approbation of his judge!—which will cause his memory to be honored by eulogies and monuments, while eloquence and poetry unite to hang garlands over his grave, and hold up his example to incite the young and aspiring to deeds of renown!

But what, after all, is the amount of this boasted virtue? Is it a quality appropriate and suitable to man's nature? Is it the real and rational courage of an intelligent moral agent, in the full exercise of his faculties? What is true courage in such a being? Not the blind stupidity of ignorance—not the blustering madness of passion—not the reckless foolhardiness of an irrational animal, which rushes blindfold upon its

fate! But the calm, collected, deliberate, determined fortitude of a soul, awake to its true position, aware of the realities it is called on to encounter, looking danger full in the face; and yet undaunted—bold in conscious security and triumphant hope! To one destitute of the consolations and hopes of true religion, such a courage as this is, in the nature of the case, impossible. There may be a blind brutal courage of the kinds above named. But there can be no rational courage. The man cannot think honestly of the awful transition of death—he cannot reflect fully on the endless issues involved—he cannot exercise appropriately his rational faculties, and meet death with his eyes open on all its consequences, without apprehension and dread. He may have sufficient command over his nerves and muscles to conceal his emotion under an aspect of indifference. He may assume an air of levity and defiance. He may “die, and give no sign.” But if he thinks, he must fear. If he exercises a rational mind, he must feel a rational dread of death. Such a dread is rational, to one destitute of piety. The nature of the event is such, the character of the transition is so peculiar, that, apart from the sustaining hopes of religion, death must be appalling on any supposition, as to the realities which lie beyond it. Investing the future in dim uncertainty, and considering death as “a leap in the dark;” yet the eminence from which that leap is taken is so high, and the darkness into which it plunges is so vast, vacant and profound, that the conscious soul must shudder in the descent.

But even this gloomy vacancy of unbelief is forbidden. Reason itself teaches that the soul is immortal, and that, when

separated from the body, it enters the presence of its Maker and Judge. Nor will any general reference to the mercy of God suffice to sustain in peace the departing spirit of him, who has lived without God in the world. To such an one He is "an unknown God"—a mysterious and awful stranger—perhaps an enemy—or if perchance a friend, his presence has been unrecognized, his kindness unrequited with gratitude, his companionship and favor unsolicited, during a life of dependence on his protection; how can it be otherwise than fearful to a soul, conscious of past alienation, thus to form its first acquaintance with God, as it is forced to stand before his bar of judgment! But in addition to this, when conscience, at length awakened to faithfulness, fastens a sense of guilt upon the soul, in view of a life thus spent in forgetfulness of its Divine Author, the demands of his law violated, the invitations of his mercy disregarded, and the soul passes unreconciled and unreprieved into his holy presence, how can it avoid trembling solicitude and agonizing fear? We have said, the mercy of God affords no alleviation to the terror of such a prospect. For if, under the earthly revelation of that mercy, the soul remains unreconciled, no transforming efficacy can be expected to ensue from its heavenly manifestation. But under aggravated guilt and confirmed habits of impiety, the moral nature, diseased and disordered, perverted by evil tendencies, in discord with the laws of eternal harmony—cut loose from the source of all light and the centre of all order, must wander in the blackness of darkness for ever and ever—must carry in its inherent wretchedness its own curse—must contain within itself the elements of its own perdition!

But shall a virtue be made of necessity? Shall recklessness arise from despair? And shall it become an act of heroism to brave unmoved a doom that is inevitable? Are apathy and inactivity our highest achievement in a crisis of danger? When threatened with fire and shipwreck in a burning vessel on the deep, is he esteemed the greatest hero, who, with folded arms, stands unmoved and listless, without an effort to escape the danger or deliver those dependent on his protection? Perhaps a life-boat approaches—perhaps, with promptness and energy, the means of deliverance are at hand. In such a case, he whose generous and noble efforts succeed in delivering the helpless from danger—*he* is hailed as the true hero of the scene. The reckless apathy of despair, in view of death, is not a becoming virtue, but a ruinous infatuation. For if the soul, awakened to its obligations, should at length come to itself, and even at the eleventh hour should honestly relent and return, divine mercy waits, with open arms, to welcome the prodigal. Yea, even in the last extremity of danger, amid the storm and darkness attending the hour of shipwreck, the life-boat is at hand to rescue all who fly to it for safety. To stand paralyzed by despair, and regardless alike of danger and deliverance, instead of rational courage, is suicidal madness—instead of closing the scene of life with an air of noble dignity, crowns a career of folly with an act of self-destruction.

But if a regard to future interest and safety be deemed an unworthy motive—if a dread of the wrath of God, and the endless ruin of the soul, be thought too sordid a consideration to affect the mind of a hero; yet there is a consideration that

appeals to high and honorable principle, and which alone should render the approach of death terrible to one living in impiety. It is deemed right and honorable, for instance, when an error has been committed, to confess and correct it—when favors have been received, to cherish becoming gratitude, and when an injury has been done, to make prompt restitution and amendment. He who has lived in impiety is chargeable before God with a long array of evil deeds and sinful habits. The sudden approach of death puts an end to the privilege of penitent confession and pious reformation, and the man falls with his moral blemishes sealed for ever upon his character. Surely *this* at least is a consideration that should strike the soul of honor with dismay, and invest the hour of death with unmitigated terror!

But will it be asked, “would you have a hero to grow craven and timid in a crisis of danger? would you desire a soldier to turn coward and deserter on the field of battle?” By no means! Let him stand at his post and discharge his present duty as best he may. But if, as must be the case with such a character, he suspends his reason in order to exercise his courage—if he blinds his mind in order to banish fear—if, under any influence, he lays aside the high faculties of a rational and moral agent, in order to assume the blind and blustering boldness of a brute; then verily, let him have his reward! But let not such a low, unworthy courage as this be exalted and magnified in our estimation as the crowning glory of human greatness. Let not a mere unconscious, irrational state of insensibility—a state produced by a combination of brutal stupidity with reckless impiety—a mere

collapsed condition of the soul, be esteemed a virtue so rare and sublime, as to entitle its possessor at the same time to the honors of a hero, and the beatitudes of a saint ! And when poetry would find a model of heroism to hold up as a bright example to incite to lofty sentiments and noble deeds, and allure mankind to a career of glory ; let it turn to a different quarter and select its model hero from a higher level of character. Especially when it would teach a lesson of noble triumph in death, let it point to the deportment of the dying Christian. There it will find an exhibition of genuine courage. He confronts the king of terrors with a heart undaunted, not because he is ignorant of the power of his enemy, but because he is confident in his own superior resources. Nor is it the reckless confidence of self-righteous presumption, by which he is sustained. Weak in himself, he is strong in the Lord. His faith rests on a solid foundation, which, the more it is inspected, imparts a higher assurance of safety. “ A peace that passeth understanding,” and “ a hope full of immortality,” are the wings on which his spirit mounts in triumph when released from the fetters of flesh. Humble under a sense of manifold imperfections, yet conscious of pure aspirations ever tending upward, his faith clings to the cross of his Redeemer, as the great anchor of all his hopes, and finds in his atoning blood a fountain to wash away all the stains of his nature. In the hour of his departure there beams upon his believing vision the radiant form of that same divine and loving Saviour, “ standing at the right hand of the throne on high.” He exclaims, “ Into thy hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit.” Then, in the calm confidence of

the only true courage, the departing saint whispers to himself, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil," "For I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to his hands against that day."

Such are the sentiments which sustain the Christian hero in death. Such are the rational sources of Christian courage. They are the only sentiments worthy of man's nature. They are the only sources of true courage in death. Let others aspire to imitate the vulgar hero, who imitates the brute. But when the final conflict comes—"let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

We have pursued our reflections to a length which many will regard as unnecessary and wearisome. But we have traced the subject into its minute details and various ramifications, in order to hunt out and dislodge from every retreat a pernicious delusion, which prevails widely over the popular mind, under the term *heroism*; and at the same time to vindicate the character of the true Christian hero from those foul aspersions and absurd imputations which vulgar ignorance and prejudice have cast upon it. We have attempted to show the superiority of Christian heroism, by adverting to the intellectual and moral qualities which enter into its composition. In *the lofty consciousness of the dignity of his nature*, which give rise to Christian humility in *the noble cause* which he has espoused, the spiritual warfare in which he is enlisted; in *the exalted motives* by which he is impelled; the spirit of love that pervades his life, and the benign results that flow from his efforts; and then, in those qualities which, in name at least,

have been appropriated to vulgar heroism ; but which in reality are exhibited alone by the Christian hero—in a high and worthy sense of honor—in a sound and healthy patriotism—in a just and noble magnanimity—in a genuine and rational courage—in all these attributes of heroism we have shown that the Christian hero stood præminent. And if we have failed to carry the convictions of every reader along with us to the conclusions we have reached, we feel assured that we have at least suggested the materials which, if properly constructed, would form a conclusive and resistless argument in support of the position we have endeavored to maintain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF POETICAL GENIUS.

THAT man is a moral agent, subject to law, responsible to a supreme power, and that a character of right or wrong, of innocence or guilt, is attached to his actions, while a corresponding reward or penalty ensues as their final result—this fundamental truth will be denied by none but an avowed atheist. Nay, even he, whatever may be the professed theory of his unbelief, will exhibit a practical refutation of such a conclusion, in the intuitive convictions and spontaneous feelings that arise within him, as he witnesses the actions of others, whether good or evil. These imply that man possesses a character of responsibility. Otherwise the sense of approval or of indignation which he may feel would be absurd and inconsistent. Moreover, when his own actions pass under review, there arises in the breast of every man, irrespective of all reasoning, as to the grounds of obligation, a feeling of complacency, or a sense of guilt, which testifies to a supreme moral law binding upon the heart and conscience.

The conditions of responsibility are two-fold—the capacity of a moral agent, and the existence of moral relations.

Wherever a creature possesses such a capacity, and is surrounded by such relations, there you find a moral agent—a being responsible to God for his conduct. Man is such a being, he possesses such a capacity, and is placed in the midst of such relations. He is endowed with reason and conscience, with a will and affections. He has intelligence to know, freedom to choose, and motives to pursue the path of rectitude. He is related primarily to God, and subordinately to his fellow-men. Each of these relations involves its peculiar class of duties, so that man owes duties to God and to his fellow men in the various relations of society. But all these are at the same time duties to God, inasmuch as they are enjoined by his authority, and are comprehended in that first and highest duty of supreme love to His character, and entire obedience to His will. The will of God, therefore, as revealed directly in His law, or as expressed indirectly in the social relations which surround man under His providence, is the great source of moral obligation. This common ground of obligation is possessed equally by every man as a moral agent.

But there is another principle, which determines *the degree* of obligation, in different cases. If the intellectual and moral capacities of man constitute him a moral agent, then the degree of his responsibility will be in proportion to the amount of his capacity. In other words, he who is endowed with nobler gifts and faculties than the mass of his fellow-men, is placed under higher obligations. “From him to whom much is given, much will be required.” He who has ten talents committed to his trust will be expected to render a larger return by accumulation than he who has received only five or

one. The justice of this principle is obvious and undeniable. Yet by some mysterious process, the principles of justice and the laws of obligation are all reversed in the case of certain men of genius. Instead of regarding their superior gifts and endowments as so many additional obligations, they plead them as pretexts for unbounded license. In their inflated self-conceit, the ignorant and obscure multitude, the vulgar herd of mankind, alone are bound by the obligations of virtue and piety, while they, by their transcendant capacities, are released from such ordinary restraints. Strange perversion of all reason and all motive! From the very premises, that should lead to an inference of the highest pitch of responsibility, they draw the conclusion of its entire absence. The very attributes by which they are equipped and furnished for a higher scale of duty, and a nobler field of destiny, they suppose entitle them to the rare privilege of pursuing a career both aimless and useless. The very considerations that should prove incentives to humble, grateful and ardent piety, become the stimulants of arrogant, impious and selfish pride. The very qualifications that should constitute the gifted spirit a bright and central luminary amid a cluster of smaller stars in the moral firmament, dispensing its light over the surrounding system, attracting each in the order of its own sphere, and binding all in harmony around a common centre, are perverted so as to form

“ A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
A pathless comet and a curse,
The menace of the universe :
Still rolling on with innate force,
Without a sphere, without a course,
A bright deformity on high,
The monster of the upper sky.”

This fatal perversity is seen, not only in the character of lawlessness sometimes assumed by men of genius, in their licentious and reckless habits of life, but it is extended, also, to the exercise of their gifts and talents, and displayed in the productions of their genius. We have already considered to some extent, in a former essay, the privilege of moral insubordination, as claimed by certain gifted but misguided men, in their personal conduct and social habits. But many who seem to acknowledge a kind of restraint over this department of their agency, do yet exclude all idea of responsibility from the exercise of their talents, as writers and authors. They seem to be aware of something like duty or obligation binding them to a degree of outward propriety in their ordinary transactions in life. But they are insensible to all considerations of responsibility, when they put their peculiar gifts into exercise, and wield the highest influence they possess for the benefit or injury of society. Their genius at least they think is free. Their talents are their own. They may use them as they please, provided, only, they reach eminence in their art, excite the admiration of mankind, and reap the reward of genius in honors and fame. The department of polite literature is thus regarded as a sort of neutral ground, an unappropriated territory, where conscience has no jurisdiction, God no authority, and moral law no existence—a vacant, unreclaimed region, inhabited only by aerial beings of the imagination. Under the vague and visionary character thus assigned to the province of literature, in which the gifts of genius are exercised, a general claim of exemption from moral considerations is asserted, and the authority of taste is regarded as supreme

and altogether exclusive of that of conscience. But in this view of the subject there is involved an obvious self-contradiction. The character thus attached to the sphere of genius is one of intellectual imbecility, yet the feeling of moral exemption founded upon it is not that of humble inferiority, and comparative insignificance; but the lofty independence of pride and the arrogant airs of towering superiority. Such writers feel exempted from ordinary moral ties, not because in their position they are sunk beneath the sphere of responsibility, but because in their lofty elevation they are placed above it. How shall the considerations be reconciled, which from the same source, at once release the mind from the claims of duty, and inflate it with arrogant pride, and unbounded self-conceit?

But this claim to moral inefficiency in polite literature, we pronounce to be wholly unfounded. There is nothing either in the faculties with which genius is endowed, or in the sphere in which it labors, to justify such a claim. But from both these sources, from the high nature of its powers, and the important character of its department of influence, we draw considerations to enhance our ideas of its responsibility. The sphere of taste, genius, and poetry is not thus circumscribed apart from all connection with moral relations. Much absurd and unmeaning language is employed by those who speak with a tone of authority, in defining the landmarks, and proclaiming the laws that pertain to this department of literature. We are led to imagine it as located in some unsubstantial region of air and shadow, as inhabited by aerial beings, as bearing no relation to things in heaven, or things

on the earth, as having no connection with the claims of God, or the concerns of men. We are informed that poetry deals with illusion and not with reality ; that its office is to entertain and please, not to instruct and edify ; that it consults taste, not truth ; that it has reference to beauty and sublimity, not to morality and religion, and that consequently it would be absurd to hold an author in this department of literature responsible for the moral effect of his productions, since in the nature of the case no such effect could follow. But who will, for a moment, admit this to be a just description of poetical literature ? If such were its character, if it were confined to a region thus visionary and void, if it conversed only with aerial beings, and constructed nothing but castles in the air, if it held no contact and no communion with human affairs, and never addressed itself to the interests, the sympathies, and the passions of mankind—then it would be imbecile as well as innocent ; it would be senseless, and therefore harmless ; it would fail to interest, and consequently to injure ; it would escape notice, and thus avoid censure ; its immunity would consist in its insignificance.

But it is no such blank and barren wild of non-existence over which the genius of poetry presides. It is rather a bright sphere of this warm, living, habitable world, a genial zone vivified by a glowing sun, watered by perennial streams, and abounding in luxuriant vegetation, and luscious fruits. Whatever ideal or visionary character may pertain to it, refers not to a separate scene, remote from reality which it inhabits ; but to qualities of excellence and perfection in that class of objects in the present actual scene, with which it prefers to con-

verse. If it employs the imagination, deals in illusion, and addresses the taste, it is more in the peculiar method of conveyance, and in the richer style of expression and illustration, than in the substance of the materials in which it deals. The domain of poetry is not mapped off by any geographical boundary lines that divide the regions of the visionary and the real, the ideal and the actual. Its materials abound every where in endless variety, mingled with meaner forms, on the broad surface of the surrounding universe. It is by selecting from these the objects of her choice, and arraying them in the appropriate colors and drapery, derived from her own richly furnished wardrobe, that poetry forms a peculiar classification in literature. It is by thus selecting, combining, and adorning materials already existing, and not by plunging into empty space, and there erecting capricious images of air, made after the likeness of nothing in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, and having no relation to human experience or sympathy, that the inventive and creative genius of the poet is appropriately exercised. In the outward form and process of the communication there may be variations from the literal truth. The structure of the materials may be more complex, ornate and attractive than the outlines of experience. But the edifice itself rests on a foundation of reality; and its proportions rise in the symmetry of truth. To be great and effective, in a word, to be truly poetical, every such production of genius must conform to the facts of human experience, and accord with the laws of human sympathy. This is true of the noblest monuments of genius that now stand in the department of poetry. This was true of Milton, although

the lofty range of his genius led him to converse with "principalities and powers in heavenly places," and with demons and depths in the nether darkness. This was true of Shakspeare, amid all his vagaries on fairy ground, and all his variations from the literal record of history, in his rich combinations of incident and character. In the exercise of their genius they come home to "the business and bosoms of men." They dealt with the tenderest ties, the highest relations, and the most vital interests of the race. They appealed to the purest sympathies, the noblest aspirations, and the strongest passions of the human heart. And hence the commanding, thrilling and transporting power of their productions, which has endowed them with an immortality of influence over successive generations of the race.

Away, then, with the unmeaning cant about "the province of art," the standard of taste, aesthetic rules, ideal perfection, opposition to truth, reason and reality, and exemption from the claims of morality and religion! If there be any conflict with such interests, in the moral results produced in any instance, it is owing, not to any laws of necessity either in the powers of genius, or the province of poetry, but to a voluntary choice of such materials, and a culpable design in their combination and effect, induced by the perverted tendencies of the author's own mind, and the depraved tastes of the multitude whom he seeks to gratify, regardless of all higher considerations of usefulness and duty. A condition of neutrality in morals and religion is possible only on a supposition of intellectual absurdity and weakness, which would bring poetry into universal contempt, nay, would annihilate

its very existence. For, although the form of verse might remain, the animating life, the melodious spirit, the thrilling and triumphant power of poetry would be wanting. Indeed the peculiar attributes which distinguish this classification of literature are so many elements of power. The select materials which it moulds into forms of beauty and grandeur are those which lie deepest in the fountains of faith and feeling, and spread widest in their influences on the destinies of mankind. It matters not that the professional air and offices of a moral teacher is omitted. It matter not that the precise formality of systematic instruction is neglected. Whatever may be the manner of its approach, or the method of its communications; though it may not advance by the open avenue of induction, or enter at the front door of the logical reason, and then move in a connected series from one apartment to another; though it may not address an isolated faculty, or make its appeal to the understanding alone; yet it opens every avenue of the soul at once, addresses every faculty by a simultaneous sway, fascinates by its presence, and commands by its authority, takes possession of the entire man, and moves his moral nature by a pervading law of resistless sympathy. Vividness of conception and power of expression in the writer are answered by depth of impression in the reader. And if we are to judge of power by the reality of its effects, and not by the formality of its process; then there is no other department of literature entitled to higher consideration for the extent of its influence and the importance of its results. If it does not teach, it thrills: if it does not instruct and inform, it quickens and moves. If it does not enlighten and edify, it educates

and moulds. And its education includes preëminently the elements of our moral nature. Its power lies in the operation of sympathy. It appeals to our tastes, sensibilities and affections. By the frequent indulgence and exercise of these moral qualities, their habits become at length fixed in the soul. And these habits of taste, feeling and sentiment constitute the permanent features of the moral character.

The true moral effect of any production consists in the kind of sympathy it awakens, and the nature of the impression it leaves on the ardent and susceptible mind of the reader. Or, according to John Foster—"Whatever is the chief and grand impression made by the whole work on the ardent minds which are most susceptible of the influence of poetry—*that* is the real moral." Judged by this rule, there is no class of writers more highly responsible in the exercise of their gifts, than those employed in this department of literature. They wield the highest intellectual power in a form most efficient for good or evil. They teach chiefly by example, and their power is exercised in awakening responsive sympathy. The moral effect of their writings is determined partly by their choice of characters and incidents to serve as models and examples.

A common plea for the introduction of vicious characters and immoral incidents, is that of faithfulness in the imitation of nature. But there is no necessity laid upon a writer to select such examples. He does it by a culpable exercise of his own free will. The influence of such a character in a work of fiction or poetry presents a new temptation to the reader—a temptation as real and often as powerful as if he

encountered such an one in social intercourse. But temptations are always to be avoided, if possible; and he who deliberately invents and produces in a work of genius, the example of a corrupt character; and thus presents a needless occasion of temptation before his readers, is just as culpable for the moral injury inflicted, as if that example had been actually presented in his own person. There was no law of literature or morals requiring him to select such an example. But on the contrary, the same scale of duty which would lead us to avoid the company of such a character in real life, should forbid a contact with its example in the department of literature.

But the evil effect consists not merely *in selecting* such examples; but mainly *in the manner of presenting them*—in the treacherous art by which a vile character is disguised, adorned and dressed up in unreal attractions. The perverted sympathy and admiration of the author's own mind for such a character, (which is generally the secret ground of *preference* that leads to its selection,) will be manifested by placing it in such favorable attitudes, amid such modifying circumstances, and with such a beautifying combination of light and shade in the surrounding scenery, as most powerfully to awaken corresponding sympathy and admiration in the minds of his readers. It is this sympathetic fascination, transferred unconsciously from the mind of a writer to his productions, which forms the fatal spell of perverted genius. The chief danger in such literature lies in its power to call forth, multiply and perpetuate, to an unlimited extent, responsive sympathies among all classes of its readers. As the seeds of evil exist

more or less in the nature of all, even the comparatively pure have the capacity to sympathize for a time with certain fascinating forms of corruption. And as our sympathies are often blindly exercised, in advance of the strict supervision of conscience, it is possible for the repeated indulgence of this sympathy to result in a habit of moral feeling, which may ultimately include the approbation of evil. Admitted under this advantage of sympathy, vice, once abhorrent, becomes at length congenial, until

“ Seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

The pernicious power of a writer then, lies not exclusively in the selection of evil examples, but in the false coloring and the fictitious fascinations with which they are invested by the perverted sympathies of his own heart. When such a depraved character is possessed by a writer, he will of course be regardless of the injurious moral consequences of his productions, even if he does not deliberately design to mislead and corrupt mankind by his influence; but few writers, if any, would openly avow so diabolical a purpose. Even when the pervading tone and general effect of their writings are pernicious, they seek to cover their motives from censure, under inconsistent professions of benevolence and incongruous maxims of virtue. Such is the pitiable policy, often without plausibility in its disguise, of those unprincipled writers,

“ Who, kindling a combustion of desire,
With some cold moral think to quench the fire.”

But if the sympathies of the reader are excited toward a

corrupt character—if the impressions left upon his mind are at variance with moral purity ; then there is no apology, that human ingenuity can devise, or the canons of false criticism suggest, that will avail to shield such an author from a condemnation as strong and sweeping, as his influence is wide and destructive.

To quote again from Foster—“ If it be said that such works stand on the same ground, except as to the reality or accuracy of the facts, with an eloquent history, which simply *exhibits* the actions and characters, I deny the assertion. The actions and characters are presented in a *manner*, which prevents their just impression, and impowers them to make an opposite one. A transforming magic of genius displays a number of atrocious savages in a hideous slaughter-house of men, as demigods in a temple of glory. No doubt an eloquent history might be so written as to give the same aspect to such men and such operations ; but that history would deserve to be committed to the flames. A history that should present a perfect display of human miseries and slaughter, would incite no one that had not attained the last possibility of depravation, to imitate the principal actors. It would give the same feeling as the sight of a field of dead and dying men, after the battle is over—a sight at which the soul would shudder, and earnestly wish that this might be the last time the sun should behold such a spectacle. * * * * *

It is no justification to say that such instances have been known, and therefore such representations but imitate reality ; for if the laws of criticism do not require, in works of genius, a careful, an anxious adaptation of examples and sentiments to

the purest moral purpose, as a far higher duty than the study of resemblance to the actual world, the laws of piety most certainly do. Let those who have so much literary conscience about this verisimilitude, content themselves with the office of mere historians, and then they may relate, perhaps without guilt, if the relation is absolutely simple, all the facts and speeches of depraved greatness within the memory of the world. But when they choose the higher office of inventing and combining, they are accountable for all the consequences. They create a new person, and in sending him into society they can choose whether his example shall tend to improve or to pervert the minds that will be compelled to admire him. If they deliberately choose the latter, the guilt of *creating*, is, with respect to the *influence*, the same as the writer would have incurred by practically *being* such an example."

When we consider, then, the high prerogative of Genius—how plastic its power, how transforming its touch, how potent its spell for good or evil—when we think of its kindling conceptions, its contagious sympathies, its thrilling and transporting emotions—and when its breathing thoughts are announced in burning words, how henceforth they become watch-words of the life and "mottoes of the heart"—when we remember the number, the variety and the rapid diffusion of its productions through all the avenues of society—when we reflect that these are eagerly devoured, especially by the youth of each generation, and constitute the chief mental aliment of ardent and impressible spirits, at a period of life most important in the formation of character—when we consider that the spell of their influence operates in the absence of all

disturbing and counteracting causes, in the retirement of solitude and the silence of study, distilling like the noiseless dew, pervading as the vital air ; and when we bear in mind that the noblest productions of genius possess a self-perpetuating vitality, that the world does not willingly let such works die, and that immortal in their influence for good or evil, they live on, enlarging, deepening, and widening their mighty currents, extending their magic sway from heart to heart, and from generation to generation for ages upon ages, after the heart that swelled with their original conception has ceased to beat, and the hand which inscribed the thrilling record, has moulded into dust ; when all this is borne in mind, it would be brutal stupidity or impious madness to manifest indifference to the sway of such an agency ! How immense, how fearful the responsibility of the gifted spirit that wields such an influence over the destinies of the race ! If the sacred obligations of piety are disowned, surely a benevolent regard to social virtue, and the generous glow of patriotism which none will disavow, should restrain the parricidal pen of that reckless writer, who by diffusing corrupt tastes and sentiments through society, would destroy that moral purity, which is indispensable to social order and national prosperity !

But the genius of the poet is bound by higher obligations than those which enforce the promotion of social virtue and the public good. Man is surrounded by higher moral relations than those that connect him with his fellow-men on the present theatre of existence. He is related to God as a dependent creature, and an intelligent subject of His moral government. He is related to an invisible future state of ex-

istence, in which he shall realize the destinies of immortality. These higher relations include and modify all subordinate earthly ties. In a word, genius is bound by the sacred obligations of religion. The lowest possible form of these obligations forbid him in any way to injure the cause of truth and righteousness.

But this is not all. There is a more direct and positive obligation. The high responsibility of genius is not answered by simply abstaining from what is wrong and injurious. God did not endow man with superior faculties, merely that he might "stand all the day idle in his vineyard." Men of genius are not distinguished as the useless pets of creation, preserved with special care for ostentatious display. The law of preëminence among intelligent moral beings, is a law of beneficent activity, and preëminent service. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation." And among men the same precedence prevails. "He that is chief among you shall be your minister ; and he that is greatest shall be the servant of all."

But a state of neutrality with respect to religion is in the nature of things absolutely impossible. Christ affirmed a necessary law, when he said, "He that is not with me, is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Christianity claims a universal empire. There is no sphere of human life, there is no department of human thought, over which its authority does not extend, or to which its principles do not apply. Genius has not the power to form

to itself any "peculiar province" from which the claims of Christianity may be excluded. Religion, unless it be a phantom, is a mighty law that pervades and binds the entire system around us. Christianity, unless it be a fable, is a great, vital, central truth, to which all other forms of truth are related in consistent subordination; around which they revolve in harmonious order—a presiding orb, throned in the midst of that moral system under which man exists, (a system divinely adapted to his lapsed and fallen condition,) dispensing its light to every part and issuing its laws in every direction. All the departments of nature, and all the dispensations of Providence;—all the relations of society, and all the events of human life, are adjusted in accordance with this supreme and pervading principle. Christianity embraces under its jurisdiction the whole sphere of man's existence—comprehends all his relations, duties and interests. It supplies its peculiar motives, and diffuses its peculiar spirit in all the departments of human agency.

Such is the comprehensive claim of the gospel, based on the supposition of its truth, as a Divine revelation. If the light of heaven has indeed shone upon our world, it illuminates every object and every scene within the compass of our vision. If the voice of God has truly spoken in distinct and audible tones to man, the responsive echoes of that voice still continue to reverberate in all the avenues of earth, and give back to human ears the significance of his silent works. If the gospel is, as it claims to be, the infallible testimony of Divine truth on questions pertaining to the present character and future destiny of man—if it has affirmed clearly concerning

his relations to God, his attitude in His sight, and his prospects beyond the grave—if it has declared man to be a sinner, and assured him of the only way of salvation—if it has declared the necessity of a moral renovation of his nature, and pointed to an almighty agent by whom it must be effected—and pronounced the awful alternative, that if this moral disease be not healed by these, its only remedies, it must result in eternal death—if these fundamental and essential features of Christianity be admitted, as they are by the general consent of society: then, they should be held not only as so many separate items of belief, but held in all the branches of their connection, all the scope of their application,—and in all the extent of their legitimate inferences,—they should be recognized and regarded in all their evident bearings on subordinate departments of truth; in all their appropriate emanations of light and shade on the scenes of human life, and in all their modifying effects on the motives, interests and prospects of mankind. Nothing should be advanced in any department of human thought, which would clash or conflict with any of the numberless ramifications of these great central truths of the Christian system. There should be no exhibition of human character and no picture of human life, presented in an aspect different from that which it assumes under the full light which shines from heaven.

Now it is evident there may be a thousand modes of conflict and collision with the truths of Christianity, without any direct allusion or reference being made to those truths. This indeed is the most common and most dangerous form of oppo-

sition to the gospel. The mind would be startled at the presumption of its own daring position, in assuming an attitude of avowed hostility to such a system. The more successful method of attack consists in simply making no allusion or reference whatever to the subject, and proceeding, in utter forgetfulness of its inspired lessons, to advance opposite principles and sentiments. Let the mind of a writer but succeed so far in a process of self-delusion, as to acquire a habit of oblivion with respect to the gospel as an infallible standard of truth, and the grand source of success in error is already attained. He proceeds to inculcate, and his readers to imbibe, false and pernicious views on moral subjects, without being conscious of opposing or renouncing that system of truth, which by the general consent of society is admitted to be of divine authority. By means of this treacherous policy, a gifted writer may succeed by the moral influence of his productions in erecting, in the prejudices and passions of the human heart, a barrier of practical unbelief to resist the entrance of the gospel, more extensive, obstinate, and enduring than all the battlements and towers that open Infidelity has ever reared around its citadel. He may present false views of human life, its duties, interests and ends, its realities, relations, and prospects—views at war with all the lessons of experience and observation, as well as the dictates of the word of God—yet so colored as to be alluring to the vision of the youthful mind, and lead it astray in absurd plans and visionary expectations. He may paint the whole scene as a paradise of pleasure, abounding in sources of self-gratification. He may conceal the stern realities of affliction, disappointment, and

death. He may omit all reference to the character of God, and the immortality of the soul. And life, thus divested of all its higher moral significance, becomes perverted to low temporal ends, and is squandered away in a vain career of self-indulgence. He may present false motives to action, and inculcate spurious virtues, and set up a low moral standard for the estimation of character, regardless of the high motives and virtues enjoined in the gospel, and the pure and perfect moral standard found in the law of God. He may give false representations of the nature and condition of man, overlooking the many infirmities, trials and temptations that pertain to our earthly lot, and the radical moral disease which preys on our fallen nature; and hence the remedies devised by infinite mercy, are spurned and rejected.

In these and many other similar ways, a writer of genius may oppose and resist the entire system of Christianity, without making a single hostile allusion to its truths—by merely disregarding them: and he may do this without adopting the strict and sober form of didactic or systematic instruction. He may do it with less parade, but often with more effect, by what is esteemed the lighter process of fiction and poetry. He may do it by painting false but fascinating pictures of life—by disguising corrupt motives and false virtues, under an aspect of magnanimity or heroism—by presenting an unworthy model of character in such a combination of scenes and incidents, that the unguarded sympathies of his readers are excited and their admiration awakened in behalf of qualities that are spurious and base. He may accomplish in this way an incalculable amount of moral injury by his influence, and yet pre-

sume to evade censure for his opposition to the gospel, by urging the pretext that the doctrines of Christianity do not lie within his peculiar province, as a writer of taste and genius—that they belong especially to the church and the ministry. But, as we have shown, the truths of the gospel are universal in their application to mankind. Christianity has a prior claim to entire jurisdiction, and consequently no subsequent plea can be urged to a separate, exclusive province, since it already includes and comprehends in its sway, every department of human thought. It allows no independent claim—it permits no control that is not subordinate to its supreme authority. It sanctions no rules that do not harmonize with its unchangeable laws—it admits nothing as true, which does not conform to its sacred doctrines, at least in their inferences and results.

Nor is this an arbitrary claim of mere authority: Christianity demands this harmony and agreement in all the subordinate branches of truth, *because then only they are true in themselves—because then only they conform to nature and reality:* And, when any instances of conflict or collision occur, they are, as to the established order of things, as well as to the doctrines of revelation, but the mere falsities and vagaries of a disordered brain. We perceive thus how utterly absurd and groundless is the common plea, as to the peculiar province of taste and genius, when urged to vindicate a departure from the divine instructions of the gospel. Equally without foundation is the inference sometimes suggested, that to maintain such a moral harmony with the principles of Christianity, in all the departments of elegant literature, would entirely

annul the appropriate office of poetical genius, and convert it into an anointed priest of the sanctuary. But this is by no means implied. There need be no change in the materials employed, or the methods adopted in the communications of genius. There need be no formal advocacy or systematic enforcement of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. There need be no departure from its proper sphere, its legitimate topics, or its appropriate forms of illustration and ornament. Consistency does not demand that literature should be confined to commentaries on the Bible, or systems of theology. Duty does not require that genius should become invariably a mere preacher of the word—a messenger from the invisible world—a prophet burdened with the revelations and mysteries of religion. This office is already filled. There is a separate, yet a coördinate mission. Let it go abroad over this actual living scene; reveal the mysteries of the visible world around us; unveil the shrouded and lovely face of nature, interpret the thousand thrilling voices of human life—voices eloquent with truth, in harmony with the voice of God in his word; which if they do not proclaim the heavenly message, at least do not deny it; but rather like the voice of Him in the wilderness, lift a note of accordant testimony, and gently opening the portals of the human soul, “prepare the way” for the entrance of Him, who alone is the “way, the truth, and the life.”

By pursuing this consistent course, neither departing from the sphere of polite literature, nor encroaching on the province of Christian theology, a conscientious writer may wield the magic power of genius, and employ the captivating arts

of poetry with extensive moral advantage to mankind. While he gratifies the taste, he purifies the heart ; while he delights the imagination, he guides the life ; and by the honest exercise of his gifts and talents in their legitimate province, he attains the highest forms of literary excellence, and promotes, indirectly, but efficiently and widely, the spiritual improvement of his race.

But if, on the contrary, a writer should adopt an opposite policy ; if actuated by the evil tendencies of his unbelieving heart, and aiming to gratify the corrupt passions of the ignorant and erring multitude, by the effusions of his genius, he should utterly disregard the entire compass of Christian truth, and advance views and sentiments at variance with its practical results and at the same time equally at war (as they must be in such a case) with the actual truth of nature and the sober realities of human life ; if he appeals to unworthy motives, adorns vice in the garb of virtue, and confers on guilty pride the title and the fame of heroic magnanimity : if he excites the admiration and sympathies of his readers in behalf of defective or pernicious models of character : or, even if pausing short of such an openly immoral tendency in his productions, and while inculcating an inferior degree of seeming virtue, he should yet, by the representations and delineations of his gifted pen, induce his readers to adopt low conceptions of the standard of moral duty—the holy law of God—to cherish delusive opinions of human character and entertain false views of human life : if, by any process whatever, he should induce, in minds subject to the sway of his genius, a habit of delusion in regard to the great facts on which the provisions of Christi-

anity are based—the unsatisfying nature of earthly interests, as a portion for the soul—the insufficiency of mere social virtue to meet the requirements of the moral law, and the necessity of a divine influence to quicken and restore—to purify and prepare the nature of man during his earthly probation for an immortal destiny, if he should thus encourage and confirm a prevailing practical blindness as to the existence and the evil of sin ; the duty of repentance and faith ; the need of a Saviour ; and the obligation to lead a pure, progressive life of humble piety, as the appointed pathway to heavenly blessedness ; and hence the entire system of saving truth should be obstinately spurned away as an inappropriate, uncongenial and altogether unnecessary intrusion upon the notice of a rational mind. If such be the legitimate tendency and practical result of the productions of any perverted genius ; then, whatever palliating considerations may be urged ; whatever redeeming qualities may exist ; whatever minor charms and excellencies may prevail ; in the sight of truth and reason he must be condemned as the instrument of moral murder on a fearful scale—and the higher the gifts possessed, the brighter the colors employed, the more entrancing the magic spell wielded by such a genius, the heavier is his responsibility, and the deeper his guilt.

To estimate the responsibility, and measure the guilt in such a case, we must rise above the paltry considerations of time and sense—we must adopt a higher standard of computation than that which determines the interests of earth—we must contrast the dignity and duration of the soul with that of the body—we must compare eternity with time—we must

measure the distance from earth to heaven, and thence again to the fathomless abyss beneath ; and so high is the responsibility—so vast and so deep is the guilt of that unhappy writer, who, by the influence of his genius, has destroyed the present purity and peace, and desolated the immortal prospects of his fellow-men, *by keeping them aloof from the only foundation on which the soul and its interests may rest for eternity!* Alas! how much of the current polite literature of our day, though not censurable for an openly immoral tendency, is chargeable with results of this description.

CHAPTER VII.

DEVIATIONS OF MODERN LITERATURE FROM THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD—WORKS OF GROSS IMMORALITY—WORKS OF PLEASURE AND AMUSEMENT—CARICATURES OF RELIGION—ADOPTION OF A LOW AND DEFECTIVE STANDARD OF MORAL DUTY—THE LITERATURE OF SOCIAL PROGRESS AND PHILANTHROPIC REFORM.

THE subordination and conformity to Christian truth, on which we have insisted, as the high responsibility of genius, instead of being a state of degrading enthrallment, is, on the contrary, the only possible condition of enlarged and ample liberty. The poet in such a case, is not tied down to what may be termed “the narrow dogmas of a creed, or the stale superstitions of a sect.” Nor is the province of polite literature limited to the formal outlines of a theological system. There need be no direct reference to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. These may be omitted as themes peculiar to the pulpit; and yet this coincidence and harmony be fully maintained between the productions of genius and the principles of Christianity. We may walk in the light of the sun, and witness the form and color of objects as revealed by that

light, without referring at the same time, to the laws of the solar system, or investigating at each step, the science of astronomy. Nor would any one, in the exercise of his reason, complain that the light thus necessary for his guidance, impaired or limited the free scope of his vision. Christ, the Divine Teacher, is the light of the world. The gospel is the central luminary, suspended by the hand of God on high, to shed its beams over the darkness of earth, so that objects, which were dim, doubtful, or invisible to the organs of sense and the discernment of reason, stand forth disclosed under that superadded revelation, which has "brought life and immortality to light." Now, the obvious and entire duty of the poet consists simply in representing objects in his appropriate department, just as they appear under the disclosures of this heavenly light; or, in other words, just as they are in reality.

The authors of our polite literature, for the most part, do not assume an attitude of avowed hostility to the gospel. Were they decided infidels, their deviations from the Christian standard would at least be consistent with their character. But a more pernicious policy is pursued by those who admit the divine authority of the Christian system; but who practically disregard its inspired communications, while they advance sentiments alien and even hostile to its spirit, without seeming to be conscious of such startling inconsistency. An enlightened Christian judgment must, however, demand, as an indispensable condition of its approval of any production of genius, calculated to influence the tastes and feelings of mankind, the most exact conformity to the spirit and senti-

ments of the Christian religion. How large a proportion of the elegant literature, circulated and read in our own land, must excite painful emotions and melancholy anticipations in the mind of a sincere believer in the religion of Christ !

1. There is a class of works, not only anti-Christian, but openly and daringly *immoral* in their tendency. These generally assume the form of fiction. Their chief interest consists in the intricacy of the plot or story, conducted through a series of surprising events and startling coincidences. Their grand aim is to patronize crime and pander to lust. The fundamental maxim of their creed is, "the impulse of passion and the force of circumstances justify all actions to which they incline." This general principle pervades this whole class of corrupt literature. Adopting this perverse maxim, these writers proceed to erect a superstructure of fiction for its habitation. They employ their descriptive and inventive powers to paint the workings of passion, in all the glowing ardor of its excitement, associated at the same time with certain generous or chivalrous qualities, that give relief to the picture and fascinate the sympathies of the reader. They describe propitious scenes, and combine the circumstances in the history, so as to form a suitable occasion for the triumph of temptation. The leading characters in such works of fiction, are mostly selected from certain reprobated ranks of society. And instead of representing them as suffering under the providential penalty of their own misdeeds ; the attempt is made rather to represent them as objects of commiseration—as the victims of passion and the slaves of circumstance. Their passions prompt perpetual outrage on the relations of society, and so-

ciety, in self-defence, repels such destructive elements. Hence, in the inevitable conflict which ensues, the whole blame of the result is thrown upon the institutions of society. Such *superior* natures are hampered, harassed, and hurried headlong into reckless violence, by the tame compliances of social life! They sin and they suffer because they are oppressed! In this literature of lust and license, we accordingly find, that almost every social virtue is, in its turn, traduced and vilified, in order to vindicate the opposite vice. The tenderest ties of nature—the most sacred relations of human life, are reproached and dishonored, in order to extenuate the lawless passions by which they are assailed. Virgin chastity and conjugal fidelity are stigmatized in order to redeem from merited disgrace the crimes of the prostitute and the adulteress. The violation of marriage vows is justified by describing the dreary and desolate doom of some fair victim, sacrificed by parental authority, or the more indefinite tyranny of circumstances, on the hymenial altar—joined in law, but not in heart, to some uncongenial and irksome companion; inhabiting a cold and cheerless home; pining and drooping in the loneliness of despair; until at length some more fascinating lover breaks like sunlight upon the scene; dispels the shadows from her heart, and illuminates her whole being with the glow of a new life. Then follow a series of stolen interviews—the secret compact—and the final elopement. Again, perhaps, the guilt of the painted prostitute is palliated and excused by describing the captivating person and seducing arts of some faithless lover, who ensnares and then betrays the affections of his confiding victim. The different stages in the process of

beguilement are set forth ; and when the spell is complete—the hour, the scene, the persuasion, and the yielding impulse are all vividly portrayed. And after the first fatal step has been taken, the victim of shame is represented as shut out from all return to virtue, by an unjust and unrelenting public sentiment.

But why continue a description of that depraved literature, which perverts the decrees of reason and conscience ; which reverses the laws of nature and Providence ; which exalts licentiousness and vice, and degrades virtue and piety ; which elevates rogues and ruffians, debauchees and desperadoes above the ruins of disorganized society ? It is an honor to our country to state that the literature of this description, circulated in our midst, is almost entirely of foreign production. The greater portion of it is of French origin. An image of the national character, instead of a model to win our admiration, it should prove a beacon to warn us of danger. Unhappy nation ! Blessed with brilliant gifts, but cursed by a wretched destiny ! With a bloody history of revolutions in the past—the present a scene of trembling suspense, with elements of disorder suppressed but not subdued, overawed into temporary silence by threatening military power—the future, what it shall be, no prophet has dared to predict. Vain, volatile, fluctuating, fantastic and yet gifted people ! What oracle can solve the mystery of your career ? What causes can be assigned for the contradictions in your history ? Shall they be traced to the peculiar constitutional temperament of the people, as sanguine, excitable and prone to extremes ? We find they are composed of common flesh

and blood, and exhibit nothing singular in their physical organization. No, the causes lie deeper than the veins and arteries of the physical frame, veiled in the secret fountains of their moral nature. France, with her heroes, poets and philosophers; with her priests, superstitions and temples; with her arts, palaces and monuments; with all her Babel jargon of "liberty, fraternity and equality;" France is yet a nation of infidels! with all the elements of social life, sensuous, sordid and self-conflicting; shrouded in earthliness, and shut out from the air and the light of heaven; with no abiding sense of moral obligation; with no supreme law of conscience; with no elevating, sustaining and satisfying religious faith: long since has her doom been recorded—" *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel!*"

2. Another classification of literature consists of what are termed *works of pleasure and amusement—entertaining but innocent*. Their claim of innocence may, perhaps, be conceded to this extent; that they avoid making a direct assault on any one of the social virtues: but, while yielding this concession, we are compelled to object to faults of another kind, as chargeable on this class of literature. A grand moral error, inseparable from such works, is an undue prominence given to pleasure as an object of pursuit. Connected with this error is another, viz.: a fatal mistake as to what constitutes true pleasure. That there is an innocent diversion of mind, no one but a morose ascetic will for a moment deny. But this diversion should be to the mind, what relaxation is to the body, an occasional relief from the more severe labors of life. But, if life itself is converted into a

holiday ; if the mind has no higher aim than pleasure, and the body no other employment than the gratification of its senses ; then nature itself, in maintaining such an unnatural system of life, is forced to the necessity of obtaining variety and zest in its enjoyment, by adopting artificial, stimulating and destructive ingredients, and pursuing a career of dissipation and profligacy, disastrous alike to the health of the body and the happiness of the mind. Man was not placed in this world merely to be diverted : and he who makes diversion his only aim in life, sacrifices both his duty and his happiness. Pleasure, when innocent, is always subordinate to duty : and he who holds duty supreme, takes the only course to secure real and permanent pleasure.

Here, then, is the grand defect of the class of writers under consideration. They make pleasure the great end of life ; and they fail to discriminate between true and false pleasure. They take for granted, that pleasure is the chief good—the “one thing needful ;” and they do not pause to inquire how it stands related to other interests ; or to ask even if there be any interest apart from this. Nor do they deem it incumbent on them to ascertain what qualities are necessary to constitute true pleasure. This is not their office. They do not aspire to be teachers and guides, that they may instruct mankind what paths to choose and what to avoid. They aim only to be entertaining and amusing companions, to divert the tedium of the journey. It is not their part to correct the tastes and tendencies of the age. They must consult the popular taste, and fall in with the fashionable current, in order to render themselves as agreeable and pleasant as possible.

They are well aware, too, what kind of entertainment the public taste demands. They know that in this reading age, most men read, not to be instructed and edified, but to be amused and diverted—that they desire to find in books not a sound, rational, and above all, not a religious entertainment; but wit, humor, novelty and a gay variety of painted scenes and images; passing like a comic panorama before the eye. In furnishing a supply for this public demand, they ply their colors to paint amusing caricatures or hideous distortions of truth and nature. If they are admonished that there are other and higher interests, which are sacrificed by this indiscriminate and exclusive devotion to mere amusement; that it is indulged to the neglect of moral duty, and at the expense of rational happiness; inasmuch as it excludes that serious reflection which is indispensable to the knowledge of our duty, and maintains a frivolity of spirit, which is inconsistent with the experience of happiness, they will profess to be unable to discriminate in such subtle casuistry—they will say that a benevolent Creator doubtless designed that man should find enjoyment in life, and that any form of pleasure would be more agreeable to his will than habits of gloom and moping melancholy.

“ Thus tell such men, that pleasure all their bent,
And laughter all their work is life misspent;
Their wisdom bursts into this sage reply,
Then mirth is sin and we should always cry;
To find the medium asks some share of wit,
And therefore 'tis a mark fools never hit.”

With them, pleasure is everything or nothing. A proper medium, a due proportion, and a subordinate relation to other interests, are conditions which they cannot conceive in their

application to this subject. They see only the two extremes of incessant gaiety and unalleviated gloom ; and the whole world to them, is divided into but two classes, the devotees of pleasure and the victims of sorrow.

But what are the sources of this vaunted pleasure ? Buoyancy of animal spirits, successive scenes of festive mirth, and a uniform frivolity of mind easily diverted and averse to habits of serious thought. This is the sum of all its attributes. How unworthy the character of a rational being ! How incapable of satisfying the thirst of an immortal spirit ! How entirely opposed to the attainment of that pure and permanent pleasure which Christianity proffers to our acceptance ! The one awakens the soul to the right exercise of its rational and moral powers, opens its vision on the surrounding scene, enables it to triumph over the evils of life, and draws its light and animation from an unfailing source. The other suspends the powers of the soul, blinds the mind to the inevitable realities of life, assumes a gay delusion which hides the features of truth, and a levity of spirit which shakes off the impressions of duty. The one is an ever-flowing stream, springing from perennial fountains, sparkling here and there in many a sportive eddy, but still rolling on, spreading fertility and beauty in its course, and growing broader and deeper as it flows on for ever. The other is an artificial reservoir, confined in its position, fed by temporary supplies, liable at any moment to escape by a sudden rupture of its embankment ; or, if retained, it is only to grow putrid from stagnation, and exhale in deadly vapors under a blasting sun.

Now, these two systems of pleasure are obviously opposed

to each other in their very nature. The very habits of mind and traits of character, which these amusing writers encourage and confirm, involve a permanent hostility to that entire scheme of happiness which is founded on rational and Christian principles.

Nor is it merely a passive enmity of nature by which this vain system of pleasure stands opposed to Christianity. It breaks forth in direct and aggressive hostility. Destitute of resources within itself, it makes predatory incursions on the sacred territory of truth, and converts the most awful solemnities of religion into subjects of mockery and sport. One of the most common instruments employed by these writers, is *ridicule*—a weapon most effective in the defence of prejudice, whatever may be its pretended value as a test of truth. This is a mere pretence, however, without a shadow of reason for its support ; for it can be maintained only on the supposition that the blind prejudices of the multitude and the reigning fashions of the hour are in every instance identical with truth. For where lies the sense of ridicule ? Not in opposition to abstract truth ; but in opposition to the existing current of popular sympathy. This imparts odium to an event, and absurdity to an opinion. This gives authority to a sneer, and currency to a laugh. What, then, are the conditions of ridicule ? Power of fancy to represent an object in a grotesque position ; an arrogance of spirit which dares to despise it ; and a coincidence of public sentiment which sustains the act and echoes the laugh. Again, to what feeling does ridicule make its appeal, but a feeling of shame ? And what occasions shame, but a regard to public sentiment ? Then, to make existing

public sentiment a test of truth, would render truth a mereameleon. Instead of being immutable in its nature, it would change its color and form with every change of location. For not only in dress and diet, but in conduct and character, that which is the extreme of absurdity in one community, is the sublime of dignity in another.

Such is the nature of the instrument chiefly used by writers of amusement.

They deal extensively in *caricature*. And where do they generally find their materials? What class of subjects do they select for the exercise of their ridicule? Errors that are popular? Vices that are fashionable? The various forms of cant and hypocrisy that prevail in the more polite and polished circles of society? Folly and guilt in any of the high places of the world? Ah, no; *that* would be rather too *serious* an affair! There is influence—patronage—power to affect popularity in such quarters. The founders of fashion, the oracles of taste, the connoisseurs of refinement preside in these departments. The laugh might be turned against us. It would be more prudent to let them alone. So reason these polite authors. They turn to the Christian church, and select the peculiarity of Christian character, as the most suitable subjects for satire. Here they find fair game and an open field. Here caricature may paint its distortions, and waggery may twirl its grimace and ape its attitudes, not only with impunity to themselves, but to the infinite amusement of those gay and polished circles, whose propitious smile is so essential to literary reputation.

Let any one revert in memory to the list of works of fic-

tion which he has read, and then ask himself how many of the specimens of Christian character introduced in such works have been faithful likenesses ; and how many have been disgusting caricatures. And he will, perhaps, be surprised at the result. The Christian name is represented as concealing under a mask of outward devotion, a character of malignity, or worldliness, or sensuality ; and even when the outward profession is not made the veil of hypocrisy, it is openly associated with a character of fierce fanaticism, or contracted bigotry, or superstitious credulity, or ignorant stupidity. If a priest or parson be introduced, he is either some dark scheming scoundrel, or some effeminate fop of fashion, or some rubicund and roystering boon companion of the bottle, the card table and the fox chase ; or some fanatical stickler for creeds and dogmas ; or some devout ignoramus, whose piety, though sincere, excites pity instead of respect. Now, we admit that there are exceptions to this description ; but they are so rare, as to be only exceptions to a general rule. The Christian name is generally associated with some psalm-singing, sour-visaged, sanctimonious pretender to piety, with a jargon of religious cant, whose character exhibits the most unlovely and distorted features, and whose life displays the most vile and contemptible conduct ; while men of the world who make no pretension to piety, are set off in contrast with every noble and generous trait of character, and all high-minded and honorable actions of life.

Now, it is true, it may be replied to all this, that such unworthy characters have existed in the Christian church ; and the apology of Burns for his satires on religion, may be adopted.

“ To stigmatize false friends of thine
Can ne'er defame thee.”

But, we ask, why are evil examples *so generally* introduced, and worthy ones *so rarely*? Is there any *caveat* or any intimation implied or expressed, that these examples were intended to represent only “ false friends” and insincere pretenders to piety? Is there any thing in the *manner* in which they are introduced, to show that it was designed “ to stigmatize” *them*, in order to relieve religion from the odium of their example? Or rather, does not the whole spirit of the performance indicate the deliberate purpose to injure the cause of religion, by means of their example? At all events, whether intended or not, the practical result of such representations is to bring Christian piety into contempt—to identify the sincere devotion of an honest heart, and the straightforward consistency of Christian principle, with superstitious cant and sanctimonious hypocrisy; and to induce irreligious men to feel contented and secure in their neglect of the whole subject of religion.

But in many instances, such writers go even beyond the point of ridiculing the Christian name and profession. They make the solemn doctrines of Christianity subjects of caricature and profane burlesque. They do this by expressing the truth in the cant phrase of vulgar ignorance, so as to clothe it in an aspect of absurdity, or by associating the truth with some low allusion or ludicrous image; or by extending the limits of the truth to some extreme of evident extravagance, or blending it in association with foreign and opposite ideas; little thinking that this absurd, distorted, fantastic image, which they have conjured up as a phantom of human super-

stitution, is nevertheless but a caricature of a divine reality, which, in a different form, is revealed in direct terms again and again, in that Book, which, many of them at least, acknowledge to be the Word of God.

3. The greater portion of polite literature is chargeable with a general fault, which includes a variety of departures from the Christian system. This is *the assumption of a low and defective standard of moral duty*. These writers do not acknowledge the obligation of the divine law, in the full extent of its requirements. They limit their ideas of duty to a class of mere social virtues. The duties which arise from our relations to God—the high and peculiar duties of religion, are practically disowned. This is not merely as a matter of omission, which arises from confining the attention to one class of duties, while a higher department is left to the supervision of other teachers. There is a silent assumption that these higher moral duties have no existence, or at least no practical obligation. The virtues patronised by polite literature, have consequently no reference to the character of God. Not only is the first great class of spiritual duties discarded, but the grand source of all obligation and the right motive of all obedience are disowned; and a set of mere human and social virtues is regarded as the sum of all our duties. These are not held as parts, connected with a vast system; but as complete substitutes for the entire moral law.

This grand defect in the moral teachings of polite literature, leads to a number of departures from the Christian system. The false standard of duty thus assumed, produces false and flattering views of personal character—involves self-

ignorance—conceals the evil nature of sin—blinds the mind of man to his true moral attitude—hides the alienation of his nature from God and the corruption of his heart. Ignorant of the true nature and extent of his moral obligations—the high and holy standard of God's law out of view, he perceives not in contrast the depth of his fall or the distance of his wanderings. In a word, he is thus lulled into a fatal delusion as to those prevailing moral evils, to which the gospel of Christ brings the only appropriate and adequate remedy. Unconscious of guilt, he rejects the atonement. Ignorant of his moral weakness, he seeks not the needful grace to quicken, to sustain and to save.

Rejecting thus the remedies of the gospel, even the partial and seeming virtues which may exist, are composed of qualities foreign to the elements of Christian character. The virtues of the one are humble, gentle, patient, prayerful and aspiring. Those of the other are proud, passionate, revengeful, self-righteous, self-dependent, and stationary.

4. We shall conclude the present article by adverting to a recent type or classification of literature, which, in its character and results, is decidedly antagonistic to the religion of Christ. It may be styled *the literature of social progress and philanthropic reform*. The ancient arts of the demagogue and the political agitator, are going out of date. An improved policy has been adopted. The restless advocates of reform and revolution, not content with straining their heated lungs in loud harangues to gaping crowds from the stump, the hustings, or the rostrum of anniversary jubilees, have selected a new instrument of success ; have brought the press into their

service ; have constrained taste, genius and poetry to minister in their cause ; and have perverted polite literature to become a channel of their communications with the public.

The authors of the new type of literature are a mongrel herd,—a motley class of various shades of opinion and belief ; alike in the prominent outlines of character, and differing only in the degree and intensity of their generic development. We find Agrarians, Socialists, political revolutionists, radical reformers of social evil, pantheists, atheists, and nominal Christians, all mixed in homogeneous amalgamation of spirit—all blended in a common brotherhood of benevolence. Their only difference consists in being stationed at different points along a line of *progress* in the same direction. They are alike in spirit, in principle, in policy, in the means employed, and the ends proposed ; and, *in all these respects, alike in their opposition to the religion of Christ.*

One common feature of this general class is a practical disregard of the authority of the Bible ; some indeed openly disown it as a *divine* revelation and so far act honestly. Others, however, acknowledge it to be the word of God ; but from what motive they do so cannot be readily discerned, unless it be to avoid the labor of finding reasons to justify its rejection, or to escape the shame of rejecting it without reason. But they practically recognize its authority *only so far* as it coincides with their opinions, and sanctions their policy. This, however, is not invariably the case. And when the word of God conflicts with their principles and policy, they either evade it by a forced interpretation, or reject it as a spurious insertion in the sacred canon, or pronounce it obsolete and

superseded by subsequent progress in religious knowledge and the developments of the age. Some have even gone so far in the penetration of their enlightenment, as to avow their conviction that had Christ lived in the present age of steam and electricity, and enjoyed all its advantages, he would have taken different views of many important subjects from those which he expressed while on the earth. In a word, he would have thought as they do, been of their party, and adopted their measures ; and *therefore* they feel entitled to plead his authority for their opinions, and to call themselves Christians !

But let not our meaning be misapprehended. Let it not for a moment be imagined that Christianity is opposed to social reform and the progressive enlightenment and elevation of mankind ; and that, *on this account* it conflicts with the teachings and tendencies of these self-elected and self-styled reformers of the day. On the contrary, the Gospel of Christ is the true and only efficient agent of genuine amelioration in the character or condition of man, and *therefore* it opposes these specious counterfeits and showy impostures. It is an emanation of infinite wisdom and love—an embodiment of divine benevolence. It taught the first lesson of true liberty to the world. It first conveyed to man correct ideas of the proper dignity of his nature. It brought the first tidings of encouragement and hope to the poor, the ignorant, and the oppressed. Animated by the true spirit and adopting the proper plan of benevolence, it has pursued its silent and steady march, while just laws and liberal governments, social order and domestic happiness, the arts of peace and the luxuries of refinement, enlightened civilization, and elevated humanity, have

attended its career and attested its triumphs. But the radical reformers of the day have no sympathy with such a spirit and no coöperation with such a policy. Many of them, it is true, bear the Christian name, and are connected with the Christian church. Some are even ministers of the Gospel: but they use their religion for other purposes. They look to the church for something else. When anything is to be done in the shape of benevolent enterprise, or of social reform, or of setting the world to rights in a general way, they forthwith forsake the church—seek some new platform—organize some special association of kindred spirits—collect a crowd—get up an excitement—speak—write—abuse—rail, and shout huzzas in anticipation of speedy triumph.

It would be unjust to apply an indiscriminate condemnation to an entire class. Among them may be sincere but deluded individuals—men, who, themselves delivered from the dominion of evil passions, cherish a real, but misdirected sympathy for the afflicted and oppressed—misled by an aspect of romance which invests certain Utopian schemes of benevolence. But, in schemes of this character, such facilities are afforded for diverting attention from the wants of their own nature, and the duties of their own sphere—the miseries in reach of their relief and the sins that lie at their very door—such ample vent is given to the restless and turbulent passions of a disordered mind—such plausible disguises are supplied by which to cloak malignant tempers and unholy aims, under a character of liberal zeal and large-souled benevolence; and so cheap a reputation for heroism is offered to the champion of oppressed humanity, who only swims with the tide of popular

phrensy, and shouts the war-cry of the maddened multitude, "agitate—overthrow—disorganize!"—that it would be no breach of charity to apply the term *diabolical* to that spirit of reckless, raving, riot-breeding radicalism, which in certain quarters rules the day. Look at its characteristic features, and call it Christian if you can? Look at its inevitable results, and you will hesitate to call it even human. But call it what you may, in its spirit and form, in its principle and policy, in its motives and measures, in its aims and results, in every feature of its character, and every step of its career, it displays a direct and decided hostility to the religion of Christ.

Observe some of the points of contrast between Christianity and this modern radicalism.

1st. Christianity begins with *self-reformation*. It demands attention, first of all, to personal character. It requires as a primary duty of each individual, that his own heart and life should be right in the sight of God, before he goes forth to reform the character of his fellow men. It enjoins that he should set his own house in order, before he begins to rectify the general condition of the world. "Cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull the mote out of thy brother's eye." Modern radicalism, however, overlooks these private and personal details of duty, pitches its plans on a general scale, and begins its operations at a distance from its own sphere.

We do not say that all the advocates of such a system are necessarily men of corrupt character. But there is nothing in the laws or conditions of the system to forbid their being

so. On the contrary, there are many special inducements to encourage depraved men to adopt such measures as a substitute for personal piety. Restless and malignant passions may be indulged in denouncing general wrongs. A spurious benevolence may be exercised in sympathizing with vague and distant calamities. And in the very act of denunciation and sympathy there is a flattering consciousness of moral superiority which cancels and covers up all defects of personal character. So that this false "charity hides a multitude of sins," not in the object towards which it is directed; but in the agent by whom it is exercised. Hence the description in the Bible of a class of self-deluded reformers, is often verified in the present day—"while they promise others liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption." Suggest to such men the propriety of attending to the personal claims of religion—hint the application of the proverb, "physician heal thyself," and they will indignantly repel the insinuation as an impertinent insult. They will exclaim, "You are behind the age. Away with your antiquated superstitions—your stale and stupid sermonizings—your sanctimonious croaking, and your puritanical cant! We are men of enlightened views and liberal sentiments, of lofty aspirations and expansive benevolence—the apostles of liberty and the advocates of reform, in an age of progress! Trouble us not with your cold-blooded cautions and your narrow-minded scruples! We are above your sphere, and beyond your comprehension."

2nd. Christianity is *humble and patient in its benevolence* and employs *persuasion* to effect its object. The true Christian is acquainted with his own character—knows his weakness and

unworthiness—acknowledges all his hopes to rest on the unmerited grace of his Redeemer, and aspires to imitate the character of Christ. Humble in self-estimation, he does not arrogate the right to censure or denounce his fellow men. He pities, persuades, and prays, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” These are the means by which he seeks to enlighten, reform and elevate mankind.

On the other hand, the spurious charity of these radical reformers, is arrogant, censorious and malignant. Ignorant of themselves, they are puffed up with pride, and vaunt their own powers—they are prompt to condemn and denounce ; and if they pray, it is only to call down fire from Heaven to consume their adversaries. Actuated by such a spirit, they are inefficient for good, and powerful only for evil. They alienate where they should appease ; they exasperate where they should heal ; they poison where they should purify, and desolate where they should reform.

3rd. Christianity is conscientious in the use of means—forbids “to do evil that good may come,” and employs only the *truth* to effect its purpose. Modern radicalism is unscrupulous in its measures ; considers that the end justifies the means,” and circulates slanders and lies for effect. It employs fiction not only as the vehicle of its lessons, but often as the veritable burden of its instructions. If its facts are not literally true, they at least answer the purpose of truth—they accord with existing sentiment on the subject—they encourage prevailing sympathy, they keep up a proper excitement, “and what need,” think they, “of such precise accuracy in our statements, when they are obviously for the good of the

cause? Surely in such a case, a *telling lie* may be told—a significant slander may be circulated. If not true as facts, they are as symbols and exponents, and have the effect of truth.”

4th. Christianity regenerates individuals, and thus moulds society at large. Radicalism would reform whole masses at once; and hence keeps up a perpetual ferment, which produces nothing but disaster and decay.

5th. Christianity renews the heart, reforms the inward character and thus affects a change in the fountains of our moral nature, which secures the result of individual happiness and social order. It infuses a spirit of mutual love amongst men and of humble piety towards God, which produces harmony in all the relations of life, and contentment under all the allotments of providence. Radicalism, however, reverses the whole process, reforms the outward condition, changes the external relations of society, leaves the fountains of evil untouched and engages in the vain attempt to dam up the swelling current by artificial embankments. It reforms laws, revolutionizes governments, changes the relations of society, and to this end wages wars, fights battles, sheds the blood and slays the bodies of thousands, that each proffered remedy may in its turn be applied as a panacea for all the evils under the sun. Under this disastrous regimen the distempers of the world have been doctored from its infancy until now, with only the abatement of a temporary depletion, by such means, while their ravages have reacted with new violence, and disorder and death still prevail.

6th. Christianity has reference in its results mainly to a

future life. Christ affirmed, my kingdom is not of this world. The great object of his mission was to purify and prepare man for an immortal destiny. In effecting this final purpose, however, Christianity secures incidentally the subordinate result of the greatest social order and happiness. The "godliness" or piety which it inculcates, "is profitable in all things, having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." By planting the hope of immortality in the human heart, and regarding this life as a scene of preparation and pilgrimage, it takes the surest and only effectual method of transforming the character and regulating the conduct of mankind. By referring to a future and eternal state of existence, it gathers motives sufficient to repress the evil propensities and passions of the soul, and sustain the secret struggles of virtue in the hour of temptation. By unfolding the portals of immortality in the future, the soul is supplied with a satisfying portion and expatiates freely amid prospects as large and lofty as its own desires. Released from the dominion of the sordid lusts and passions of earth, admitted into the spiritual liberty of the sons of God, and endowed with a title to a heavenly inheritance, the happiness of the true believer is rendered to a great extent independent of external influences. Thus enlarged, exalted and enriched, the poorest and humblest Christian may look down with a rational pity on the proudest and most prosperous devotee of the world, who may affect to commiserate his outward state. And many a saint in bonds now looks with serene compassion on the spiritually enslaved reformers of the day, who are so loud in their expressions of sympathy in his behalf, and says

to them in the language of Paul, the prisoner in chains at the bar of the royal and sympathizing Agrippa, "Would to God that not only thou, but all who hear me this day, were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except these bonds!"

By idolizing the interests of this life, we prostitute our nature. By expecting too much from earthly things we disqualify ourselves for enjoying the true, but transient satisfaction they are intended to impart. By blotting out the hopes of immortality, and living alone to the present world, all motives to high effort and holy aspiration are destroyed, and the soul without an anchor of hope is tossed and thrown into perpetual tumult by the restless longings of its own nature. Here is the grand mistake of the radical reformers of the day; they look alone to things that are seen and temporal: they attach exclusive importance to outward evils: they idolize the present world; and they aim to realize an earthly paradise by changing the external relations of society. They look not to "things that are unseen and eternal," have no "respect to a future recompense of reward," and foster a supreme devotion to the world, which produces a brood of sordid lusts and passions, that throw society into a perpetual ferment; so that even were it possible to realize the outward changes they propose to effect, they could only succeed *so far*, as to sweep and garnish the apartments of a palace; "the unclean spirit" would return, and with it other and viler devils, and the last state of such a society would be worse than the first.

Surely the history of the world has sufficiently illustrated the vanity of all such attempts. Look at France. Why after all the *revolutions* of her wheel of progress is she stationed in her

present position? Why, except that her reformatory have all been *external!* and the unclean, unhappy, earthly spirit of the nation has never been exorcised!

7th. Finally, Christianity recognizes the actual condition of the materials on which it operates—takes into account the positive facts that pertain to all human experience—acknowledges the Providence of God, the curse of sin, the authority of government and the rights of individuals. It enjoins patience under unavoidable evils, commands obedience to “the powers that be,” and inculcates contentment under the allotments of Providence. It consults prudence in the use of means; regards expedience in its proposals of change; and *is conservative in its progress.*

Modern radicalism, however, has *but one idea*, and is regardless of other relations and reckless of consequences; and in all its bearings and results it is *disorganizing* and *destructive*. It admits no providence but its own will, and no sin but civil government. It sets up an ideal scheme of society, and denounces every thing that comes short of its standard. A single defect, an incidental evil, is sufficient to demand the overthrow of an entire system. Hence a simultaneous attack is made on all the institutions of society. And even in our free land, with its ample resources and equal laws, there are bands of madmen openly demanding the destruction of our government, or urging the rash introduction of changes that would ensure it as a necessary result! “O liberty, what crimes are perpetrated in thy name!” “Necessity is the plea of tyrants.” But such men and such measures furnish tyrants with that plea. Rash, reckless and revolutionary in

their attempts, the government which they assail, is forced in self-defence to adopt a more stringent policy. Forever engaged in impracticable and dangerous designs, the only result of their efforts is to strengthen the chains and increase the burdens of the oppressed. The principles they adopt are opposed alike to the laws of nature and the laws of God. The policy they advocate, would, if carried into effect, overthrow at the same time the order of the material universe and the structure of human society.

In the present system of things, we no where find absolute perfection. Incidental evils occur in every department. This will be the case, in spite of all the tampering and meddling of world-menders, until "the new heavens and the new earth shall appear." The partial order and harmony which prevail, are in every instance the result of a single principle—*obedience to law*. In the physical world, it results from the blind and passive obedience of matter. In the moral world, from the intelligent and voluntary obedience of mind. But the order and harmony which prevail in both the material and the moral world, do not arise from obedience to one solitary law, impelling in a given direction; but from obedience to two conflicting laws, impelling at the same time in opposite directions. Thus in the physical world every separate form of matter obeys two laws or forces at the same time, (a centripetal and a centrifugal force.) and these forces impel in opposite directions. Thus regulated and impelled, the radiant ranks of the heavenly bodies revolve above us, each in its own orbit, and all in harmony, around a common centre. Thus also in the moral world, man acts under two laws or

forces at the same time, each impelling in an opposite direction. The one is a law of liberty ; the other of duty : the one is a force of right ; the other of obligation. Consistency of action arises from an equal regard to both these laws. The law of right secures to man the possession of certain immunities and privileges—an ample amount of personal liberty. The law of duty enforces the obligations of man to society, and to God, the centre of all. Religion secures the equal action of these two forces in human character, and thus maintains the order and harmony of society at large. But there are malignant forces at war with each of these laws. Tyranny would rob man of his rights, destroy his liberty and crush society under civil oppression. But on the other hand, licentious, disorganizing radicalism, whose perpetual cry is *liberty*—whose frantic song is ever of “rights”—would destroy the force of duty, would annihilate obligation, and break asunder that centripetal law, which binds man in a subordinate sense to civil government, and supremely to the moral government of God. If this result were possible, man released from all law, would revel in the unbridled license of his passions, and society would present a scene of anarchy and desolation ; to escape from which the most rabid reformer would gladly take refuge under the most tyrannical government.

Under the most liberal policy, irregularities and evils to some extent are inevitable. The elements of nature—air and water, for instance—although they move in general harmony under existing laws, yet they are liable to occasional interruptions. The air, generally pure, placid and healthful, now and then becomes infected with pestilential vapors, or drives in the

fury of desolating storms over the land. Water, for the most part, gushing pure and fresh from its mountain springs, flows evenly along its appointed channels; but occasionally the streams swell beyond their natural limits, and overflow the surrounding region. Here are real evils incident to the economy of the elements around us—evils of a serious character. But they must be patiently endured, with such partial alleviations as may be within our power. To disturb that economy, in hope of an effectual remedy, would insure general desolation and death.

Suppose the reckless and radical reformers of the day, who lament over social evils, and prescribe unbounded license, as a remedy for every disease, were permitted to undertake the reformation of the economy of the elements. Suppose they should first apply their experiments to the element of water. Suppose they should abolish those presiding laws, which cause water to seek and retain its proper level; turn all the streams backward on their original fountains, and proclaim universal emancipation to the abounding element! Need we ask what would be the consequence? We read of such an experiment having been once made; but it was made in wrath, as a judgment from Heaven. We read that the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the earth and its guilty inhabitants were overwhelmed by a deluge; all—save a remnant preserved alive in the ark. And when at length the waters subsided, and man once more walked abroad over the earth, we read that God appointed the bow in the sky as a token that the earth should not be destroyed again by a flood.

And yet there are spirits raving mad with visions of human rights, social progress, and universal equality, who would advise a similar experiment, as a remedy for evils inseparable from the lot of man—who would overthrow the bulwarks of civil government, release the elements of society from their present laws, break up the relations of human life, unlock the fountains of the great deep of human passion, and open the windows of heaven's wrath over our heads, and who would degrade our elegant literature into an instrument to effect this work of desolation and death! Shall it suffer such an unnatural prostitution? Shall American literature ever sink so low as to become the tool of such reckless and ruffian vandalism? *No, never!* On the contrary, let it rise in its purity and strength, and assert its native dignity, its high relationship and its legitimate purpose—let it rise in all the majesty of mental power, and all the loveliness of moral worth; imaging at once the charms of earth and the glories of heaven; blending the ties and endearments of life with the brighter visions of immortality—let it rise like the rainbow, resting its radiant feet on the earth, and lifting its omnicolored arch to heaven; and rising thus, let it bend above us in its brightness, as the symbol of God's propitious smile, and the shining pledge of our national security!

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE SPECIAL ADAPTATION OF CHRISTIANITY, IN ITS PROVISIONS AND HOPES, TO MEN OF REFINED TASTE AND POETICAL GENIUS.

THE provisions and hopes of Christianity are adapted to *all* men—are offered to all—are needed by all—and would assuredly be welcomed by all, if men were fully aware of their need, and were honestly disposed to embrace the appropriate remedy. But Christianity encounters obstacles in its approaches to the human heart. The most prevalent and powerful of these, is a habit of indifference to the whole subject. Most men live entirely regardless of their immortal destiny; and consequently are subject to a practical delusion, as to the capacity of this world to satisfy the desires of the soul, and to impart substantial happiness. Hence they fail to appreciate that interposition of Divine mercy, which procures “peace on earth,” and “brings life and immortality to light.” That state of the moral character, so comprehensively described by the term *worldliness*, is the uniform cause of this melancholy indifference. The world, in its pleasures and pursuits, its

interests and prospects, is chosen as the chief good ; and the soul clings to it as a sufficient substitute for that glorious and immortal scene which is unfolded to the vision of faith. The faculties, the affections and the hopes of the soul are all circumscribed by this visible earthly horizon—all revolve and centre within the compass of the present life—and every thing above and beyond the circumference of this diminutive sphere, becomes practically an infinite blank.

When this character of worldliness is established, a necessity is laid upon the mind to accommodate itself—to shape its habits and limit its excursions according to the nature of the scene it occupies. Its sensibilities and affections must be *acclimated* to the condition in which they are placed, and its discursive thoughts must be tamed and drilled to tread with undeviating step in the narrow walks, which lie within the walled enclosure of a prison. Nay, the mind itself must be duped into the delusion, that the prison in which it dwells is a spacious and splendid palace. This necessity grows out of the very formation of such a character. It constitutes the only possible condition, on which life itself could be endured with any degree of satisfaction, when thus isolated in its interests. Not that such a life attains true peace or real satisfaction. But in the main, the variety of passing scenes and events, the excitement and ardor of pursuit, and the false, but flattering radiance of hope, so far assist the infatuation of the soul, that it continues to dream of earthly delight, not as a present actual possession, but as a possible future attainment. This state of mind constitutes the groundwork of that habit of indifference, with which the eager devotees of the

world meet the proffered consolations and hopes of religion—indifference based upon delusion, and that delusion sustained by voluntary blindness of mind. It is true, in an important sense, that Christianity is adapted to such, as it is to all men. They need its interposition to attain true peace in this life, and an indispensable preparation for a life to come. But they do not realize that need. They are not conscious of that adaptation. They do not appreciate, desire, or seek the possession of such a treasure. They imagine themselves already provided with a preferable portion: and when the gospel offers its “gold tried in the fire” and “white raiment” and “eye salve,” they say “we are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” To such minds, in all the glory of its revelation, it remains a hidden gospel. Its immortal radiance suffers perpetual eclipse. They are “*blinded by the god of this world.*”

When, therefore, we speak of the *special* adaptation of Christianity to any class or condition of human character, we refer to those who are not so much subject to this state of indifference, delusion and blindness—those to whom the light of truth finds a readier access—those who feel the need of something beyond this world to sustain and satisfy their spirits—those, in a word, who are conscious of wants in their nature, to which the gospel of Christ may make an appropriate appeal. They may not be of themselves more readily disposed to embrace the gospel. But they are less easily satisfied with any earthly substitute. They are less liable to sink under the tame, sluggish and sordid spell of worldliness. And their

moral nature, unsheltered by the cloudy covering of delusion, stands more openly accessible to the unobstructed rays of heavenly light.

In this sense of adaptation, there are two general classes of mankind to whom the provisions and hopes of Christianity are especially adapted. They occupy the two extremes of the scale of humanity—the high and the low—the *intellectually* exalted and the physically oppressed: not the exalted in earthly state and grandeur ; but exalted in that which forms the true stature of man—*in mind* ;—for under the glare of prosperity men are more entirely subjected to the spell of worldliness. This world forms the great opaque intervening obstruction between the light of the gospel and the soul of man. The mass of mankind, the sordid multitude, live under the shadow of this dread eclipse. The tallest intellects are able, from their elevation, to see the light above and beyond it. The poor and lowly, over whose outward state the shadow of this world rests but thinly, they also see beneath its lower verge that distant light which is hidden from the proud and prosperous multitude above them. Thus, when an intervening cloud covers the rising sun from a company of men stationed on a medium elevation of table land ; he who stands on the summit of an adjacent mountain, and he who walks in the lowly vale beneath, both avoid the shadow of the cloud and meet the unobstructed rays of the morning sun.

The special adaptation of Christianity to the one class—the poor and lowly—will be readily admitted ; since the testimony of scripture and the facts of history both sustain the supposition. But that there is also a special adaptation to the other

class, will be questioned, if not denied—since both scripture and history *seem* to oppose such a conclusion. It will be asked how can we claim a special adaptation in Christianity to men of the highest order of intellect, when Christ affirmed the prediction, and the whole history of his church has conformed to the fact, that “not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty of this world are called.” In answer to this, we reply, first, there may be a special adaptation, even where there is no greater readiness to embrace the gospel. The proportion of success is not always according to the degree of adaptation. The intellectually exalted may rise superior to the torpid spell of worldliness; may see more clearly the evils and dangers by which they are surrounded; may feel more deeply the wounds of sin and the wants of the soul; but from inflamed passion, prejudice or pride, they may reject that Divine remedy which is adapted to their necessities.

—But we reply again, that there are different kinds of wisdom and different degrees of greatness; and that those endowed with poetical taste and genius are not wise or great after the fashion of the world; and consequently they are not properly included in the class above described. That worldly wisdom, which is represented throughout the Bible as antagonistic to truth and piety, is evidently not the sterling coin, but a specious counterfeit; notwithstanding it bears the image and superscription of Caesar, and circulates in the high places of worldly commerce. It is a false science—a superficial, short-sighted, and therefore a proud and arrogant wisdom, which opposes the career of Christianity, and the same science and wisdom oppose the interests of poetry. It is

another proof of the affinity between the two interests for which we have contended, that the poet as well as the Christian encounters reproach and contends with a sense of unmerited shame in assuming his profession; for the self-complacent wisdom of the world pronounces the character of the one to be superstitious and sanctimonious, and that of the other romantic and sentimental; while it sneers at both as equally beneath the dignity of reason.

The true poet is not wise after such a model. The loftiest intellects are unappreciated by the world: they do not ape the airs, or assume the dress, or seek the sympathy of the worldly wise. They are independent in their habits of thought and feeling; they do not consult the oracles of taste and fashion; they do not echo the cant of popular prejudice; they do not bow down before the dumb idols worshipped by the multitude;—they inhabit a higher sphere, above the narrow prejudices and the stupid pride of the world—their vision commands a wider range—they judge not after the sight of the eyes or the hearing of the ears—they can perceive the beauty of truth under the disguise of obscurity, and trace its glory under an eclipse of shame. Such minds at least are exempt from one common prejudice against the religion of Christ, viz.: that it is not the religion of the great and noble of the earth. The gospel does not become *vulgarized* in their estimation because the poor and humble are found willing to embrace its consolations and hopes. Under all the abuses and perversions, which human weakness and corruption have cast upon the system of Divine truth, they can perceive its radiant features undimmed and untarnished; they cannot “lightly speak evil” of the Re-

deemer's name, because "he was despised and rejected of men;"—they can see the traces of his divinity through the veil of humanity, and gleams of his glory in the depths of his humiliation. Amid the scorn and persecution of the world, their appreciative genius kindles with admiration, as it surveys the perfect symmetry of his character, the spotless purity of his life, and all those features of moral beauty and sublimity which cluster around his wonderful career.

Are we reminded again that comparatively few of this class are found among the followers of the Saviour? We answer, that the class itself is not numerous. They, the rarely gifted—the prominent few—that tower up, in every age, above the multitude, with faculties which nature does not lavish abroad with a prodigal hand. And who shall determine what proportion of these are found walking in the narrow way of immortality? Who shall say, until the day of final revelation discloses the fact, what comparative number of such gifted spirits shall stand redeemed and radiant on the right hand of the throne? We fondly hope to see a far larger accession of such among that "multitude which no man can number," than many seem now to anticipate. We find some such true to the attractions of heaven in every age; and who shall say that these are not the brightest and the best?

The first worshippers of the Son of God on the earth were a company of lowly shepherds, who, as they watched their flocks by night on the plains of Bethlehem, were directed by the angels, who sung his advent, to the humble scene of his birth; and a band of eastern sages, termed with no vague significance "wise men"—a bearded brotherhood of rapt, pro-

phetic, mysterious Magi, who followed the guidance of a star until it paused trembling over the scene, where they found the infant Saviour, and bowing down before him, they offered up their costly sacrifice of gems and spices, and the worthier homage of their gifted spirits. This opening scene of the Christian dispensation stands as a fit type of its future development. While the humble, the poor, and the oppressed have found here their best consolations and their brightest hopes, yet the loftiest intellects, the most gifted sons of genius, the true Magi of the mind, have, in every age, felt the attraction of the cross, and followed the guiding star of immortality! If not—if they close their eyes on this only light, that beams from heaven on the darkness of earth—“*if in this life only, they have hope, they are of all men most miserable!*”

And this is what we maintain. Not that by a necessary law men are inclined to become true Christians, in proportion to the degree of their intellectual capacity; but that above a certain point of elevation, men do realize wants, and stand in need of those remedies which the gospel supplies in proportion as their gifts and talents are exalted; whether they may be cordially disposed to embrace those remedies is another question.

The poet, (and the same reasoning applies to others, in proportion as they approximate the character of the poet,) is denied, by the very gifts of his genius, those conditions of satisfaction in life which are possessed by the mass of mankind. The multitude, who live engrossed in the pursuit of this world, retain their present happiness, as we have seen, by indulging a habit of indifference with regard to those causes

which are calculated to disturb their serenity. This habit is incompatible with the genius of the poet, and consequently his nature is left exposed to the full power of such distracting influences, unless he finds relief in the consolations and hopes of religion.

There are three features which distinguish the character of the poet, and which forbid his finding satisfaction and peace from the ordinary sources.

1st. *He has a more intense and far-reaching mental vision.*
 2nd. *He has tender sensibilities and more ardent affections.*
 3rd. *He has purer tastes and loftier aspirations.* Each of these attributes proves a source of dissatisfaction and distress in his earthly experience, and opens a wound in his nature which nothing can heal but the "balm of Gilead."

1. The poet is said to possess "the vision, and the faculty divine;" by which the world understands nothing more than a large endowment of the wayward faculties of imagination and fancy, which leads him to converse with scenes of beauty and sublimity, and deeds of romance and heroism, and to create fantastic images in the visions of his own mind. But is this all? Does the high gift of genius include nothing more? True, there are *nominal* poets of such a calibre—mere versifiers, scene-painters, and picture-framers. It is true, also, the genuine poet delights in the beautiful and sublime wherever displayed; and this capacity, while it finds rich pleasure in its gratification, realizes deeper pain in its disappointment; and amid the disorder and desolation which mar the face of nature, and the deformity and death, which darken the scene of human life, such a faculty must often prove a source of misery

to its possessor. But true genius delights in the spiritual and the infinite, as well as the beautiful and sublime. Indeed it appreciates the latter mainly as types and indications of the former. There is, so to speak, an immensity of vision, and a universality of sympathy, in such a mind. It looks not merely at the colors that lie on the surface of nature ; it pauses not merely to observe individual forms and isolated fragments of truth : it surveys the mighty system itself in its mutual relations and combined result : it investigates the nature of the great Architect ; the design of its different apartments ; the significance of its varied proportions, and the grand, final purpose of its erection. The meditations of the poet reach forth into the spiritual and the infinite. He communes with the veiled spirit of the universe, and feels the beating of the great heart of Nature. His mind stretches the invisible electric wires of its sympathetic intelligence from point to point in every direction through the material world, and far into regions that lie beyond ; and these mystic wires tremble with perpetual communications from abroad, that transport the soul with joy and hope, or torture it with anguish and despair. His pervading sympathy associates enjoyment or distress with every scene of contemplation. His clear, commanding vision embraces the vast scene of nature, with all its intervening variations ; and his sensitive soul vibrates to all its vicissitudes.

Leaving out of view the consolations and hopes peculiar to the religion of Christ, let us ask how the happiness of the poet will be affected by his deeper communion with the scenes of nature ? What high reward shall he reap in his experience

from the rare endowments of genius? Alas! one who possessed the gift has answered the question.

“The wise
Have a far deeper madness; and the glance
Of melancholy is a fearful gift—
What is it but the telescope of truth,
Which strips the distance of its phantasies,
And brings life near in utter nakedness,
Making the cold reality too real?”

We suppose the poet to be destitute of the hopes of immortality, and a stranger to the consolations of piety. He has no trust in God, and no treasure in the skies; he takes this world as his home; and he seeks to gain from its uncertain sources, and to hold in his possession, amid its unceasing fluctuations, the final fruition and crowning glory of his nature. What is the inevitable result?

He looks abroad over the surrounding scene—not with the stoical gaze of stupid indifference, but with the intense kindling and capacious vision of a gifted genius; and his sensitive spirit is bound to earth by tender chords that tremble to every touch of sorrow and respond to every sigh of woe by which it is agitated—he looks abroad over nature, and amid its loveliness and smiles, its beauties and wonders, over which he lingers with delight, he yet beholds traces of a curse in its blasted features—in its wild solitudes—its sterile deserts—its uncongenial climates—its unpropitious seasons and unfriendly soil. He hears from the groaning tribes of its animal kingdom, and feels in the warring elements that inwardly convulse its frame, and outwardly desolate its surface, a fearful testimony of its visitation by the wrath of God; he looks within his own nature, and while proudly conscious of its wonderful

capacities, he observes its broken ties, its wounded affections and its blasted hopes, its feverish desires and restless passions, its fond illusions ever coloring the distance, and its longing aspirations ever struggling toward the future. He looks abroad over the scene of human life: he sees in one region whole nations sunk in ignorance, degraded by superstition, and groaning under the yoke of political oppression. In another he sees vast communities visited by some desolating calamity—thousands swept by war, or famine, or pestilence, into the grave. In another he beholds large cities involved in sudden and universal ruin—desolated by the violence of elements let loose for their destruction—overwhelmed and buried by the volcano or the earthquake. He looks at the diversities of individual experience, even under the most favorable circumstances. One pines under poverty, and lingers away a loathsome life of pain and disease; another sees his possessions vanish and mourns over his earthly prospects; another survives to feel in succession the tenderest ties severed from his heart, as friend after friend is laid in the grave, and hope after hope is extinguished in darkness; while on every hand the tearful eye, the heaving bosom, and the mourning attire, disclose the victims of disappointment and affliction.

But leaving out of view these dark spots in the general scene of life, he yet knows that there is one dread event “which happeneth alike to all,” and which, happening when it may, though it terminates the most fortunate career, converts the whole scene into vanity; but which, happening as it generally does, at the end of a vain career of faded hopes, and unfulfilled expectation, and unsatisfied desires, verifies the

mournful description of the preacher, and life itself becomes the great "*vanity of vanities.*" He beholds the triumphs of this last and terrible enemy of man—resistless in his approach, relentless in his ravages, and indiscriminate in his victims—stilling the faint flutterings of the infant's heart; extinguishing the glowing hopes of youth; dispelling in mid career the schemes of worldly enterprise, and crushing the feeble energies of declining age. Emphatically the great king of terrors, the shadow of whose dark throne casts a gloom over nature—the chilling atmosphere of whose wide dominion subjects the warm currents of life to the icy bondage of perpetual fear! He may not forget that there are alleviations in the lot of all—that the goodness of God is displayed on the earth—that the smiles of a merciful Providence illuminate the present scene. He may remember that many of the sufferings that men endure, are brought upon themselves by their own agency, as the natural consequence of their want of prudence and their ungoverned passions—that many of these might be avoided by the exercise of proper foresight, or removed by the use of appropriate remedies. But he knows there are wounds which no earthly balm can heal—there are events beyond the sagacity of man to foresee, and beyond his power to control—there are a thousand inevitable calamities to thwart the schemes and desolate the prospects of man. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; nor riches to men of understanding; nor is it in man that walketh to direct his steps" to certain success. It lies not within the compass of human power to form a shelter

from the storms of adversity, or to build a tower that will resist the assaults of the King of Terrors.

True, he sees the rapid advance of human knowledge : he beholds science making a succession of brilliant discoveries, exploring the secrets of nature, and subjecting the mighty elements, one after another, to the will of man ; so that, at one time, they waft his treasures from nation to nation over the deep ; at another bear his person with winged speed from point to point over the surface of the earth ; and at another, whisper his very thoughts with electric tongue from city to city throughout the land. But the advancing discoveries of science have not lengthened the span of human existence, nor rendered permanent the possession of human happiness. They have increased the luxuries of the body, but have not removed its susceptibility of suffering, nor taken from it the seeds of mortality. Even the elements which yield compliance to the mind of man, do at the same time triumph over the weakness of his body ; and while speeding on the messages of his will, may, by a single explosion, send him in a moment an unwilling messenger into eternity. Remedies have multiplied ; but diseases have increased in the same ratio. The ravages of death keep pace with all the improvements of society ; and amid all the monuments of human skill, and all the palaces of human pride, that tower and glitter upon its surface, this blasted earth still groans and labors under the curse of sin !

How shall these scenes, as vividly realized in the vision of his genius, affect the happiness of the poet ? How shall he harmonize these discordant elements ? How shall he inter-

pret the voices of Nature and Providence? How shall he solve the brooding mystery of life? And amid these groans, and portents, and signals of distress on every hand around him, what shall be his faith in the present, and what his hope in the future? Let the poet who pondered the mighty problem, again answer the question.

“Our life is a false nature—’tis not in
 The harmony of things. This hard decree,
 This unradicable taint of sin,
 This boundless Upas, this all-blasting tree,
 Whose root is earth, whose leaves and branches be
 The skies, which rain their plagues on men like dew,
 Disease, death, bondage, all the woes we see,
 And worse, the woes we see not, which throb through
 The immedicable soul, with heart aches ever new!”

Poor Byron! endowed with a lofty genius, “whose march was on the mountain wave, whose home was on the deep,” but launched on its perilous voyage without the compass of a Christian faith, or the anchor of a heavenly hope; no divine pilot at the helm, and the guiding stars of heaven all covered with clouds, tossed on the gloomy waves of doubt, driven by the dark storms of passion; when at length, far from the promised haven, he sunk amid the warring elements, what a noble vessel was wrecked! Oh, had he but probed deeper the wounds of his nature until he felt that sorrow “which worketh repentance unto life,” and humbly applied to the healing power of the Great Physician! O, had he but sought the presence of that divine pilot on the voyage, whose voice the winds and waves obey, He would have spoken “peace, be still” to the threatening elements, and guided the vessel safely to shore!

The poet, above all others, needs the relieving and har-

monizing light of the gospel, to secure inward satisfaction and peace of mind in surveying the scenes by which he is surrounded, and to avoid sinking into dark, reckless and despairing unbelief with regard to the future. He can not turn away with indifference from such themes of contemplation. He can not shroud his mind in a habit of delusion and blindness. He can not repose in the stupid slumber of a worldly spirit. Conscious of a blight and desolation within, beholding confusion, disorder and darkness without, he seeks in vain a satisfactory solution of these oppressive mysteries. Christianity alone provides that solution. It alone traces the evils which exist to their true origin, reduces the discordant materials to a harmonious plan, and points onward to a consistent and worthy result in the future. This world is now blasted with a curse, but brightened with a hope that lies beyond it. The origin of that curse is sin. The end of that hope is the heaven which the gospel reveals. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against sin ;" but he has also revealed his mercy to the sinful. Prompted by infinite compassion, he sent his eternal Son to reclaim and reconcile his rebellious children ; to bear our sins and sorrows in his own person ; to suffer and die in our behalf ; to wash away the stains and heal the wounds of our nature ; to silence all our fears, and conquer all our foes ; to triumph over death and the grave, and ascending up on high to leave an open way, cleared of every barrier for our safe return to our reconciled Father and our immortal home. Around the cross of that glorious Saviour, the attributes of God, the aspects of nature, the scenes of providence, the events of human life, and the issues of immortality ; all meet

together in mutual harmony, and conspire in the order and symmetry of one vast and accordant system. The world, as it now exists, contains nothing complete, nothing final, nothing permanent within itself. Viewed alone in its present position, it exhibits, both with reference to God, by whom it was created, and with reference to man, to whom it was designed to be subservient; the wreck of an abortive enterprise. The blight of sin has fallen upon the soul of man and upon the surrounding scenes of the originally fair creation. But it is not a hopeless doom which prevails. The present is not a scene of final retribution or unalleviated punishment. The goodness as well as the severity of God—the smiles as well as the frowns of Providence, rest upon the earth. While the system is impaired so as to forbid the fruition and perfection of man, it is yet not forsaken and given over in entire despair. While disease, desolation and death have fallen upon it, it yet show signs of recovery and restoration. God has graciously interposed to effect a deliverance from the impending curse. He is now in the person of Christ “reconciling the world unto himself.” And this scene, subject to vanity, as it is in its present form, is at the same time subject to hope in its final issues and results. And after awaiting a period of sufficient experiment, and undergoing a series of appointed changes, it will at length emerge from every incumbrance and defect, and shine forth in all its proportions a scene of beauty, perfection and glory. This blasted and broken edifice shall at length fall into ruin. Its useless materials will be thrown aside; its mouldering rubbish will be swept away; but from its ruins will emerge a new structure;

cemented in a more enduring form ; adjusted on a more commodious plan ; towering in more beautiful and majestic proportions ; without a single defect or blemish ; all pure, perfect and permanent—" a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The cross of Christ stands as the great central attraction in the midst of the surrounding desolation—the reproducing nucleus of a new moral creation, collecting around itself every thing congenial ; drawing the best and brightest things of earth within its own circle ; assimilating, purifying and perfecting all its collected materials, until at length the glorious result of its universal triumph shall appear in " the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Happy for the gifted son of genius, if he be led to bow in true contrition and humble faith before that cross ! No longer a wretched prodigal in a far country feeding on husks with the swine. No longer " the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind." No longer the wild demoniac, wailing among the tombs, rending his garments and lacerating his flesh. But, " clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus." There he finds peace. Hope dawns upon his spirit. Clouds and darkness roll away from the scene. Light, order and harmony prevail around him. Above him is the smile of a reconciled Father. Before him the visions of an immortal paradise.

2. Another source of peculiar suffering in the experience of the poet, and consequently a reason for the peculiar adaptation of the consolations and hopes of religion to his necessities is found in the fact that *he possesses tenderer sensibilities*

and more ardent affections than ordinarily pertain to the mass of mankind. It is true such refined sensibilities of nature afford a higher degree of enjoyment when placed in circumstances favorable to their gratification. But it is also true that they inflict keener anguish upon the spirit, when they encounter disappointment and affliction. For,

“Chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure,
Thrill the deepest notes of woe.”

In the sanguine anticipations of youth, conscious of such refined capacities of nature, the poet fancies before him an earthly paradise adapted to their gratification. In imagination every companion is a friend, every friend a hero, every mistress an angel, and society at large a scene for the mutual interchange of noble sentiments and generous actions. But the fair delusion is soon dispelled.

He finds, perhaps, in his actual experience, friendship to be false, love faithless, mankind sordid and selfish, and society disordered and corrupt—disguising, under a show of generous and cordial feeling, suspicion, envy, malice, slander, and “all uncharitableness.” In the violent revulsion of feeling caused by the discovery—in the frantic desperation of his wounded spirit, he is ready to rush to the opposite extreme in his conclusions. He becomes disgusted with life—weary of the world—renounces all confidence in mankind—wraps himself up in the gloomy seclusion of his own thoughts, and becomes a stern, solitary, scowling misanthrope. It is of no avail to urge that such a result is owing in a measure to his own fault—that he was too sanguine in his anticipations and too suspicious in his disappointments. Such sensitive natures are

conscious of capacities for refined and rapturous enjoyment. Hence they naturally form their anticipations according to the standard of their own consciousness. And under the shock of disappointment their anguish is so intense, that they have neither the power to discriminate, nor the patience to endure until hope may form a new image from the broken fragments of its early vision.

But even if the poet is so happy as to escape such revolting disclosures in his experience ; if he is so rarely blessed in his social relations as to know nothing of the treachery of pretended friends, or the malice of secret enemies ; if he has never found love inconstant and false ; if no fair viper has ever nestled in his heart to pierce it with a poisonous fang ; if no cloud of alienation has ever darkened the light of his fireside, and no tones of discord disturbed its harmony ; if hitherto he may have found in society only the congenial appreciation and spontaneous sympathy of kindred spirits ; yet in the dark hour of affliction, and in the stern presence of death, when this scene of rare delight vanishes away, when the idols of his heart, one after another fall under the final stroke of the destroyer, then these luxuriant affections which have flourished under the former sunshine until their thousand tendrils have encircled the object in a close and clustering wreath of fondness ; these will be crushed and broken by a deeper desolation and will continue to bleed with a keener and more enduring anguish. O how shall such wounded spirits be healed ? How shall such rooted sorrows be plucked from the memory ? Where shall such distressed and despairing minds look for comfort and hope, but to that faithful and

sympathizing Saviour Friend “who sticketh closer than a brother,” “who can be touched with a feeling for our infirmities,” and who is as able to console as he is willing to sympathize? Who with every cause to scorn mankind, still loved, and pitied, and labored to bless, and when they heaped their blackest outrage upon his innocent head willingly died for his enemies, crying “Father forgive them, they know not what they do!” And who seeks to inspire his disciples amid the wrongs and injuries of an evil world with the same serene and blessed charity.

3. Again, *the poet possesses purer tastes and loftier aspirations, than pertain to ordinary minds.* Christianity alone presents a scene in which such attributes may find corresponding objects and realities. Those visions of beauty and of bliss—those aspirations after the sublime and the infinite—those intense longings for some vast and visionary good—those radiant forms and images of ideal perfection with which the mind of the poet is familiar, forbid his finding satisfaction in the scenes and interests of this world. The wealth, the fame and the splendors of this life can never fill his desires. The busy multitude scorn his devotions, and the rude realities of life throw mockery on his visions. But vain as such aspirations are with reference to this world, and worse than vain, if this world is the only scene of man’s existence; yet in a life to come—in that scene of glory and immortality revealed in the gospel, they find their reality and their fulfillment.

We are told that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things

which God has prepared for those who love him." More beautiful than any earthly scene the eye has ever admired—sweeter than any strain of earthly music the ear has ever caught—nay, brighter even than the brightest imaginations of poetry—loftier than the loftiest aspirations of genius, are the beauties, the melodies, and the glories of that better world.* If earth displays such scenes of beauty, and the mind is capable of forming still brighter visions, even in its present state, under the overshadowing curse of sin, and amid the abounding wickedness of the world, what shall be the scenery of that world where sin, and death, and sorrow, and tears are unknown—where perfect purity reigns supreme—where faith is exchanged for sight, hope for fruition, and the dim image of a glass for a vivid and glorious reality, and where the unclouded smile of an approving God beams over all who rejoice in his presence ?

But not only will the scenery of that world surpass our present capacities of conception. Our natures will then be endowed with higher capacities and mightier energies. The soul, released from its present enthrallment, refined, enlarged and exalted in all its faculties, and associated with "a glorious and spiritual body," shall be capable of nobler activities and richer delights. It will be surrounded by pure, harmonious and congenial society. None of the foul passions, which darken the circle of human life will there intrude. None of the defects and blemishes which mar the present scene will be seen there. No feeling of want, no sense of evil, no fear of change, no dread of death, will there be realized.

Nor will this sense of security, and this consciousness of

eternal duration to itself and its joys, throw around the soul a dull and slumbering monotony in its emotions. The far-spreading serenity of that immortal scene will not rob heaven of its animation and energy. No, all that we know of rapture in this life is tame and torpid compared with what shall then be felt. The pulse will beat with a stronger bound, the heart will swell with deeper emotions, and the ecstasies of joy and the energies of action will be far more intense and thrilling; for our natures, nerved with immortal vigor, shall feel no weariness in exertion, and as each period of eternity revolves and brings a new series of joys, wonders and employments, these shall be the appropriate sustenance of the soul, which shall forever hunger but without pain, and forever feast but without satiety.

In this life the soul is like a vessel launched on a narrow bay, beset with rocks and quicksands, and tossed by continual tempests. From fear of sudden shipwreck, the sails are all taken in before the fury of the winds, and the vessel floats to and fro at the mercy of the waves, tossed and broken in its wavering career. In a life to come that vessel will have passed into the tranquil and boundless ocean of eternity. But because the tempests have ceased and dangers no longer threaten, will it float dull and lifeless on a slumbering tide? No, even in the tranquillity which prevails around, a gale stirring and strong strikes upon the vessel, and refitted in every part, complete in all its proportions, freighted with immortal treasures, with every sail expanded to the wind; it will spring with a lighter bound and glide more swiftly and gracefully over the yielding surface of that shoreless deep which, in

its infinite expanse, shall ever unfold new scenes and wonders to the view, and which though sailed forever, shall never be fully explored !

Here we find the consummation of our brightest hopes and the crowning prize of our loftiest aspirations. The gospel of Christ is adapted to man's deepest necessities. The proud and stupid world, in its delusion and blindness, may disregard this heavenly light. But the largest and loftiest minds, whose clearer vision surveys the real features and true limits of the present scene, and comprehends the significance of its indications—whose sensitive spirits feel more keenly its adverse influences, and whose higher aspirations rise above its poor rewards ; they at least are conscious of facts in their experience, and wants in their nature, to which the provisions of the gospel are adapted.

This adaptation to man's necessities is one of the strongest proofs of the divine origin of the system itself—the self-disclosing light of truth. The gospel stands not merely on the evidence of the miracles which attested its truth in the first period of its proclamation ; but it is supported by the testimony of nature and providence through all ages of the world. The cross of Christ not only awakened the sympathies of the surrounding universe, as the mighty atonement was finished on Calvary, in the darkened heavens, the quaking earth, and the opening graves. But “ the whole creation which groaneth and travaileth in pain until now ” still vibrates to the mighty touch there given—is darkened by the same curse—shudders at the same grief—and shadows forth the same immortal hope !

The wisdom of this world may pronounce it foolishness, but the gospel stands accredited from on high, attested by the signature of all His visible works as "the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation." Infidel science may wander to remote regions of the universe—may consult the nebula which float in the firmament above, or penetrate the strata which lie buried in the earth beneath, for testimony against "the record which God hath given of his Son." But here on the broad surface of the earth—among the tribe of its living inhabitants—in the felt necessities of a fallen but immortal nature—here on this actual scene of providence; *there are nebula visible to the naked eye which recognize no other hypothesis; and there are strata imbedded in the human soul more enduring than the granite formations of the earth, which conform to no other plan but that which brings life and immortality to light.* And while this earth remains blasted by the curse of sin; while pain and sorrow and disappointment attend the career of man; while the human soul has a conscience to tremble under a sense of present guilt, and dread the result of a future reckoning—or while it owns an aspiration that rises above a clod, or a desire that swells beyond a moment, or a fear that recoils from annihilation—while death desolates the happiness and the grave swallows up the hopes of man; so long will be sent up from this groaning earth that mighty argument which all the vain speculations of science can never suppress,—*"Lord, to whom then shall we go? thou alone hast the words of eternal life!"*

Eternal life! Here the voices of nature find their harmony—the mystery of life, its solution—the mind, light to dispel its

darkness—the heart, a balm to heal its wounds—and the soul, a prospect to fill its capacities. Here the visions of poetry find their paradise, and the aspirations of genius their immortal home.

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