ON CHARACTER

Nihil Obstat.

F. THOS. BERGH, O.S.B.,

Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur.

✠ PETRUS,

Epūs. Southwarcen.

Southwarci,
Die 23 *Junii*, 1911.

The Angelus Series

ON CHARACTER

BY THE

VERY REV. J. GUIBERT, S.S.

SUPERIOR OF THE SEMINARY OF THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTE, PARIS

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION

R. & T. WASHBOURNE, LTD.

PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

AND AT MANCHESTER, BIRMINGHAM, AND GLASGOW

PREFACE

THIS is not a scientific treatise, but an essay in morals.

The writer has chosen this line because, as Joubert says, "morals show us how to live."

The art of living is the thing men need to know more than any other; for skill in this art makes them fully and truly men.

"We lack men," as Jouffroy sadly observes. There would be no lack of men if, instead of carelessly following the bent of their inclinations, they would resolutely take in hand the direction of their lives, and temper their characters to hardness by means of methodical endeavour.

In theory, all are capable of being formed. As Lacordaire says: "There is not one of us who has not in him

the roots of the saint and the criminal." But in practice, there will never be more than a few who will undertake the task of self-development with enough perseverance to bring it to a successful issue.

What matter though the number be limited, if it be true, as is said again by Lacordaire, "that a single soul is like a great nation." Should the following pages influence only one soul to decide upon self-conquest and sustain it to the end in the long moral struggle for mastery over self, the author would feel that he had not worked in vain, and that his book was not a barren seed.

He hopes, however, that the harvest of souls may be more abundant. For he knows that they are legion in whom ferments to-day the desire for the good, and who are fired with the noble ambition of giving to their being its highest development, and who say readily with Montaigne : "I will rather have my soul well wrought than full fraught."

Preface

May this humble essay be of use to all those who are ready to set to work with a will to acquire virility of character.

The line followed by the writer is so natural and so straightforward that he deems it unnecessary to delay the reader with any further explanations.

CONTENTS

Contents

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

ON CHARACTER

CHAPTER I

THE DEFINITION OF CHARACTER

I

What it is

THE word character comes from a Greek expression signifying *to engrave.* However many may be the meanings assigned to the word, yet it always retains something of its original sense. The first picture which it calls up to the mind is that of the ancients with chisel or graving-tool working on granite or bronze to inscribe them with the memory of their exploits in indelible strokes.

Sometimes it denotes the visible mark which abides and speaks to the eye ; sometimes the tool which works on the material, leaving its furrow behind. So, when you impress your

seal on the softened wax, the character may be spoken of as belonging either to the matrix or to its imprint. Thus, too, it may be applied either to designate a man's expression or the man himself.

On all sides we have to deal with character : in nature, in art, in works of the mind, as well as in the region of morals. But in these pages we strictly limit our treatment of character to the moral qualities of man. Furthermore, this is the restricted sense in which it is commonly used, for, whenever we speak of a man's character, it is always because we are dealing with his tendencies and worth from a moral point of view.

Even when thus determined, the word character is still capable of various meanings ; and of these there are three in chief which we shall use in turn. If we consider man externally, character is his distinctive sign or moral note ; if we examine him inwardly, character stands for his moral constitution ; and if we desire to express the feature which gives him his greatest value, character means his moral energy.

II

Man's Moral Note

No prolonged observation of men is needed to discover, in spite of their unity of nature, wherein they differ from one another. However plainly visible their differences may be from a physical point of view, their moral differences are still more striking. The distinguishing sign, the moral note which stamps each one of us with his own personality, is character.

One man has lofty inspirations, noble and disinterested impulses, a dignified bearing, and is inviolably sincere : he is a fine character. Another, on the contrary, shows vile tendencies and coarse appetites ; he is selfish and lacking in conscience ; he is a low and contemptible character.

Here is a generous and enterprising soul, firm and resolute, undaunted by difficulties and never disheartened by grief ; a rich character from which we have a right to expect a profitable yield. There, on the other hand, is a slack soul, lacking in initiative, quickly tired of work, de-

pressed by suffering and unable to face opposition ; a poor and barren character which will bear no fruit.

One person impresses you agreeably ; he pleases you with his affability ; he is amiable, lively, gentle, open-hearted, both easy and dignified, and at once conciliatory and firm ; his company is never a burden, but a pleasure : you say he is a good-natured character. Another, on the contrary, seems uncomfortable and disagreeable ; in everything he rubs you the wrong way, both by what he says and does ; he is morose, taciturn, hard and feeble, shy and tiresome—a thorn-bush which scratches you all over : you call him an ill-natured character.

This moral note is impressed on the whole of a man's exterior : it shows itself in your bearing, whether dignified or careless, modest or pretentious ; it is seen in your gait, regular or uneven, firm or haphazard ; it is in your face, the changeable features of which so faithfully reproduce your impressions, and the outlines of which, in repose, reflect your habitual manner of thinking and feeling ; it is in your

expression—animated or dull, frank or shrinking; it is in your speech—decided or drawling, accurate or vague, original or commonplace: it is even in your writing, which, like your purposes, is either finished or formless, and like your inspirations, either vigorous or feeble; it is in everything you do—even in your most insignificant actions. There is nothing about you which is not stamped with some mark of your personality.

And what gives importance to these external signs is that they are the faithful expression of what is within.

We readily admit that they are hard to read, and delicate to decipher; they are a language full of complexities and subtleties of light and shadow, which very few can thoroughly understand. Through precipitancy or lack of discernment many fall into error or make blunders in trying to interpret them. And the fable is quite right which bids us "not to judge people by their looks."

Nevertheless, however indecipherable they may be to most of us, their

imprint is a true one, and they are the outward sign which really expresses the soul within. "Physiognomy," says a modern thinker, "is the portraiture of the soul, its abiding reflection in the flesh which it indwells and gives life to. In it we betray ourselves involuntarily, and the secret of our life follows us everywhere as an honour or a disgrace." Long ago the Spirit of God wrote in Holy Scripture : "A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance. The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man, shew what he is" (Ecclus. xix. 26, 27).

When we say of the character that it is the moral note of the man, we are all the more right, because through these visible signs we touch the inner depths of the man himself.

III

Man's Moral Constitution

Here, indeed, is the true seat of character. Outward appearances reveal it, and they are its image, but they do not contain it. They bring

it to mind, just as the script makes us think of the engraver's tool, and just as the picture expresses the genius of the artist. Character holds a still higher place in man : it is the deeply hidden agency which is displayed in his outward acts ; it is nothing else than man's moral constitution.

Our habitual actions emanate, indeed, spontaneously from the ground of the soul. Such as is our being, such are the acts which spring from it. It is not that we are unable, by means of considered determination, to raise up and ripen within us resolutions which were not in germ in our inclinations ; for we are always given the option of sowing within us seed of our own choice. But very few and far between are those who make such a use of their liberty as to produce such acts ; very few, too, even amongst the most gifted natures, are the occasions when they do such violence to their own native dispositions. Let it then be laid down as a certain axiom that it is this inner moral constitution in man which we call character.

It is made up of our tendencies,

the impulses to action born within us, or acquired through repeated acts which incline us to expend our moral energies in a given sense : tendencies which are good, if they incline us towards what is right ; evil, if they urge us in the direction of what is wrong.

Our character would be quickly known, if it were easy for us to discover our tendencies, and to discern those which hold the chief sway over us. But in our reckoning of ourselves, we are the plaything of so many illusions that we can scarcely take cognizance of ourselves in a clear light. Those who regard us from the outside are not less liable to misunderstanding, so much are they affected by prejudice and prone to survey us through the medium of their own dispositions. Furthermore, is there anything more complex and more variable than our tendencies ? Manifold and often contradictory, they are like the dense tangle of some young forest where all the vegetation grows in confusion. Changing like the environment by which they are influenced, varying with the various periods of life, and sometimes in the

same day, according to the state of our constitution, they seem to defy all analysis.

Amidst so many diverse and inconsistent impulses, some dominate the rest and take possession of our being. Though dominant tendencies may themselves undergo variations, and though we may thus come under the sway of opposing forces, nevertheless, some of them get the upper hand with greater frequency than the rest. And hence the many forces which draw us in different directions finally end in a resultant which gives its characteristic meaning to our lives.

Thus we reach a definition of character ; it is the habitual resultant of the manifold tendencies which contend for the control of man's life. To give the tendencies which are favourable to what is good a preponderance over inclinations to vice: such, we conclude, must be the fundamental rule which is to guide us in the formation of our character.

IV

Man's Moral Energy

Whatever the value of the dominant tendency, that will be the value of the character. It is this, in fact, which opens out to a man the course he is to pursue in life. Hence man has the highest interest in submitting his soul to the sway of that tendency which offers the most noble of advantages.

Now, of all moral qualities, that which raises the character most, that which gives the greatest reserve of power, that which assures to human life the highest amount of profit for the individual or for society, is, indisputably, energy of will. Moreover, it is customary, in ordinary speech, to use the words, "character" and "moral energy," as synonymous expressions. That is to say that, amongst all characters, he who deserves to have the word applied to him *par excellence* is conspicuous for strength of will. To have will-power is to be possessed of character. If you are wanting in strength of will, you have no character. And

certainly, it is not without reason that the word "character" sometimes abandons its broader signification to be restricted in order to express moral energy.

Look, indeed, at a man stripped of strength of will : do you not see that he is devoid of character ? He leaves no mark on what he handles ; he makes no impression on men or things ; he passes, like clear water passes over a piece of metal, without letting any trace remain ; in no respect does he resemble the graving-tool which bites into the brass, or the ploughshare which hollows out the furrow. He is counted as a unit amongst his fellows ; but he brings forth nothing for mankind. Within he is limp, flabby, lacking in backbone ; in a word, without any firmness : and therefore he is the creature of circumstance, and never shapes his surroundings to his mind.

On the contrary, take a man gifted with moral energy, with a will : does he not impress you as possessing character ? He acts upon everything he touches ; he stamps upon men and things the vigorous imprint of his personality. His speech has

weight : it is grave ; because it is the expression of a definite idea and an unerring resolution. He sees clearly the end in view, and advances to its attainment with decision ; he pursues his course with perseverance; no obstacle can bar his way, because he knows that every barrier will break down before a patient and determined will. This might of will-power becomes character. In fact, it is the whole man. It manifests his personality and throws it into relief. And when a man's personality thus stands out so as to be conspicuous amidst the crowd, we call it "character."

Lacordaire, then, was right to define character as "the secret and persistent energy of the will, a sort of fixed steadiness of purpose, a still greater steadiness in being true to one's self, to one's convictions, to one's friendships, and to one's virtues, an inward force that springs from one's personality and inspires everyone with the feeling of assurance which we call security. . . . One may be witty and learned, and even a man of genius, and yet not have character."

The Definition of Character

Thus understood, character has its seat neither in the intellect, nor in the heart, but in the will ; it consists, according to the saying of a German thinker, "in a completely developed will."

CHAPTER II

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

"THOSE who complain of fortune," says Vauvenargues, "have often to complain only of themselves." Each of us is, indeed, the artificer of his own life. However powerful may be upon us the action of external circumstances, our life nevertheless proceeds from within, from our feelings, our passions, and our will; it is the product of our character.

This is what is taught us by popular wisdom, gained from the observation of centuries. It admonishes us that it is differences of character that explain and determine differences of life; that if the talents are equal, one succeeds and another fails owing to character; that little

daily faults, the outcome of character, spoil a life more surely than great and accidental mistakes; and that likewise little daily efforts, the persistence of which is due to character, unfailingly lead to success. How comes it that this man, so full of promise, meets with the innumerable checks which have ruined his life? Perhaps from some single defect of character. And how is it that the career of this other, less gifted by nature, is so fruitful? It is because his character has made his pathway clear, and enabled him to pursue it without a fall.

If life is a flood of active energies, it is character that hollows out the river-bed for the flowing stream. If life has a task to fulfil, character is the power which accumulates its resources and applies them to the work ordained. Thus we see, according to character, great reserves of life lost without result, or else men of moderate attainments achieve great works.

Hence character plays the leading part in life. Such is its importance that we may profitably consider more closely what a good-natured

character is worth to man, and what a man loses by allowing himself to be led by a defective character.

I

The Good-natured Character

You have a well-dispositioned character. What do you gain by it?

In attributing to you a good-natured character, I assume at the outset that you are affable, gentle, and agreeable, and that you have made it a rule not to offend anyone willingly; next, I assume that, by persevering endeavour, you have attenuated the evil tendencies of your nature, and enabled your nobler impulses to preponderate; and finally, that, after long struggle, having attained the conquest of yourself, you have your moral energies well in hand, like a captain who holds under orders the soldiers whom he has disciplined for the fray. For the character is only altogether good, when it possesses all these characteristics.

With such a character as this, what advantages will you win from it?

It will bring you the two things to which men most aspire: happiness and power, joy of soul and social influence.

You will be the first to get happiness from your good-natured character. Your kindly thoughts and charitable feelings, before finding expression in pleasant words and affable manners, will make you glad at heart. You will find pleasure in your own company. For the beams of joy will only be reflected in your face and enlighten others after they have illumined your own heart, which must be their source. Do you not think that the seductive charm, which seemed to exhale first from St. Francis of Sales and then to envelope everyone who came near him with a sense of well-being, reacted upon his own feelings in the highest degree? And was it not this that gave him the calm peace in which his soul reposed? As Joubert observes: "Good humour is fruitful in smiling ideas, in pleasing prospects, in hopes. . . . Gaiety clears the spirit, while being dismal clouds it."

You will be happy in the possession of a good-natured character,

because in return the world around will smile upon you and be more kindly towards you. One goes sword in hand against wolves, so dreaded for their sharp teeth ; but one takes a green bough to meet lambs, so loved for their peaceful disposition. If your character shows the gentleness of the lamb, I do not say that you will never meet a wolf to appeal to the law of force against you ; for there are some beasts so cruel that they can never be tamed. But, at any rate, you may be sure that the majority of your fellows will be congenial to you, and that the most obdurate will generally lay at your feet the arms they take up against the pretentious and the arrogant. Through abstaining from wounding others, not only will you be spared yourself, but you will be liked, so thankful will people be to you for not treating them as enemies against whom you have to be on your guard. The joy of being loved will be yours, and it will be due to your character. To those who complain of not winning affection, I shall readily reply with Nicole: "If you do not get people's love, it is because you do

not know how to make them love you."

Happy, too, you will be, owing to the order which reigns in your conscience. For, if it be true that the highest happiness consists in the feeling of peace, and if it be true that the only real peace dwells in the conscience, and if, again, it be true that the conscience is only at peace when the dominant tendencies of the soul are in the direction of what is right, and spontaneously fulfil moral duty, who does not see that character is the great factor in the production of peace and happiness? With a character thoroughly well-dispositioned, wherein healthy inclinations have won the upper hand and taken hold of the helm of life, you will find virtue, and, therefore, happiness. With an evil character, wherein unwholesome tendencies and the capricious influences of circumstances devastate your being, you will find moral failures, and, along with them, agitation and bitterness.

The feeling of power is another source of happiness to man. He who is conscious of his strength does not tremble: he fears neither the wicked-

ness of men nor the cruelty of the forces of nature ; he knows that he will overcome men by patience and firmness ; he knows that, if his body cannot escape the sting of physical evil, yet his soul, uplifted by Christian resignation, will issue scathless from the ravages wrought upon his flesh or in his fortune. He will be like the wise man of whom Horace speaks, who keeps his inward calm amidst the crash of a world in ruin. Such an interior serenity, arising from the sense of moral energy, is of supreme importance to our happiness, since our sadness and sorrow and distress are almost always the bitter fruit of apprehensions and fears which gnaw at our hearts. But this impression of power is a question of character : it is only to be found in the man who has taken himself completely in hand, and who feels that he is the master of all his resources. And hence here once more we may say : "It is not our condition, but the temper of our character, that makes us happy."

And this happiness is increased by the power with which the man of good-natured character is indued.

For Jesus Christ says : " Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land." A winsome promise, indeed, and a precious prescription for the use of those whose mission it is to conquer the whole world. The proof of it, moreover, is to be met with every day : good-natured characters are the real masters of men and things.

Note, first, how they take men : they attract them and get hold of them.

Men go naturally and easily towards those who are good-natured ; they know that they will meet with no rebuffs, that they will not be hurt by running against sharp corners, that they will be made to feel at home ; they are sure that they can open their hearts, tell their troubles, and unburden themselves of their load of sorrow ; they are certain that they will not knock at these hospitable doors in vain, and that the help required will always be forthcoming. Thus, mere passive good-nature in you will lead other people to put themselves in your hands ; and one of the first ways of winning them is to ensnare them with kindly gracious-

ness. But if your amiability is active, if it takes pains to be friendly, what conquests will you not achieve? If it is already a sign of power that people are not kept at a distance from you, what influence will you not gain, if you draw them to yourself by the attractions of an engaging and decided character? By being engaging you will win them, and they will come readily within the sphere of your influence. By firmness you will bring them over to your way of feeling and thinking, and impress them with the impetus of your will.

There are so many drifting minds and hesitating wills that it is an incomparable source of strength to have clear ideas and definite plans. How can it be said that "every energetic desire gets realized," unless it is because human capacities, when they are allowed to run loose and at haphazard, are unresistingly seized and set to work by the vigorous hand that knows how to catch and retain them? The man who can say "I will," is a centrepetal force drawing to himself and into his service all capricious wills, which are as incoherent and impotent as motes of dust

floating in the air. Bonald said quite rightly that "a people may be stirred up by ideas, but it can only be governed by character." A man who is exact, resolute, tenacious, and who never causes irritation by the violence of his proceedings, though he be the poorest and least of all, will not fail to reach the front rank one day.

Lacordaire, who makes this remark, says that character, therefore, must be saved before anything else, because the end we put before us is reached more quickly and surely through character than by talent.

As one gets a hold upon men, so does one dominate circumstances, by character.

The well-ordered character is the most skilful; he never compromises things through precipitation. If he holds his peace at awkward times, it is not a sign of weakness. He refrains from speaking and acting when any imprudence might ruin everything; he reserves himself for the happy moment which affords a felicitous solution to the man who waits. The temporizer, if he be not faint of heart, has the world at his

feet. He does not waste his strength in useless efforts : he bends before the storm that he cannot withstand. As the gale cannot last for ever, he uses the time of calm to gather up all his energies to work for the triumph of the cause which he has at heart.

It has sometimes been said that the "good-natured character" is ill-equipped for the battle of life ; and the observation is true, if by "good-natured characters" we mean people who are amiable only from lack of will-power, and it is of such that Bruyère said : "There is no worse character than the man who is without character."

But, if by "good-natured characters" we mean those who temper a resolute and persevering disposition with the charm of sincere affability and the patient delays of prudence, we have indicated those who are marked out by Providence to sway the world.

II

The Ill-natured Character

There are two kinds of ill-natured characters : the irritating and the weak. It is impossible to make either of them understand too clearly that they are badly equipped for life ; they are bound to suffer and to succumb.

It is the irritating who are properly speaking "ill-natured characters." They are a burden to those who have much to do with them, they wound those who come near them. Dull, self-centred and sullen, they banish joy and prevent open-heartedness. Merciless critics, they note the smallest defects, and draw attention to bitter words. Any kind of opposition arouses them ; the least vexation provokes them to an outburst of noisy wrath. They are wont to use envenomed irony, and love to let fly barbed shafts which cause deep wounds. Their selfishness is exacting to the point of hardness ; they know not how to please by kindly civilities. They are haughty, pig-headed, prigs, surly, brutal and vindictive, and express in their outward actions the envy, jealousy, sensitive-

ness and pride which are within. For it is within them that the evil dwells. Sometimes there are openings in the overcast and stormy sky of their hearts, and they are then able to smile kindly, and to act disinterestedly. But these gleams are rare and fugitive. Soon their humour becomes once more dull and threatening. Such a character is a twofold misfortune to its possessor ; it is both an affliction and a weakness.

However vexatious they may be to those about them, they are a still greater scourge to themselves. The thorns with which they bristle are not all pointed outwards : the sharpest are turned inwards, and lacerate their own thin skins. The patience and resignation with which others treat them fail them so that they cannot endure themselves. Oh, how well they know by experience the intolerableness of their own company ! This would be only fair, if their vexation, arising from their own faults, did not make them still worse.

To the stings of their conscience is added the sorrow of feeling that they are left to themselves. The affection of their fellows, which is

such a cheering cordial and such a healing balm, is denied them. People are afraid of them and fly from them ; for they are regarded with distrust, their blows are dreaded, and none will submit to their tyranny. Or else, if they are generally set upon, it is only after all have done their best by combined effort to rebuke their conduct, and to repel their attacks. This isolation first, and this universal opposition afterwards, they are bound to incur as a consequence of their failings.

But do they gain in strength what they lose in sympathy ? They fancy they do ; and this persuasion of theirs consoles them for the aversion which they incur. No flatterers are we, say they. They have the pluck to tell everyone the truth to his face. With cowardly compromise they will have nothing to do : they are bold enough to maintain their opinions. Those of other people cannot be forced upon them ; they know how to make themselves respected, and to keep everyone in his place. They will have obedience, and will brook no resistance. This is what they say, deluded with the idea that

their ill-nature gives them power. But they are the victims of a serious illusion. Amongst these vexatious characters, some are strong, and others weak. The weak get no strength from their ill-humour ; but it does not deprive the strong of decision and perseverance of will, though it closes to them the avenues by which moral authority reaches real success. The strongest are weakened by an ill-natured character, either through the opposition which they arouse, or else because they compromise favourable situations.

To win men, one must reach their hearts. But vexatious characters cannot win hearts and call forth their love ; and hence they never get hold of men in the right way. Such sway as they achieve is but external and fleeting ; it never grips the soul, and only lasts by means of compulsion. You do not have a person under your influence if you merely make him submit to a yoke because he dislikes having to shake it off.

Who has not noticed how complications arise according to the character of those who bear rule ? A nation, which is at peace under

the authority of a man of tact, becomes agitated and divided and revolutionary, when it passes under the sway of a ruler who is clumsy, exacting, indiscreet and upsetting in his projects, and crafty and suspicious in his ways. Wherever he goes, the ill-natured character fails ; he is full of complaints against his subordinates ; how is it that he does not see that his lack of success is due to himself ? But he is too full of pride to acknowledge his faults ; if he only had a single grain of humility, his ill-natured character would no longer exist.

The weak, too, have a defective character, but in another fashion. Whilst the vexatious are aggravating through the violent assertiveness of their individuality, the weak so far efface themselves that they condemn their lives to sterility.

Feebleness of character comes out in several degrees. At the bottom of the scale are found men with no definite ideas or fixed wishes, the sport of vague fancies of a futile sort, which float before their minds in a cloudy kind of way. A step higher are men of clear thought and with

well-defined aims, but whose resolutions, being without vigour and paralyzed by the fear of their fellows, never make the slightest advance towards realization; these are the idle and fearful, who waste their time in fine and useless schemes.

Others, again, with more energy, not only make up their minds, but set to work; unfortunately, either from want of lustihood or from fear of opposition, they do not carry out their undertakings, and, if they do not go to sleep in their efforts, they leave the right road, and waste their powers in a multiplicity of vain endeavours.

Characters so poor in energy suffer the consequences of their incapacity, and their steps are dogged with disaster.

It is a bitter humiliation and a cruel torture to souls of acute sensitiveness and with noble aspirations to feel that they are never up to the matter in hand; that they fall below their own legitimate ambitions, and are betrayed by the defections of a feeble will. If grave interests are committed to your charge, you will keenly regret seeing them

endangered because you lack the firmness required for their maintenance. Here are souls whom, for various reasons, you have to rule by moral influence; but they escape your efforts, and are subject to false notions and, perhaps, to base passions, because you are too weak to get a hold upon them; you have too much conscience and dignity not to experience deep mortification in consequence. All weak characters, even those with the least delicacy and loftiness of feeling, suffer if they see that they are dominated, reduced to silence, sometimes trampled on, and lowered in their personality by circumstance, or by the imperious will of others. However indolent they may be, the weak are always unfortunate.

Their ill-fortune comes from their lack of vigour, owing to which they achieve no fruitful results. They let themselves drift with the stream, like a vessel without oars or rudder. Hence they leave no mark upon life. Doubtless, they do not bar the progress of what moves onward with its own impetus; and then they seem to win a measure of

success. But if ever they are required to give an impulse themselves, just where the help of their hands is the one thing essential, some patent check shows their incapacity. It is not that they have no fits of vitality and give no temporary proofs of will-power. But while these appearances of energy are only transitory, and therefore without effect, often they manifest a violence which is scarcely less noxious than apathy to the interests which have to be secured.

Whatever kind of ill-nature it may possess, the defective character is a misfortune to the person who is afflicted with it. And if man's being is so far dependent upon character, who can be so indifferent to the work of life as to remain careless as to the nature, the value, and the formation of character ?

CHAPTER III

THE IDEAL CHARACTER

CHARACTER, as we have said, makes life.

The best character, then, will make the best life.

You aspire to live. You hold life to be a treasure which must not be wasted; you are even determined to increase its value and to make use of its powers. Hence comes the just ambition, the highest that can take possession of the heart of man, of imparting to life more and more of nobleness, intensity and fruitfulness.

But these beautiful aspirations towards a better life carry with them, as an inevitable consequence, the obligation of cultivating the character, since character is the measure of life and the instrument which moulds it, and since lowness of cha-

racter is incompatible with grandeur of life, and feebleness of character with fruitfulness of life.

The man who is eager to live, and therefore to form his character, before putting his hand to the work, will begin by setting clearly before his mind the ideal that he purposes to realize. What kind of character will you have? That is the first question to decide.

In character there are two parts, as we will explain hereafter; the part which is due to nature, and the part which belongs to our moral individuality.

Over nature's part you have but little dominion. What you are by temperament, that you will remain. If you are all steel, remember that you will have to work on steel. If you are a withe, treat yourself as a withe and no otherwise. In other words, if you are born sanguine, you will be sanguine; if nervous, nervous, and so on. Whatever your natural disposition may be, do not be alarmed at it; for no soil is so unyielding as to be incapable of being made to bear a useful crop by means of skilful cultivation.

There is, in fact, in character another part, that of the moral personality, over which your will has full power. It is for you to mould it to your liking, so that, whatever be your nature, you may stamp it with the impress of your choice. Do you not know that, in the artist's hands, the poorest of material lends itself to the realization of the ideal which he has vigorously conceived?

With only four strokes we will outline the ideal of a fine character:

Uprightness of conscience, which makes it honourable.

Strength of will, which gives it value.

Kindness of heart, which is its charm.

Demeanour, which heightens its dignity.

No one will doubt that these qualities constitute a great character. But they are independent of the temperament, since they are not the outcome of one character rather than another. Hence they are within the reach, though not to the same extent, of all natures. Whatever your disposition may be, you have so to direct your innate habits

as ever to follow conscience and never to shirk endeavour, so as to keep kindness in your heart and manifest dignity in your behaviour. And it is not by rare and isolated acts, the result of a sudden outburst of moral effort against yourself, that you will acquire this noble character ; it is the very ground of your soul that must be sown with good tendencies, in order that spontaneously, and as if from the prompting of nature, you may habitually possess a tender conscience, an energetic will, a kind heart, and an irreproachable demeanour.

Let us attempt to put these features of the ideal character in a still clearer light.

I

Uprightness of Conscience

If we put conscience in the forefront, it is because the conscientious man alone wins our esteem. We instinctively despise the man who unscrupulously tramples conscience under foot. As we cannot reckon upon him, nor on the sincerity of his words, nor on the trustworthiness of

his actions, we turn away from him, and refuse to regard him as a man. Straightforwardness is, indeed, the first condition of honour, the first claim to confidence. Here is a man with will-power, propriety, and who is also engaging, but he is false, he lies, and is untrue to conscience, and, on occasion, he will betray his own friends ; in our estimation he is a wretched character, however great in other ways his qualities may be ; if he is wanting in conscience, in our eyes he is wanting in everything.

What, then, is conscience, and what is the part it plays in life ?

Joubert gives a very clear notion of conscience when he writes : "Children require a master within them ; there he is better placed than at their side. All of them are ready to receive him, and in conscience they have a place ever prepared for him." Conscience, then, is like an inner tutor whose voice is never silent, like a watcher, night and day, who never slumbers.

To explain fully the office fulfilled by conscience, we will say that it is at once a faithful monitor, a powerful curb, and an effective stimulus.

As a faithful monitor, it warns us of danger at its first approach, it recalls duty at the moment in which it is to be carried out, and it keeps the heart awake to all good actions.

As a powerful curb, it stops a man from slipping down the dangerous slope, it governs the transports of his most ardent passions, and it thus guards him from disastrous falls and irreparable ruin.

As an effective stimulus, it arouses men from torpor, prevents their giving way to apathy, and imparts to their stores of energy a kind of electric thrill stirring them to the production of work. It harasses the idler into action; it puts a strong curb on the man who goes astray to bring him back to the right way; it spurs him on who is slack to make him recover his *élan*.

There are those whose conscience is still unawake: lower natures, which the lack of cultivation has allowed to remain children, who have only a confused idea of good and evil, and who, being led by the lower appetites, deserve rather pity than wrath for the lowness of their lives. But there are others in whom

conscience is blunted, weakened, or destroyed, because it has long been stifled, outraged, and trampled under foot; these are contemptible beings, not only because noble feelings have lost their hold upon them, but because this lamentable atrophy of conscience is the result of repeated faults. There are also, thank God, those in whom a lively and healthy conscience keeps its delicate sensitiveness, souls in whom the voice of conscience is faithfully listened to and obeyed with docility; these souls, according to the measure in which they follow their conscience, bear the primary stamp of the fine character.

Men of conscience are distinguished by three signs in chief: they are nice in the performance of the duties of their state of life, strictly sincere and rigidly honest in handling the interests of others.

Conscience takes a particularly high view of duty; in its eyes duty has a value in itself, and obliges with an authority which is higher than that of any human will. If conscience has you fully under its sovereignty, this is the way in which you will reason with regard to duty.

"This charge is committed to me, not by men, but by God—whose eye is my own conscience. If men are pleased, so much the better : I shall be glad if they are, but only one thing is of importance to me—the witness of a good conscience. If, however, men misunderstand me, I will not trample on my conscience in a matter of clear duty to escape their censure. This is plainly my duty, and therefore I will do it ; I will do it promptly and gladly, and I will take all the pains with it of which my weak nature is capable. No one will see me, nor shall I get any credit for it in this world ; never mind, I will do it. No one will reckon up the value of it, or estimate the trouble I have taken ; never mind, I will use the utmost care about it." Can one use any nobler language? Well, this is the way conscience speaks, and thus it works in action.

How different is the language of the man without conscience, or with a conscience but slightly seared! Instead of being led by love, he is driven by fear. The policeman in this world, and hell in the next, are

the forces which keep him straight. He is always on the watch to see if someone is looking. As long as he feels that he is under his master's eye, he is at work. But as soon as he is out of sight, he folds his arms and does nothing. He knows that account will be kept, and as he fears censure, and still more punishment, he brings to the business he has to do so much application as is required for his own peace; and that is all—no dash of enthusiasm, no generosity and no devotion to duty. And it is not only in the service of men, but even of God, that this low type of morality is found. Souls which are only second-rate and which merely afford a cheap kind of service to their fellow-men, are generally no better in their service of God; and, in the same way, men of lofty character, whether in the service of man or of God, show that delicacy of conscience which does duty for its own sake. "To sacrifice one's humour to the part one has to play, and even one's virtues to one's duty"—this is the first sign of a truly great character.

A second note is conscientious and

strict sincerity. On the point of integrity conscience may be said to be even "touchy." It will not endure any disagreement between thought and word and deed. While observing the wise rule which prevents a man from always betraying the whole of his mind in what he says, it nevertheless inspires such a respect for truth that it dreads the least deviation from it. It fills us with an instinctive horror of lying, so that it feels wounded to the quick, if the will is allowed to slip on the disgraceful slope of falsehood. Unsatisfied with proscribing words which formally violate the truth, it repels the cowardly and underhand methods of procedure which some people hold to be clever, but which it condemns as wanting in straightforwardness.

Amongst the dispositions which it condemns in the name of candour as being degrading to the character, let us note: deference to human opinion, which, through fear of man, in order to escape a smile or a bit of chaff, hides right thoughts and good feelings, and is ashamed of any acquired merits, and hinders the

practice of the best habits; dissimulation, the cowardice of a disordered spirit, which flies to secrecy in order to do ill, and buries in silence avowals that ought to be made frankly; hypocrisy, that mask of virtue which false hearts use to hide behind, not only to conceal their vices, but to win esteem and favour with deceitful shows of goodness; unfaithfulness to the given word, the sign of a low mind that attaches no value to its own word, and is ready to give itself the lie for some base interest, and is only to be bound by the chain of civil law; and, lastly, duplicity, which flatters and is treacherous in turn, which praises and extols you to your face, but blackens your character and ruins you as soon as your back is turned—an odious vice, condemned by Holy Scripture because it "sows discord amongst brethren."

No less than sincerity conscience requires strict honesty in business, and thus it gives another stroke of moral beauty to character. It is the rigid and sole guardian of interests confided to our care. Money, confidential information, reputation,

everything put into our hands, can only be safeguarded by the interior law of conscience.

In money matters conscience is the sole efficacious guarantee of integrity. Even under the most skilfully organized financial administration, clever cupidity finds a way of reaping its own advantage, in spite of the closest meshes of inspection ; and all the more surely will it secure its own benefit, when there is no supervision over the management of the sums of money entrusted to it. To banish theft we must bind, not the hands, but the heart ; for an avaricious heart will always find a way of freeing the hands, however closely they may be tied. But conscience alone can secure the heart, and impart to the character that dignity which comes from unsuspected delicacy of tone.

Still more precious than our money are our secrets ; for instance, our inmost state of mind, our passions, our bitterness of spirit, or even our family circumstances or fortune. On the one hand, we feel an instinctive need of speaking about them, for it seems as if by doing this we

unburden our soul ; but on the other hand, it is important that they should not be divulged, because, if they became public property, they would compromise our credit or our reputation. If charity imposes on others the duty of listening to us, so that they may console us, justice strictly obliges them to be silent, so that we may not be ruined. Tact and a really lofty character are needed for the exercise of this indispensable discretion. Those who let out secrets in which great interests are involved are either light and frivolous persons, or else their hearts are evil and their consciences debased. Conscience, then, is a curb for the tongue, as it is an inviolable seal on the safe in which money is stored.

Amongst all human possessions none is more precious to a man than his reputation. Holy Scripture bids us take care of our reputation. Reputation is our very honour, because it brings us either esteem or contempt, and inspires people with confidence in us or marks us out for distrust. If it is good, it secures us prosperity in our material or moral position ; if it is bad, it buries us

under all sorts of disaster. But our reputation depends on others; a word of calumny, a meaning smile, may ruin it. Who, then, is to preserve a thing so precious and so fragile? Conscience alone, so that at every moment our life depends on the conscience of others. It is their fineness of conscience that will save us. The false tongue, that does fatal injury by deadly speech, is only found in those of low character and tarnished conscience.

* * * * *

Need we say any more in praise of the man who is fully under the sway of conscience? Have we not said enough about it to make clear wherein his strength and honour consist?

The most unmistakable sign of his strength is that he is able to do his duty of his own accord. His moral energy is not borrowed, but springs from his own heart. Though the weak may wait until they are threatened or enkindled before beginning to act, the man of conscience has an inner reserve of activity which is set loose of itself

when he is face to face with a clear case of duty.

Conscience, moreover, is a principle of power. For it will not allow the will to slumber in inaction ; it rouses it up, it urges it on, it exercises it, and, in doing this, it develops it. It supports the will in an action once undertaken ; and thus it gives to an enterprise that continuity and perseverance which ensure its success. In fine, it makes men valiant, especially when the fulfilment of duty involves painful sacrifice and demands a bold front in facing danger.

From another point of view, conscience is a power in virtue of the firmness which it imparts to the will, and of the assurance which it affords to the soul. To follow conscience always is to take the straight line without turning back, and to do this consistently and without hesitation. He who has once disobeyed conscience, whether by lying, or by bad undertakings, or by infringement of duty, is always full of anxiety and uneasiness, not only because he has fallen in his own self-esteem, but also from fear of being found out.

In order to hide his faults and to preserve his consistency, he has to give himself up to the calculation of alternatives, which wear him out, and in which he often comes to grief. Then he finds all too late that peace belongs to truth, and that strength is only obtained by following the straight road.

Honour, too, can only flourish where there is integrity of conscience.

God is well pleased with the conscientious alone. "How good is the God of Israel," says the Psalmist, "to them that are of a right heart!" When God wishes to extol the merits of His servants, it is their uprightness that He praises. "Hast thou considered my servant Job," He says to Satan, "that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man?" And the evangelical law has no other rule for judging souls. "If thy eye be single," says Christ, "thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome." But conscience is man's eye: it is conscience, therefore, that fills him with glory or

shame. Furthermore, what will be on trial at God's judgment-seat if it be not conscience? It is the faithful conscience that will receive the eternal reward; and endless punishment will be the meed of the conscience that is false. Such is the part assigned by God to conscience; there, in His eyes, dwells the whole man.

And herein the judgment of men does not differ from the judgment of God. They fasten a note of ignominy upon the betrayals of conscience, and they crown with a halo those who are honourable and straightforward.

However weak men may be in practice, they take a very firm stand on the ground of principle. A lie is hateful to them, and they deem it a grave insult to be called a "liar"; and thus a man loses all public credit if he is openly convicted of lying. Unscrupulousness is a blemish no less humiliating; and if a man be called a "robber," he does not fail to demand satisfaction, either in a duel or before a court of law, so sure is he that shame will cleave to him if he does not clear himself of the disgrace. Hence, nothing so degrades a man in the eyes of his

fellows as an established charge of lying, fraud, or theft.

And this popular ratification of moral right, however hardly it may work, is just. Society requires it. All social order is based upon the mutual confidence of men. Peace and prosperity are only possible as long as we can hope that our neighbour is not trying to deceive us. But how can I be sure about my neighbour? Who will guarantee me his straightforwardness, the truthfulness of his speech, and that he will respect my rights? For all this I must depend upon his conscience. It is his conscience that will secure my peace of mind; but if he have no conscience, I shall be distrustful and uneasy.

Well, then, may we honour those who, by doing duty for conscience' sake, become mainstays of social stability.

But, on the contrary, what a disgrace are those who, by proceeding on their way unchecked by any scruple, are a shame and a danger to society!

In great characters the law of conscience holds such a commanding

place, and is so promptly obeyed, that they would rather lose all, both fortune and reputation, than trample under foot, even in the shadow of secrecy, a duty declared by conscience to be sacred.

II

Strength of Will

The unbending uprightness of conscience which assures a man a place of honour in the esteem of his fellows presupposes will-power, the very soul of all great characters. Moreover, after giving the first place to the quality which makes a man worthy of respect, we shall hasten to deal with that which is the measure of his value. Where will is lacking, individuality does not exist ; according as will-power increases or diminishes, personality grows or wanes.

Mistakes are often made as to the nature of will-power. Neither displays of temper arising from the provocation of meeting with difficulties, nor obstinacy from being engrossed in some ill-founded

opinion, nor hardness in the use of authority, nor pretentiousness which assumes a show of simulated boldness, are signs of a strong will. Lack of feeling is no better evidence of it; for to be untouched by emotion under the blows of sorrow, in the bitterness of betrayal, or in response to a demonstration of real affection, is the mark of a cold and passionless disposition, and not the note of a virile character: and, on the other hand, there are souls who reveal a fine virility amidst the feelings aroused in them by the vexations and joys they meet with. Not even freedom from moral falls is an unmistakable sign of will-power; for not to fall, if there be no temptation, may be merely the result of insignificance; and, on the contrary, even grave failings may come to sadden, as troublesome and temporary accidents, generous souls in whom the will holds full sway.

To sum up the state of the man of will-power, we may say "that he is master of himself." "Be thine own master," said wise Marcus Aurelius, "and keep a good heart in all thy days, good or bad." And St.

Francis of Sales, too, thus extols self-possession: "A man's greatest happiness, Philotheus, consists in the possession of his own soul." In the words of a German philosopher: "The highest good given by God to every creature is, and will be always, to be himself." "That in which you are wanting," said a moralist doctor, "is yourself. What can I prescribe for you, unless it is yourself?" True it is that the great German mystic, Tauler, writes in the spirit of the Gospel: "Where I lost myself I found God: and where I have found myself, I have lost God." But later on we shall see that each of us bears within himself two men, and that, by bringing the lower into subjection, we win at the same time both ourselves and God.

Yet the possession of one's self implies two things: freedom and control; freedom, whereby we break through all bonds, and win for ourselves liberty of action; control, whereby we get hold of the store of energies within us and set them to work for the achievement of what is right. The man who is free, and who governs himself thus, is truly his

own master—noble in his independence, he is strong in the use of his energies. He has a will. He is a character.

* * * * *

The first duty of the man who is determined to get possession of himself is to set himself free. He must break three sorts of chains that bind weak souls in humiliating bondage: external circumstances, human influence, and his own passions.

Timid souls, and their name is Legion, fear the world of outward circumstances, such as illness, loss of money, family disasters, and the inclemency of the seasons and their consequences. They consider nature as a blind machine which crushes us under its pitiless wheels, the gearing of which threatens every moment to seize us with its savage teeth. Under the menace of such apprehensions as these, weak wills tremble and feel themselves incapable of acting; if the evil strikes them, they give way, abandon all efforts, and at most send up a sigh.

An altogether different sort of boldness marks a stout will when it encounters the brute powers of the

physical world; it is not to be daunted by threats nor crushed by blows actually received. Such a person knows that if man is but a pigmy compared with the colossal powers of nature, yet he can often master them by drawing upon his intelligence; and therefore he enters the conflict with resolution, and uses all his skill to escape the cruel ruthlessness of unconscious forces. How many are the fatal maladies that have been avoided by means of prudence, and cured by confidence! How many fortunes have been kept from ruin by cool presence of mind, and saved from disaster by persistent toil! And if misfortune is inevitable, if there be no escape from its dreaded assaults, men with a will are nevertheless neither conquered nor despairing; for they keep an air of moral triumph in "this universe that crushes them without knowing it."

Nothing is finer or greater than a man of character at grips with grief. He is not at all astonished at meeting it on the way, for he sees clearly that there is no human life without a large share of it. He does not turn from

it with horror ; but he looks it in the face as a messenger of good ; he questions it to learn the lessons it has to convey, and he welcomes it to get from it the benefits with which it is charged. Convinced that "impatience is the destruction of strength, and patience the mainstay of weakness," and that, as Joubert says, "God has ordered time for the consolation of the unfortunate," he waits for the dark hours to pass away and for a brighter day to dawn. Moreover, he is assured that the days of suffering will not be sterile ; that life is but a blank page until the words, "I have suffered," are written across it, or, in other terms, "I have lived" ; that misfortune awakens a man out of lethargy and is indispensable to the development of his mind and heart ; that life points out the path to follow with a rod of iron ; that "life is a rough sculptor whose chisel gradually carves out from the raw material the model of the inner ideal," as Madame Bentzon says ; and that, in Lacordaire's words, "the sting of sorrow keeps a man

from being stung to death by the sting of pleasure."

Strengthened thus by a clear perception of the providential reasons for suffering, the man of character stands upright under trial, and does not give in or listlessly let his hands hang down, but on the contrary gathers up his energies, and, as soon as outward circumstances seem no longer a hindrance to work but rather an incentive to action, he starts afresh with resignation and courage, consoled by the very use of such life as is left to him.

Thus set free by strength of soul from bondage to blind powers, man has next to be on the watch against falling under the yoke of his fellows. Christians should always have ringing in their ears the proud words of St. Paul: "You are bought with a price, be not made the bond slaves of men." Who can flatter himself that he is no man's slave? What liberty we should enjoy, if we were our own masters despite those who wound us or impose on us, or seduce us by flattery.

Who, in his own circle, does not come across irritating persons who

are as thorny to handle as a bundle of brambles? The more one has to do with them, the more one gets scratched. They are bitter critics, dry and sharp in speech, keenly reproachful and bad-tempered, unscrupulous in their ways, awkwardly silent, disquietingly reticent, unreasonably hostile, and inexorable in their antipathies. Not only are they disagreeable but they become our masters. They put us out of countenance. Our will either gives way through timidity, or else dissipates its strength in violence. Cowardice breaks the very springs of the soul, lowering and effacing and annihilating us; yet if we were truly independent, we should not, indeed, be indifferent to irritation of the outer skin, but we should not be fundamentally upset; we should pursue our business with calmness, and never allow the fear of an epigram to choke within us an impulse to do good. To those who lose patience in the company of ill-natured characters, and by an outburst of anger dissipate the merits acquired by long forbearance, we recommend the following fine re-

marks of Nicole : " We should think it as ridiculous to get angry with other people's faults and eccentricities as to take offence because the weather is bad, or too hot or too cold, for our anger is as impotent to set men straight as to change the seasons. In fact, it is still more unreasonable, in that, by being angry with the seasons, we make them neither more nor less agreeable, whereas our bitterness against men irritates them against us and only makes their passions more vehement and active." The Master was right when he said, " In your patience you shall possess your souls."

Furthermore, a firm will does not yield to those who seek to impose upon it. Whether their authority over us is exercised by way of command or of suggestion or of menace, dignity of character demands that we should retain our hold upon ourselves.

Far be it from us to think that a lawful command may be infringed or disputed. We uphold the sovereign power of established authority with its absolute right to our entire obedience. But there is a base sort

of obedience which is dishonouring, as there is a loftier kind of obedience which is ennobling. In the former, the subject is passive; he is acted upon and does not act, and is a mere parcel of clothes to be shifted about at will. In the latter, we are enlightened and active; we love and desire the thing that is bidden, just because it is commanded; our actions are our own, and we possess ourselves.

How few are those who are independent of the suggestions of others! What an influence over us have those who are about us! Sometimes we yield to them quite consciously; sometimes we are subject to them without knowing it. Here, it is our equals whom we do not mistrust; there, it is a leader who carries us away in our weakness; elsewhere, it is intriguers who take advantage of our honesty; often, it may be servants who deceive us, and, at times, we may fall under the spell of a woman's charm. Their thoughts and feelings carry the day with us. We think that we are expressing our own thoughts and promoting our own plans: in reality, we are not our own, but the tools of others.

We are more on our guard, and feel pride stir within us, when threats are used by those who are dealing with us. If we are pugnacious, we take our stand against the use of force, and resist with boldness. If we are timid, we oppose unjust demands, at any rate with a passive resistance which never yields, and before which the most violent often find themselves disarmed. However valuable this resource may be to the weak, does not one still sometimes see the fearful give way to threats and betray their own convictions? This is a characteristic of men who abandon possession of themselves.

Of all human influences, that which sways men most and makes most slaves is seduction. Most of those who resist force succumb to flattery. He, then, will have the most hardened will, who retains self-possession in spite of all the attractions which make their appeal to him.

Seduction attacks the whole man; it catches his eye and feeds his curiosity by means of sights and shows, of displays and dress; it fosters his vanity by lavish praise; it captures his heart by trailing the

dangerous bait of real or sham affection ; it flatters his cupidity with the glitter of gold, and his pride with the allurement of honours.

Nowhere can character prove its quality better than when it has to meet with seductive enticement. If such and such a woman had will-power, she would not be carried away by the flashy shows of window-dressing to make purchases which her conscience disapproves. If such and such a man were master of himself, he would not let himself be taken in the snare of a deceptive affection which will cast him into despair after bringing ruin to his household. And this other, who sells his conscience for money, or who sacrifices his honour and his ideals for the sake of a decoration, lowers himself to be a slave ; how, then, can he help feeling that he has given up his personality ? On the contrary, how great and worthy of all respect is he who is won by no fascination, and whose will is as it were winged to fly from all the nets that are set to catch him ! He is always his own master.

* * * * *

To belong fully to himself, he must, however, shake himself free from another yoke. After triumphing over nature and mankind, he must take good care not to forge his own chains of servitude. "The most valiant captain," says Lacordaire, "may be weak as a woman the day after his victory, and his wounds cover a character which is merely feeble and of no account." It was the misfortune of the great Napoleon that, after conquering the world, he was unable to master himself : not knowing the art of self-command, he lacked strength no less than wisdom.

Man, indeed, is a most complex and multifarious being. He is the microcosm of a great state, in which seethes a whole nation of desires and passions, of caprices and impressions, of interests and ambitions. . . . These emotions and inclinations are in his soul like subjects in an empire : the reins of government are held by the will. Just as a sovereign, in order to reign in peace, does not exterminate his subjects, but reduces them to obedience, puts them under tribute, gives them occupation and exploits them for the public welfare,

thus the will, if it fulfil its part, does not stifle innate tendencies and personal aspirations, but rules and moderates them, lets them go or keeps them in according to occasion, makes submissive auxiliaries of them, and never gives in to their hurtful and unreasonable demands. Wherever inclination gets the upper hand, or nature follows its bent, and where, on that account, the will is silent or wanting in authority, there is anarchy, and personality is effaced ; there the "I" is a slave, and moral worth is destroyed. This is why man by force of will has to break free from self and to be his own master.

This mastery, which is the most real and the most fruitful that man can aspire to, must be exercised over the sensual appetites, over the frenzy of imagination and the frailties of temperament.

Nothing lowers a man so much as being enslaved by the senses. Whether he is led by the gross instincts of the glutton or gives way to the shameful appeals of lust, he always becomes degraded and loses his honour, and sometimes his health as well. Bending under the tyranny

of the senses, he experiences dulness of spirit and debasement of heart; the strength of will in him grows weak or altogether disappears; his ideal is too poor and dim for the love of higher things; and he is so incapable of effort that he does not try to attain to them. Therefore the first action of the man who is anxious to belong to himself must be to emerge from these low depths of sensuality. He must put a check upon his love of the table: an excessive fondness of dainties in women and children, and an intemperate love of alcoholic liquors in men, are both signs and causes of weakness of character. Above all, he must subdue the carnal passions which seethe in him; for if he treats them with culpable indulgence, and if he does not muzzle them like wild beasts, he will become their plaything and, ere long, their prey.

How many men, after laboriously winning their moral freedom by subduing the senses, succumb to another yoke, that of a diseased imagination! For all the mental torments that follow one another in a long line, from uneasy curiosity to the weari-

ness of faint-heartedness, undermine the soul at the very centre and kill the will in its very source. A man has no hold over himself, if he is carried away by an unwholesome curiosity to attend risky theatrical performances and to read immoral or doubtful books, or to look at immodest pictures, or to take part in loose conversation. Nor can he call himself his own, who, in endless reveries, dwells upon fancies that taint the mind, or affections that enervate the heart. Still less does he belong to himself who is obsessed with fixed ideas and becomes a fanatic in his antipathies or in irreconcilable hatred, or who thinks he is persecuted by imaginary enemies, or groans under the burden of maladies that do not exist. Finally, he soon ceases to be his own master, who gives way to depression and melancholy : for their first fruit is weary discontent, a kind of moral rust which silently eats away the soul ; and they end in producing discouragement, which so inevitably crushes out all energy that Lacordaire rightly calls it " the death of manliness." To repress curiosity by way

of mortification, to dissipate reverie by action, to force oneself to believe in the uprightness and kindliness of one's fellow-men, to keep alive at the bottom of one's heart the little flame of confidence in oneself by means of the beneficent influence of trust in God—such are the remedies for these ills of the imagination amidst which the will so easily makes ship-wreck.

In these daily struggles a well-balanced disposition would be an incomparable help to character. But men's temperaments also, owing to their excitability at times, must be kept under control so that the will may bear sovereign rule. To speak only of the two extremes, some are easily carried away, and others remain apathetic : the former require a bridle, the latter a whip.

Impulsive natures require energetic self-control ; for if they yield to their feelings, they are always precipitate or vehement. When they are not crossed, they are, indeed, not without calmness ; they are quick in action, wanting forethought and deliberation, and liable to a multitude of mistakes, which they discover only

too late; they work like a horse, but are less anxious to do well than to do much; being unable to restrain their speech, they betray secrets, muddle business, and give offence; they have no better control over their ill-humour, and do not conceal their resentment. When they meet with difficulties, their susceptibilities are awakened, and they burst forth into violent language and exceptionable proceedings; and the outbreak shows that they are wanting in self-possession. In such souls moderation is the goal of the moral struggle.

No less effort is required if the will is to win the day in apathetic and lazy dispositions. It is not that they are lacking in resource; but their energies are benumbed in the slumber of despair. In vain do you try to shake them up; they are never quite awake, being wrapped in a sort of drowsiness. Always behindhand, they drag on at their work; they make a start just when the thing in hand ought to be finished. They are inconsistent in thought, and their undertakings have no continuity. There is no order in their employments or business or house-

hold, and order is especially deficient in their soul. They fritter the time away, dissipate their life and maim their existence. The idle man seems to have self-possession ; but is only at peace because he is asleep. He does not belong to himself, because he is not free from slumber.

It is now evident to everyone that the conquest of self is a huge and heavy task. Man's liberation is neither just a day's work nor mere child's play. It requires time, and it is not too much to devote to it the labour of a life. It demands great courage, it may be almost super-human courage, such as religion alone can infuse into a man's heart. It is to this noble enterprise that Jesus Christ invites us when He bids us deny ourselves and take up the cross ; and to make us victorious in the struggle, He promises grace in response to our humble and persevering prayers.

* * * * *

However important the acquisition of the moral mastery of ourselves may be, it is nevertheless only the first step in the programme that the will has to carry out. When it has

broken its chains, when it has won possession of itself, when it holds all the treasures of its activities at its disposal, the will must turn them to account and make them bear fruit and set them to work. And since its proper function is *willing*, it must make a study of learning, in fact, how to will. All man's misfortunes come from the want of *willing* ; and therefore, as soon as he is his own master, he must cure himself of the fatal disease of lack of will-power. "Having the will is enough," says a politician, "to free a man from all ills." "Know how to will things, and do your duty," says a German moralist ; "there in two words is the soul's whole hygiene."

But will-power exists in various degrees : it attains its climax when it is decided, active, and persevering.

There are souls who swarm with fancies like the growth of brambles in neglected land. They overflow with ideas, a tangle of desires, and plan after plan, but nothing gets defined or takes shape ; their entire fertility of soul is absorbed in this wild vegetation, which results in a

mass of dried-up weeds. This is because their will is without decision: amidst the many plans that make their appeal to it, it makes no choice. And it abstains from doing anything, not from lack of light, but for want of energy and of an adequate interior incentive. For the act of taking a side, even when expressed only in the inner sanctuary of the soul, requires no less moral effort than an outward act. The undecided and irresolute are really sick folk, and their heedlessness may degenerate into soul-paralysis.

Nevertheless, decision, even when clearly pronounced, is but the will's first step. It may be definite, without being strong enough to find outward expression in action. For the execution of a purpose involves something more than a mental decree.

It requires all our motive forces to be set in movement, and that they be provided with enough energy to clear away difficulties and to beat down opposition. Orders feebly issued by the will come to grief; and therefore the active impetus springing from the centre of the

soul must break forth with a high degree of intensity.

Further, the beginning of action is not all; it must endure. Most action is only maintained by persevering will—that is to say, by a will so strong that its supply of moral energy does not get exhausted; so consistent that, without grave reason, it will not change the direction of its efforts. When it has attained this degree of firmness, moral will is endued with irresistible power; it imparts the highest possible value to the character of its possessor. Though but few are able to reach it in reality, yet all ought to tend towards it. The upward path is steep; but, as one climbs the hill, the horizon broadens without, and virility grows within.

III

Kindness of Heart

In character we were not wrong in assigning so large a place to the will. It is, indeed, the framework and support of character; it is also its secret spring. Without will

power, character has neither consistency nor vigour, and, indeed, one might say it would not be character at all. Such, too, is the received opinion generally held that men with a will are the only ones who are really men of character.

Let us, however, hasten to add that a resolute character possessing nothing but will-power would have no great attraction for us. He would give us the sense of strength, but be wanting in charm. Mere strength alone conveys a suggestion of roughness and hurtfulness ; we do not like rude embraces. The will, as it appears to us, is but the bare skeleton of character, and this framework of bones startles us, if it be not clothed with soft, warm, living flesh. Let us have the will in all its entirety to sustain the man ; but let it be hidden by the living virtues that spring from the heart. With the heart's help, the character will become amiable because it will be human.

Its first-fruit will be affability, the virtue of a kindly heart, and that which imparts to the whole outward man a pleasing air, combined with

the engaging manners which are the ornament of a good-natured character. The affable man impresses you as simple, easy, and free from ill-humour, his face lighted up with a frank smile; he converses with you readily, does not begrudge the time he spends with you, and says agreeable things without flattery; you are at ease with him, your heart opens and expands, and your troubles seem to drop off; he has the gift of making you glad and of inspiring you with courage. These outward things, however, only charm you because you are first of all sensible of his kindly feelings towards yourself. You are thought well of, your wrongs are forgotten, your failings are unnoticed, your uprightness is acknowledged and your good qualities are appreciated: and all this goes to your heart and wins your sympathy. And thus you approve the rightness of the moralist who observes: "Kindness should willingly set some limits to over-shrewdness. It places a screen in front of the too piercing rays of perspicacity, and refuses to bring into the light all the ugliness and

misery of the mental hospital." Nothing, indeed, makes a character more aggravating than having eyes from which no fault escapes, and a tongue that never spares a single reproach.

While affability is mainly a superficial virtue, which, taken by itself, would leave the character rather insipid, sympathy, by stirring the heart to its depths, imparts to character an indescribable tenderness and strength, which win and keep souls. The sympathetic man has the gift of discovering trouble; he is touched by it, and lingers over it, and assuages it; he is the good Samaritan. He does not hunt out the source of it; whether it be undeserved or the inevitable punishment of certain faults, he always sympathizes without making accusations, and stretches out a helping hand for its own sake. The best we can do to express the strength and charm imparted to character by the feeling of pity is to quote the words of a doctor: "Ever since man has existed and suffered, the language of pity has been one of the best helps, and often he obtains more relief from a glance or from

the pressure of a hand, from a speech or a charitable exclamation, than from all ingredients that we can boil down or strain out or crush and grind." While hard natures leave a painful impress on people who suffer, the sympathetic, on the contrary, allay the sharpest pains by the sweetness of their affectionate demonstrations.

The beneficent inspirations of the heart go still farther; its kindness renders the character generous, great, magnanimous, and disinterested. The man without heart is selfish; at any rate, he is narrow and calculating. On the contrary, note the behaviour of the man of large and open heart. As soon as he is touched by pity, he gives all that he has; money does not cling to his hands, and he becomes a purveyor to the poor; his time is not his own, and he spends it ungrudgingly in listening to the troubles, and in consoling the sorrows of the unfortunate; he undertakes journeys; he faces fatigue and rebuffs; he will even endanger his life to do a service or to repair a compromised situation. And however much he may esteem gratitude, he makes it no condition

of his devotion; if he does not get it, he makes no bitter complaints. What a noble example he gives the world of a fine character! And how fruitful! "Those will not have lived in vain," says an eminent English philosopher, "who have been for ever so short a time a source of happiness and moral good to the smallest circle."

The character rises a step higher, however, when the heart is the source of pure affections. It then produces that ideal charity of which Pascal utters these unique words of praise: "All the bodies and minds in the world are not worth the faintest feeling of charity." For charitable souls, whose feelings are deep enough to be human and high enough to be Christian, are doubly worthy of respect and sympathy; they have reached the topmost height of perfection to which man can aspire; they offer their fellows the best shelter, where the wounded and abandoned may find life and rest.

And now who cannot see the value that kindness of heart gives to character? It seems as if the man

of strong will must suffer from his very strength, if he does not temper what is in him of rigidity and dryness and coldness by feelings of kindness. At all events, he will be only respected and feared, he will not be loved, unless he sheathe his iron hand in a velvet glove, and if the dictates of his brain be not softened by passing through the heart.

If, then, in order to be happy and to increase your influence, you take pains to be kind as well as strong, as tender in your feelings as firm in your purposes, you must cultivate your heart as diligently as your will. There are no better hearts than those that are kindly fashioned by nature : feelings of sympathy spring up in them spontaneously, beneficent actions flow from them without effort, and sincere affections blossom in them like flowers in rich soil. Happy are those who are born rich of heart! But if you have not been favoured by birth, if, in your inheritance, a tender and generous heart forms no part, do not despair, but set to work to acquire that in which you are lacking. For, by persevering effort, there is no habit that cannot

be created and no faculty that cannot be cultivated. Look at the kind-hearted; see how they act and speak, and imitate them. Get often into touch with the wretched; there you will enkindle the feeling that puts the heart in motion; there generosity is called forth by pressing need; there you will learn to pour forth consolation, and your lips will acquire facility in expressing the feeling that is stirred within you. Perhaps you may think such conduct has something forced and artificial about it. But take courage: what you began doing as a duty will soon become easy. Before long persistency of will will develop a new nature in you. Just as, according to naturalists, living organs grow with use, so kindness of heart will increase within you by means of repeated kindly actions.

The result will be worth the trouble that is spent upon it: to neglect the cultivation of the heart is to deprive the character of the qualities that give it its richness and charm.

IV

Dignity of Demeanour

Demeanour is man's moral garment. It so shapes him outwardly that nothing in his behaviour jars upon our sense of fitness. You say a man is lacking in demeanour, when, by the negligence of his habits, by the vulgarity of his speech, and by the uncouthness of his manners, he destroys any feeling of dignity or respect you may entertain for him.

Demeanour is something relative, and its positive precepts vary with the position of the person concerned. Thus, words which would not at all be in keeping with what you expect from a gentleman would cause you no surprise in the mouth of a labourer ; and you will not insist on a peasant being dressed like a barrister. Every social rank has its customs. To possess demeanour is to behave and speak as befits one's social status.

What connection is there between demeanour and character ? There is a sense in which one may have an

excellent demeanour and yet a very bad character, just as one meets men of admirable character whose demeanour is deplorable. If by character we mean disposition, which may be good or bad, and ease or the reverse in daily intercourse, then it must be admitted that demeanour and character are two things independent of each other. But if character be taken in its higher meaning, if it express the moral constitution, if it must correspond with the ideal that we have outlined in this chapter, there is no doubt that demeanour and character are closely connected, and that good demeanour is of the highest importance to dignity of character. Our ideal would not only be unfulfilled, it would even be disfigured, if we were to omit the final touch—demeanour.

Character and demeanour are connected chiefly in three ways: demeanour reveals character, and reacts on it and moulds it, and increases or diminishes its social influence.

Demeanour, as we have said, covers the entire man externally—

his clothes, his bearing, his gestures, his gait, his associations, the propriety of his behaviour. . . . But all these externals are the faithful expression of the man. No one possesses such composure and is so skilful in hiding his feelings as not to betray himself outwardly. Though some people may be too inexperienced to decipher the details of this kind of automatic writing, the writing is nevertheless so faithful that no one can altogether counterfeit it. Moreover, popular opinion on the subject is not mistaken; it boldly pronounces on a man's character according to his "looks"; it holds the outside to correspond with what is within.

If this is the case, demeanour is a revelation, a kind of abiding "exhibition," of character. If you allow your clothes to be ill-fitting, ragged, and dirty, and your house to be in confusion, you are a slovenly fellow. If your talk is trivial and you make use of low expressions, if you take pleasure in the company of your inferiors and indulge in misplaced familiarities, you are wanting in dignity. If you neglect the practice

of ordinary civility, such as bowing to your acquaintances, returning people's visits, and answering their letters, and making way for ladies; if you weary people with the length of your calls, or by indiscreet attentions or extraordinary gestures, you are lacking in refinement and, perhaps, coarse. If you are overnice in dress, stiff in gait, mincing in speech, and affected in the matter of your conversation, you are pretentious and a prig. Thus it is with your defects and with all your qualities; do not complain of the judgments that are passed upon you. If they displease you, cultivate your character so that even your exterior may be modified, and so that on account of an improved demeanour people's estimates of you may grow more favourable. Or else set to work directly upon your demeanour itself, and you will observe that your efforts, ascending to the source of your acts, will have the happy effect of transforming your character.

For it is henceforward a well-demonstrated fact, that the postures of the body have an effect on the movements of the soul, and that

thus the outward expression of certain feelings gives rise to them or encourages them in the heart. With regard to this matter, hypnotism has given us some very significant hints. A person in a state of hypnotic sleep gets thoughts and feelings corresponding with the gestures that are imposed upon him: if his hands are folded together, he begins to pray, if his hands are made into fists, he exhibits anger and utters threats. And in our normal condition, this influence of our postures is not less real: for instance, the Christian who kneels down and uses hallowed forms of prayer soon feels the spirit of prayer take possession of his whole being; and to cure oneself of the emotions of jealousy or antipathy, one need only treat the persons concerned with the same kindliness and courtesy as one bestows upon one's best friends. This principle, which is so interesting as a natural law, has a vast fertility of scope in its practical bearings. For, in cultivating oneself outwardly, one works right enough at the improvement of one's soul; and these lessons in noble

conduct have the highest importance as moral lessons.

To limit ourselves to character, there is no question but that it is dependent on demeanour. Every fault of demeanour reacts immediately upon character. Vulgarity of manners, slackness of gait, triviality of talk, doubtful promiscuity of intercourse, and pot-house behaviour, such are the things that lower character; for one's feelings quickly catch the tone of one's language and habits. On the contrary, see that your words are always worthy, your conversation elevated, your gestures measured, your bearing irreproachable, your dress in accordance with your position, and you may be sure that your character, receiving its impress and support from the happy conditions of its environment, will be inevitably permeated with gravity without stiffness, and with nobleness without parade. Is it not this reaction of demeanour on character that educationists take account of in the training of children? Their exhortations, by which they arouse the higher feelings, are assuredly not in vain, but

the perpetual watch they keep over behaviour is far more certain in its effects and far more durable.

Demeanour, in fine, is of importance to the authority of character. Whatever mystery attaches to the gift of authority, which inspires respect and calls for obedience, at any rate it is certain that character is its source. For neither hard words nor outbursts of temper, nor rigorous punishments, nor the merit of knowing, nor even the halo of virtue, give authority or the moral force of influencing men. Authority comes from a sort of seriousness, of evenness, of gravity, of constancy, of decision, which make one feel that there is a personality—in other words, a character—behind. But what is it that hinders a man's authority? What is it that destroys his social effect? It is either because he passes unnoticed and is of no account, or else some eccentricity makes him ridiculous. In any case, it is on account of some inferiority of character. But how is it that his character is diminished? Is it not because he is compromised and betrayed by his demeanour? If

his manners were not vulgar, if they were not inconsistent with his position, he would not have fallen into contempt. If he had kept watch over this defect, or corrected that oddity, he would not have become the talk of those about him, and the influence of his good qualities would have been unimpaired.

So nothing can be neglected in self-cultivation. Just as no outward beauty is so great that it is not disfigured by dressing up in wretched rags, so there is no character so great as not to need, if it is to have its full social influence, the adornment that comes from good demeanour.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORIGIN OF CHARACTER

IN our sketch of the ideal character we have put a model before the reader's eyes. And now it is for him to shape himself according to the example we have given him. Let him not say that the model is too high, and that such perfection is unattainable ; for duty does not consist in realizing the highest degree of moral beauty, but in making a daily attempt to approach it. And let him not plead the infirmity of nature, for there is no temperament, however poorly endowed, that may not make some progress on the path which we have opened up. Uprightness of character, strength of will, kindness of heart, dignity of demeanour—these are primordial virtues which have a

claim on all ages, all ranks, and all dispositions.

Yet, with regard to this work, different natures stand on very different footings. According to whether their rooted inclinations are good or bad, they help or hinder the fulfilment of moral duty. Difficulties vary, then, according to the individual: in one, character rises without any trouble towards the ideal; in another, slow progress will demand great struggles.

Further, different natures must be led in different ways. At a concert, even when the same melody is to be played by all the instruments, each instrument must be played according to its own rules. Thus, in its endeavour towards the common ideal that we have outlined, each temperament must be dealt with according to its aptitudes.

And hence it is necessary for each of us to know our own nature and resources and difficulties.

Hitherto we have spoken of the harmony that ought to flow from our character. We have now to inquire what kind of instrument we hold in our hands, and how we ought to handle it.

On Character

Three influences have combined to shape it—birth, education, and will ; and according as their contribution has been favourable or the reverse, the disposition of the character will be fortunate or to be regretted.

I

Birth

The child at birth is like a cutting taken from the mother plant. He brings with him not only life in a general sense, but an already determined kind of life. By the mere fact of his origin he is marked off from his fellows, stamped with the sign of his forefathers, sealed with an indelible seal. Just as fruitful slips alone are taken from the vine, so amongst the families of mankind the character which is peculiar to a particular race recurs in all its descendants. "A vicious, skittish, and restive horse," says Buffon, "produces stock of the same nature." Maudsley says the same thing of men. "Man," he says, "has a destiny made for him by his ancestors, and no one, try how he may, can escape from the tyranny of his organization. However great

may be the influence of education, it is still a force which is strictly limited. It is limited by the capacity inherent in the nature of the individual and can only act within the circle, more or less restricted, of a fore-ordained necessity." Montaigne had already well observed that man has from birth certain inclinations that he can never entirely eradicate. "They help and strengthen one another," he says, "by being established, but they scarcely change or are overcome ; numbers of natures in my time have broken free in the direction of virtue or vice by means of using a contrary discipline ; but these original qualities are not extirpated, they are covered up and concealed."

Carrying on the life of his forefathers, the child inherits their blemishes as well as their good tendencies ; an intrinsic justice brings upon the shoulders of the son the faults of the father. "Nature," says a German doctor, who is a moralist, "is, I venture to say, a secret tribunal ; its jurisdiction is patient and unperceived, and lets nothing slip ; it knows the faults that hide from human eyes and are beyond the reach of human

law. Its decisions are sovereign and eternal, like all that proceeds from the First Cause, and produce their inevitable effects on succeeding generations, and the grandchild who ponders in despair on the mystery of his sufferings might find their cause in the excesses of his ancestors." (Feuchtersleben, "The Soul's Hygiene.")

The blood which is our life is like the waters that come down from the highest mountain peaks, and, only after long journeys underground, break forth in the valleys. On their way, the hidden waters borrow from the various soils through which they pass the most diverse elements, so that, when they spring out of the ground, they contain evident traces of all the stages through which they have run. Sometimes they are distinguished by some dominant property; in one place they are full of iron, in another alkaline, or charged with sulphur. In the same way the streams of life which flow in our veins show signs of all the generations through which they have come before reaching us — some good, others bad; and of these

innumerable influences there is sometimes one which dominates the rest, one which characterizes us and gives us the ruling quality of our disposition. But the whole is as complex in its composition as it is manifold in its origin.

Whatever be the story of its past, our life-blood is either rich or poor, contaminated or pure. In the same way, the flesh that it nourishes is sound or sickly, vigorous or enfeebled. And this state of health from the outset is not without some effect on our moral life : for, just as the living cell, if well formed, is full of potentialities, so is it wanting in vitality if it is weak. Who, indeed, can fail to be aware how much our will depends upon our physical condition ? But, in our organization, heredity is not confined to a certain degree of strength or weakness. Our tendencies are rooted in our flesh. The capacities of our living fibre depend upon the past, like the fibre itself : if the descent be vitiated, the flesh will be full of perverse inclinations, while if the descent be healthy, the flesh will inherit beneficent tendencies.

Happy, then, are those who come at the end of a good line! It matters little whether they have or have not a fair share of this world's goods; they are assuredly rich in inheritance. From the cradle they possess the promise of good health; they have in germ the virtues of their forbears, and the instincts that grow with their growth will incline them towards the good. Such would have been the destiny of all men, if evil at the outset had not broken in upon mankind and upset the wonderful equilibrium of health established in the beginning by God. Through the misfortune of sin, there is, alas! no one who is born with an untainted inheritance.

But those who come at the end of a bad line are worthy of infinite pity. Even if from the cradle they have received all that fortune can offer, their lot must still be considered miserable. Either in themselves or in their descendants they will easily be the prey of vices that have grown with their fathers; for fatal tendencies, if not quickly put under powerful constraint, will inevitably carry them away to the abyss of all ruin.

Men differ, then, from birth. As

if they had pre-existed, they follow throughout their personal existence the life which they began in their ancestors. While some are born with impulses towards the good that facilitate their advance towards the ideal of a fine character, others enter the lists with infirmities that make them heavy-footed, and thus hinder them on the road.

Such considerations are best fitted to fill a man with respect for himself, combined with a sense of responsibility. For, with these facts before him, each one must say to himself: "I carry within me the future of my race. My good actions will be throughout the ages the inalienable inheritance of my children. But if, on the contrary, I injure my life with sin, all the lives that flow from mine will suffer the consequences, and will accuse me before God of their decay."

This hope of helping the future by the virtues of the present is all the more well-founded, seeing that a man has the power, to some extent at any rate, of escaping from the lamentable influences of the past of his race. For what we receive at birth is not our

whole being. Two other forces, education and will, take up the struggle with heredity, and counterbalance its effects.

II

Education

"Whatever you do, you may be sure that the mind will lean towards the side to which it is inclined by nature." If taken absolutely, this saying of Locke's exaggerates the part played in character by heredity. It must, moreover, be adjusted by the fine remark of Samuel Smiles: "Character is formed by a multitude of minute circumstances which depend more or less on each individual. Not a day passes without bringing its lesson, either for good or evil. There is no action, however simple, without its consequences, just as there is not a hair which does not cast its shadow. Every act, every thought, every feeling contributes to the formation of our disposition, our habits, and our intelligence."

How far men remain supple and malleable could not be better ex-

pressed. For, if by birth man has a bent given to his nature, he is not born fixed or finished.

Further, there is nothing in this world that is fully finished. Everything stirs in a constant state of becoming. Even the rocks, so seemingly immovable beneath our feet, undergo long evolution which modifies their state. All the more do living beings, which are so plastic and susceptible to external influences, receive impressions from the surroundings in which they grow ; and, without any fundamental change of nature, they nevertheless adapt themselves to the circumstances in which they are cultivated. The florist's art, like that of the stock-breeder, is entirely based upon the fact that living types are susceptible of variation.

But this variability is also a property of man : both his organization and his faculties can be moulded by the surroundings in which he lives. He is merely rough-hewn by nature, and throughout his existence he is subject to the external forces with which he comes into contact. In reality, he is always in a state of

development, and not one of his days altogether resembles the one before it. Influences are so diverse and often so contradictory in their succession that the resultant variations, instead of following a straight line, are liable to strange oscillations that sometimes show progress and sometimes reaction. Nevertheless, in the long run, some of them seem to get the upper hand, and then they help to characterize the man.

What a man receives from birth is the raw material on which his environment works. When he is born he brings with him tendencies and aptitudes received from his ancestors, with which he teems like a young forest with an undergrowth of brushwood. Surrounding forces, whether they be unconcious or intentional, then come upon the scene, like a nurseryman in a nursery-garden : some innate tendencies they pull up or stifle ; others they encourage to grow ; but rarely can they implant the seeds of habit, unless they were in germ in the organic inheritance.

To this complex labour, carried on by means of external influences,

we apply the word "education." Understood in this broad sense, education, then, is a force which modifies nature's original work ; and therefore it has an appreciable part in the formation of character.

It has unconscious agents, which are the surroundings, and intentional agents, who are the educators.

At all ages, but especially in childhood, our organization, and consequently our faculties, are subject to the influence of our physical environment, the conditions of climate and air and food amidst which we live. Who has not observed what blooming health characterizes the child reared in the country, and how sickly he is when brought up in the stifling air of a great town ? The mountaineer is full of vivacity, but the dweller in the plain is lacking in virility. So, too, the bracing air of the sea-coast is more exciting than the heavy atmosphere of far inland. The men of the South have the sun in their blood, and it comes out in ardour and gaiety ; but the men of the North are of a more staid disposition, and their impulses are less spontanteous. What more

deserves pity than the child who is brought up in narrow rooms, without light or air, and condemned to poor and insufficient food? On the other hand, the child has a flourishing constitution, if he is not denied pure air, nor light, nor a free run. How many women and children waste away in insanitary workrooms! How many school-children are insubordinate merely because they suffer from some dull and irritating sense of discomfort in the thick and vitiated atmosphere of schoolrooms, in which they endure a confinement intolerable to the young! The prolonged action of unhealthy surroundings leaves upon the body stigmata that are not easily effaced. On the other hand, if the organization is placed, in due time, amidst grateful surroundings, it means a recovery of temperament and character. "I come yearly to the Alps," said Tyndal, "to renew my lease of life and to restore the equilibrium of mind and body."

No less great is the action of moral conditions upon our tendencies. An old proverb, the fruit of ages of experience, thus puts its

results on record: "I will tell you what you are if you will show me the company you keep." If the child is brought up by careful and loving parents, he is open-hearted, confiding, and affectionate. If he has never known his relations, or if he has been treated by them with brutality or neglect, he is timid, shy, suspicious, and sensitive. If he is repressed with too severe a discipline, he keeps to himself; if he is left to his own inclinations, he becomes slack and disorderly; but his heart swells within him and his will grows stronger in surroundings, where he lives happily treated with prudence and firmness, without harshness. If he is alone and the sole object of the affection of those about him, he becomes selfish; on the contrary, he learns the meaning of disinterestedness and charity among brothers and companions who daily practise small acts of self-denial. Nor are the differences any less accentuated according to whether the child grows up to work or to be idle, in joy or sorrow, amidst examples of virtue or in an atmosphere of vice. Inevitably does he

drop into harmony with his moral environment; and the longer the influences last, the deeper will the corresponding tendencies get rooted in him.

The pressure of intellectual surroundings is no less telling in its action. Whatever be the real value of his mental equipment, the child develops according to the intellectual atmosphere he breathes. In an unenlightened environment, in which the empty converse of his parents or teachers affords no stimulus to thought, and if he is also without books, the child does not unfold, and is little given to reflection, and remains commonplace. If, however, his early surroundings are enlightened, and conversation and books give keenness to his mind, he becomes interested, and inquires and perceives and thinks. And it is not only the degree of intellectual activity that depends upon the environment; we inevitably get, or, rather, are influenced by the ideas of those about us, our parents, our teachers, our books and newspapers. It is strange that the mind, which is apparently so free, should become

to such an extent the prisoner of its surroundings.

Higher than all these influences, which are often dependent on the chance of circumstances, appears to be that of teachers. If they knew their power, if they had the energy to make use of it with continuity, teachers would exercise over men, and especially over children, a sway as lasting as it is broad and deep. It is for them to eradicate bad tendencies, and to inspire higher inclinations and create improved habits. But they must have a plan of action, and pursue its realization with perseverance, and then their efforts will be crowned with the consolation of success.

Amongst all surroundings they will choose those that are the most healthy for body and soul. If they cannot select these, they will take pains to improve them. And not satisfied with turning outward circumstances to the best advantage, they will act directly heart to heart through their feeling of affection, the help of their advice, and the impulse given by their encouragement.

Having to undergo so many in-

fluences that work upon him incessantly, man cannot remain exactly what he was by birth. What his character owes to heredity is considerably modified by the contributions he receives from the circumstances of his education.

III

Will

A third power, that of the will, adds its share to that of birth and education in the constitution of character.

If some have cast doubts on the part played by the will, it is because, on the one hand, most men do not labour at their souls, but abandon their lives to the inclinations of nature and to the caprice of circumstance, and that, on the other hand, those who are anxious to cultivate themselves do not win the radical victories over self which they reckon upon, but grieve at remaining to the end a prey to the attacks of the same inner foes.

Our conscience, however, tells us that we are our own masters. If we give way to evil inclinations, it holds

us responsible and accuses us. If we control them and run counter to our appetites, it bears witness to us that we have done a good deed. We have a firm conviction that our soul is in our own hands, and that it is for ourselves alone to protect it from being carried away by the passions that would seduce it, and that we can weaken, by deliberate and intentional resistance, the blind bidding of feelings too often in a state of delirium.

Furthermore, experience confirms this persuasion. The hope of self-conquest cannot be illusory, since so many of our fellows have had it and realized it. In the world, as well as in religious houses, how many, without either stifling or mutilating nature, have nevertheless brought it into subjection! How many souls have bridled evil inclinations, and turned their impetuous energies towards the good! How many have developed habits of which they had nothing but the unseen germs within them! However few be those who master themselves, the success of those who have undertaken the work resolutely is enough to establish the power of the will beyond dispute.

And so important is the part played by our own personality in the formation of character that eventually the whole of the merit of it returns to us. However good your descent may be, you are still sure to have some evil inclinations; if you are allowed to lead your life anyhow, you run a great risk of seeing them get the upper hand and destroy the best in you. However excellent your surroundings may have been, and however well-planned the educational influences of your youth, nevertheless, nothing can make up for the part you will have to play, or dispense you from the duties of life. For we daily see educational failures brought about by the carelessness of the very persons whom their environment had loaded with every possible gift.

Only let your modesty be as great as your courage in this enterprise. Do not expect to destroy your nature; take yourself just as you come from your original stock and from the hands of your teachers, and set yourself to the work of getting a hold over yourself and of shaping out your own course.

Everyone has to play his own

instrument—one the violin, another the clarionet, another the cornet. We have not to change our instrument, or to be envious of those of other people. Our whole duty consists in keeping our own in tune, in handling it with skill, and in making it express the sublime harmonies of the ideal. In the hands of a master, even the humblest instrument may resound with the divinest melody.

CHAPTER V

KINDS OF CHARACTER

THE sources of character are so complex that it is easy to understand why men are so unlike one another. They differ already at birth, for their inherited capacities are far from possessing identity, even amongst brothers. And the differences are accentuated by educational influences, which are as variable as the circumstances and persons around them. Still more different are the effects of the will; for between those who let themselves slide indolently on the slope of their inclinations, and those who work resolutely to master their passions, we may find every degree of weakness and of strength: so that we may say with truth—many men, many characters.

But if characters are as numerous as individuals, will it be possible to

classify them? We admit that it is not easy to mark out groups which are not more or less artificial. Only this difficulty is not peculiar to characters; it occurs whenever we undertake to classify living things. For, apparently, nature only produces individuals, and classes, made for our convenience, are the work of our mind. In fact, just as paths are made through a thick forest to facilitate a passage through it, so naturalists are wont to cut themselves paths through the tangled mass of individuals by means of classification.

This observation explains why the writers of the last hundred years, in treating of character, have come to such different results in classification, and it authorizes us here to give the preference, amongst all these attempts, to that which seems the clearest and simplest. For, in choosing a guide amidst this maze of characters, it is only right to take the one who will cast most light upon the reader's path.

The classifications differ according to their points of departure. Some take temperament as the basis;

others, the faculties of the soul; others, a combination of faculties of the soul and temperaments. As it is no part of our plan here to make a display of erudition, we shall pass over these numerous attempts at classification in silence.

The one that we shall put forward takes the temperament as basis—that is to say, the physical nature of a man, or the sum-total of inclinations given by birth and more or less modified by environment. In this we follow the ancients, who were fine observers, and we keep to a tradition which, from the Middle Ages to our own days, has been maintained by excellent psychologists. Moreover, who has failed to observe the capital importance of the physical constitution? It is this, above all, that reveals the man; it is this, too, that determines the predominance and, perhaps, the value of his innate capacities. Finally, if we observe how little men use the will in the development of their character, it is right to conclude that most of them, so far as their moral constitution or character is concerned, may be reduced to the elements or inclina-

tions contained in their temperaments.

On this principle, from the four fundamental kinds of temperament, we shall deduce four types of character: the sanguine, the nervous, the bilious, and the phlegmatic.

As a matter of fact, no entirely exclusive type is to be met with—neither purely sanguine, nor purely nervous, nor purely phlegmatic. Moreover, it is very likely that no one will be able to recognize himself exactly in the portraits which we are about to sketch, but that each will find it necessary to pick and choose the features that belong to him among the different portraits. This is because the types are mixed in the living individual; but they are so in different degrees, so that examples of all kinds may be found, from the well-balanced, who have no distinctive feature, to the vehement, who have very marked characteristics.

I

The Sanguine

The sanguine man has generally a rosy complexion, blue eyes, and fair

hair. His blood gets the better of any lymphatic tendency of disposition, for it is driven through his whole organism with its well-formed vessels by a vigorous heart, and circulates rapidly, filling him with a sense of life and health, until stoutness comes with age. For the sanguine man does not waste his strength much, and this economy, which is natural to him, keeps his blood bright red, his skin clear, and his complexion fresh.

In the use of all his faculties he is quick, superficial, and changeable.

His feelings are lively, and even acute, but without consistency. His impressions are without depth ; in a moment he passes from laughter to tears, from wild joy to dark depression. If he were in the depths of mourning, the sight of something ridiculous would be enough to make him burst out laughing. In the same way, if he were in the middle of festivity, the presence of wretchedness would arouse his pity, and cause him to cry. He is very quick to feel trials ; the least roughness upsets him, but the painful impression soon vanishes. He pardons quickly.

This is because in him the heart instinctively takes the tune from its surroundings. Susceptible to the slightest shock, it opens and is easily stirred by the same affections as it encounters, and abandons itself to them with ardour, and becomes passionately attached. While it lasts, his friendship is tender, warm, overflowing and devoted. The sanguine have been called very rightly the "affective," so inclined are they to love. Only their instability does not even spare their hearts, for they easily find a fresh object of affection. The oaths of eternal faithfulness which they swore to one yesterday, they will swear to-morrow to another. For to them the proverb is specially appropriate : "Out of sight, out of mind."

Their intelligence partakes of the vivacity of their disposition. It is ready, quickly perceptive, assimilates with ease, and has the help of a good memory and a glowing imagination. It is as sharp as a needle in penetrating any question without difficulty. The sanguine would often have superior minds, if their breadth were equal to their acute-

ness, and their perseverance at work equal to their fertility of conception. Being slack in their studies, they do not store up knowledge, and are wanting in information; and they are rather flashy than solid. They make poets, and even orators on occasion, but not scholars. But these surface qualities bring them success; being full of fire and sincerity, they move men and get them to make a start. Would that it were always for the good!

Their character is charming from certain points of view. Rejoicing in life, the sanguine is jovial, over-flowing, good-humoured, the gladness of the company in which he is, crammed with good stories and jokes, which are sometimes a trifle coarse; he is at home in the midst of noise and bustle and festivities; when in company his voice may be heard above all others, and he may be recognized by his outbursts of laughter. True it is that he is flighty, fickle, thoughtless, vain, and sometimes worldly, foolishly fond of popularity, and generous to the point of prodigality; but all is forgiven him, because he is a good

fellow, ready to help, and disinterested.

What he is wanting in is a firm will—that is to say, consistency in resolution. For he has fine impulses towards the good; a sermon will bring tears to his eyes, and he resolves to be a saint. But face to face with temptation, he is unable to control himself. His will is not sufficiently tenacious to extirpate a bad inclination and to implant a good habit in his soul. This is why he is so easily the victim of sensuality, at any rate in eating and drinking, if not in graver matters. To him, more than others, the senses are a danger to be feared; he has no curb to keep them in check.

If the sanguine man succeeded in controlling himself and in governing his life, he would be a person of great possibilities, for he has no selfishness; he sacrifices himself without any after-thought; his enthusiasm is catching, and his kind-heartedness is captivating. But if he is to make the most of all his gifts, two things are above all indispensable for him: a rule of life wisely laid down in order to support his unsteady will

at all times, and a faithful and devoted friend, who will advise him and bring him gently back to the way from which his petulance constantly tends to make him deviate.

II

The Nervous

The nervous, whom the ancients called the atrabilious or melancholic, because of their tendency to depression, are distinguished by the predominance of the nervous system over the other parts of man's organization. They are full of nerves, and have little muscular development, and they are also fuller of feeling than of activity. They seem to have little blood in them, or, at least, their blood does not appear on the surface. This is why they are pale in complexion, and they have light eyes and hair. Their sleep is light, uneasy, and not recuperative. Of their own accord they act but little, being wanting in muscular energy, but, if excited, their activity becomes febrile and violent, they are quickly exhausted

by effort, and are afterwards prostrated. They have oval faces; for their cerebral development widens their brow, while the jaw is reduced and makes the chin slender. So weak is their physical expenditure that the blood is almost as ruddy in their veins as in their arteries; the body, after being long, slight, and thin, is, as it were, translucent; and they feed poorly and irregularly.

The nervous are interesting; they are refined and often distinguished, and they suffer.

Their feelings, while less quick than those of the sanguine, are, on the other hand, more deep. Whereas the least jar stirs the sanguine, like milk on the boil; the nervous, on the contrary, seem calm and impassive.

Yet they will take an impression; it will penetrate them, and go to their heart, and leave its wound there. The sanguine will fling aside an insult, as one casts away a hot coal with a hasty gesture; but the nervous will let it strike home, and nurse it within instead of rejecting it, feeling the pain of it as if it were that of an arrow turning in a closed wound.

Their intelligence varies, as it does in all temperaments; but as a rule it is there, keen and piercing; and as its ideas ripen in the depths of the soul, it generates strong and original thoughts, and clothes them in accurate and striking speech, which well embodies them. Such was Pascal. But intellectual toil is a weariness to them, and they have frequently to break it off; however, each time they resume it, they take up the thread where they left off. The nervous man has an innate sense of the beautiful; he has a taste for art, and, if he cultivates it, he will excel in it.

When in health, he is not wanting in heart, and often, indeed, his heart is tender, sensitive, deep, and faithful. He will not easily let go an affection, because his impressions take deep root. But they bring him more suffering than joy; for, either he feels that he does not get back as much as he gives, and is vexed at such ingratitude, or else he is timid and shy, and does not know how to express what he feels, and the silence into which he shrinks is painful to him. This is because he

is not open-hearted and unreserved; he does not wear his heart upon his sleeve, like the sanguine man, but keeps it closely veiled; like flowers that are susceptible to the least breath of cold, he shuts and shrivels up, and hides and pines. Then he shows some appearance of selfishness in his ways, and yet he is far from being selfish; for, if occasion arise, especially at the bedside of the sick, he displays devotion to the point of heroism.

His will is rather intermittent than weak, because, in the nervous, it is dependent upon their physical condition. It is crushed and null when he is worn out with work or consumed with inward cares; it is strong and generous when his heart beats vigorously, or if his mind is lit up with a gleam of joy. His character varies in the same way: he is amiable, affectionate, confiding, and frank and gay, in his happier moments; suspicious, touchy, shy, contrary, pessimistic and discouraged, when the days are evil.

The characteristic of the nervous man is instability; he is a wonderful instrument, but easily gets out of

order. During his hours of fatigue —and they are frequent—he is subject to desperate depression and sharp fits of sadness. He loves the good and takes full account of it; but he imagines that he is powerless to accomplish it, and falls into an utter distrust of himself; and when an effort must be made, he feels as dizzy as if he were on the edge of a precipice. He exaggerates his physical weakness, as he does that of his will; every feeling of discomfort seems to him a serious evil; he reckons its remotest consequences, and suffers frightfully from illnesses which are purely imaginary. His distrustfulness of others aggravates the melancholy which undermines him; apparent oversights, silly speeches, proceedings that are quite indifferent, are credited by him with a gravity which they do not possess, and in those who annoy him without intending it, he sees persecutors and tyrants. If some unfounded antipathy gains possession of him, he cannot bear to see or hear its object, and he may become so obsessed that the image of his aversion will pursue him, and even go so far as to become

an hallucination. And if no diversion of thought occurs in time, these mental troubles may result in madness.

The dangers of the nervous do not come from the senses ; for they are nearly always sober, and often of high purity of life. For them all the harm comes from their will, which is often in eclipse for long periods, during which their moral life is at a standstill or gets warped. If they could be persuaded that their sadness and depression are only due to constitutional weakness, they would be already on the road to recovery. They should avoid artificial excitements which can only aggravate the evil, and eccentricities which can only injure the regard felt for them. When their will is at an ebb, they should wait patiently at rest until it returns ; and, during the hours of black melancholy, they should make a point of trusting in the friends who give them consolation, and hold fast in their hearts the confidence that daylight will soon dawn once more.

III

The Bilious

The bilious, or choleric, might also be called the impulsive, the passionate, or wilful. Their characteristic is a bent for action and for spending their energies. One would think them highly charged with electricity, always ready to launch out in work.

Their blood flows rich and abundant through its channels. After passing through their powerful muscles, it comes into their veins darkened with the products of organic combustion. This waste leaves a deposit of colouring matter beneath the skin. Their complexion is pale verging to dark, sometimes of a yellowish olive-green, as is often seen in hot countries. It must be this colour which has given to their temperament the name of "bilious"; for it is not so much red blood as a sort of bile that seems to circulate beneath their tawny skin. Their eyes and hair are black or brown from the colouring matter deposited in their tissues. Strongly marked features impart to their faces a certain

look of hardness and an expression of severity. Extravagant of energy, the bilious are often lean and withered; and if they are stout, this is due rather to muscular development than to fat.

In these people of great activity the feelings are rather dull than delicate. Their impressions are not keen like those of the sanguine, nor deep and lasting like those of the nervous. Consequently, they are less susceptible, less given to sadness, and they are less subject to moral suffering. If they possess more endurance, they have not the same refinement of feeling, and enter less into the sorrows of others, and in their intercourse they show less fineness of tact.

They exhibit very different degrees of intelligence. Where muscular effort is in most demand, they appear as athletes, and not as thinkers; the mind is absorbed in matter, and is heavy and unfitted for intellectual exercise. In the bilious who are endowed with intelligence, if the mind is neither very pliant nor original, it still possesses breadth, acquires knowledge, and accumulates

information. Practical and handy rather than theoretical, the bilious display more action than thought in their words or writings.

Though they are not lacking in heart, they do not experience the more tender, refined and human feelings. Their passions are strong and impetuous and difficult to control, and stifle the gentler affections and the disinterested devotion that characterize a feeling heart. And also, if they are not careful, their feverish activity and eagerness to reach the end in view lead them to brush on one side or to trample under foot what is in the way, and they are put down for heartless and selfish people.

They are dominated by the need for action. Repose and inactivity are repugnant to them. No sooner are they free from one undertaking than they hasten to find another; there is always some plan working in their minds. Scarcely have they thought of a plan but that they take the work in hand; they do not walk towards their goal, they run. The delays that occur by the way only excite their impatience to reach

the end. They are not among those who put off till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day ; no, they will rather do to-day what should only be done to-morrow. If they happen to meet with obstacles, such difficulties will not stop them. Fear has no hold upon them ; they go straight up to what bars the way, and try to overthrow it. But if they meet with resistance, they become violent, rough and obstinate ; their outbursts are terrible, and their wrath is to be dreaded. If they are beaten, they nurse hatred in their hearts until the hour of vengeance comes.

Such men would be of inestimable value if they knew how to control themselves and to govern their energies. In their hands the most laborious undertakings would be brought to a successful issue. For they would be diligent, tenacious, persevering, without hurting people's feelings and without arousing relentless opposition. But, if they have not laboured sufficiently at overcoming their disposition and at gaining self-possession, they are like engines at full steam rushing at high speed over the rails, with brakes that can-

not be relied on. They follow their instincts without any adequate power to check them. Then they appear passionate, authoritative, ambitious and audacious. They treat others with a disdain that may go so far as to be cruel. Everything must give way to them, and the only right they recognize is the satisfaction of their appetites and the realization of their designs.

If they were to consult us, we should give them two pieces of advice. This is the first: "Be master in your own house: do not hurry; think before acting, and distrust your first impulses." And this is the other: "Pity the humble; never humiliate or crush anyone; never make your superiority felt, nor press your authority."

IV

The Phlegmatic

The phlegmatic, in whom the phlegmatic or lymphatic system is developed at the expense of the circulatory system, have a flabby look and a certain air of insignifi-

cance, with their thick and heavy bodies, their pale and puffy faces, and their large and fleshy noses. But there is reason to look at them closer; for, under an exterior that may be scarcely flattering—and if we except the apathetic, who are simply idlers; and the formless, who are wanting in character, and seem to be merely shapeless lumps of flesh—there are phlegmatic persons of high tone who are people of real value. It is these last who constitute our fourth type of character.

A colourless complexion, a scanty growth of beard, light hair, grey or greenish eyes, slack muscles, and slow and few movements; such are the outward signs by which one recognizes the phlegmatic. Their feelings are neither quick nor delicate, nor deep. Offensive remarks do not touch them very deeply, or leave in them any painful wounds. If they are not hurt by any want of tact, they do not show pleasure in return for demonstrations of kindness. Their intelligence may be very open-minded, and it is almost always judicious, but it is not rich in imagination. Their speech is clear,

well-ordered, positive, rather than highly-coloured, warm, or inspiring. Scientific labour, the fruit of long patience and conscientious inquiry, is more congenial to them than original results that embody the soul in individual thoughts. They have a good heart, but it appears cold; they will give devoted service to the point of heroism if it be called for; but they will rarely do it spontaneously, and they will always be reserved in the expression of their feelings, because their nature is doggedly opposed to any sort of outburst. All their qualities bring them a profitable return; and it were to be wished that others might have a larger share of them.

Activity is the distinguishing mark of the phlegmatic, but a calm and measured activity. Whilst in the bilious it is as impetuous as a torrent, as likely to leave ruin behind it as to result in work, in the phlegmatic it flows as majestically as a river, sometimes producing great effects without doing any harm. The power of control, or the curb of the will, is often inadequate in the bilious; in the phlegmatic, on the

contrary, the curb is often too powerful. It is true that, on this account, the phlegmatic man is prudent, wise, thoughtful; only acting when he is sure of his ground, and that he secures his end without causing irritation, because he turns an obstacle rather than crushes it. But he also misses good opportunities, because he is slow to make a start; and he accomplishes less, because his progress is too deliberate, and the energy he puts forth is too feeble. To him, as well as to the bilious man, we would say: "Be your own master." But whereas, in the case of the bilious, true mastery consists in self-restraint and moderation, it requires the phlegmatic to arouse and stir up his dormant energies.

If virtue were nothing more than the repression of violent passions, one might say that it was easy for the phlegmatic. But since, in all cases, it issues in the fulfilment of moral duty, it is as difficult for the phlegmatic as for others. To the bilious duty says: "Hold and abstain." To the phlegmatic it says: "Wake up, stir yourself, and work."

In either case, the task is a noble and a hard one.

On a higher level, the activity of the phlegmatic is powerful, it is continuous in its exercise, and never flags; it has the twofold advantage of prudence and fruitfulness.

On an ordinary level it is always measured and prudent, but too weak to raise life above the commonplace; it makes a man irreproachable, but he will be lacking in character.

On a lower level, when it gets down to zero, it makes a man colourless, a dreamer, a loafer, and all the more incapable of making his way, in that he is insensible to all higher voices which arouse him from his slumbers.

* * * * *

If the reader has perused these pages in the hope of finding a living portrait of himself, he must feel, now that he has come to the end of them, a real sense of disillusionment. Not one of our pictures gives him a faithful copy of himself. In fact, in each of them we have assembled the features of a like nature, which form exclusive, and therefore exaggerated, types; but men, in reality, are more complex, for they offer a more or

less harmonious combination of the elements proper to each fundamental type.

Moreover, there is another difference between a painting and life: the lines of a portrait are fixed, while the living features of a face are mobile; phlegmatic in the early part of the day, you will perhaps tend towards the bilious type in the fever and rush of business; to-day you may be a prey to the worries of the nervous, and perhaps to-morrow you will have all the dash and good-humour of the sanguine. We are changeable in the extreme, and in order to judge ourselves, we must find the average of our successive states of disposition.

And towards what type of character would we wish our average to tend?

If we could aspire to the good qualities of the most enviable type of character, we should borrow from each of the four classes: from the sanguine we should take his good humour and liveliness, from the nervous the depth and delicacy of his feeling, from the bilious his inexhausitible activity and tenacity,

and, lastly, from the phlegmatic his self-possession and prudence and spirit of continuity.

And our wish may become a programme for us to follow. For, after having noted the features that we should like to see in our own physiognomy, it only remains for us to give them shape in ourselves by means of assiduous care in the cultivation of our character.

CHAPTER VI

THE CULTIVATION OF CHARACTER

IF we are to believe Montaigne and Rousseau, to work at the cultivation of character is not only a superfluous but an iniquitous undertaking. "We should not fail to follow nature," says the former; "the sovereign rule is to conform to her. I have not corrected, like Socrates, my natural dispositions by force of reason." "All is well," says Rousseau, "as it comes from the Author of all things; all gets worse in the hands of man."

But these views of dreamy philosophers are in contradiction with the experience of centuries. La Bruyère better expressed the truth, when he wrote: "Children are supercilious, disdainful, bad-tempered, envious, prying, self-interested, flighty, timorous, heady, liars, deceitful . . .;

they will bear no evils, and like to inflict them. They are already men."

With less emphasis, but more accuracy, this is how a psychologist describes the moral state of those who, being careless about self-cultivation, let themselves drift at nature's mercy: "Their character is an incoherent assemblage of qualities which are not only most diverse, but often contradictory and clashing, which thwart or support one another, and then establish an equilibrium amongst themselves ; and their life, instead of being the logical development of a law that has to be discovered, a necessary scheme of foreseen movements, is only a succession of diverse and often incoherent acts."

To every man who learns in the school of experience, and who also has the noble ambition of giving his life its highest value and yield, the cultivation of character is a binding necessity. He knows that, just as an uncultivated field gets covered with useless brambles, and just as the untrained ox or horse is unfit for work, so man, if abandoned to his contradictory impulses, ac-

quires neither personal dignity nor the social fruitfulness of which he is capable. He is therefore conscious that to neglect himself is to be wanting to God, to society, and to himself.

But is cultivation possible? St. Francis of Sales gives the reply in these charming phrases: "Means have been happily discovered," says he, "of changing bitter almond-trees into sweet, by making holes at the bottom to let out the sap: why cannot we let out our perverse inclinations to become better? There is no disposition so good by nature that it cannot become bad through vicious habits; and so there is no nature so refractory that, by the grace of God in the first place, and then by industry and vigilance, it may not be subdued and overcome."

The suppleness of nature has, however, its limits, so that we should expose ourselves to serious disillusionment, if we expected to recast our natural dispositions in their entirety. Certainly we may, by a wise course of treatment, ameliorate our temperament and make it more amenable to our will; we can likewise, by a

continuity of moral effort, weaken or even eradicate certain of our tendencies, and increase, or even create, certain habits. But, in spite of our zeal, especially if years have diminished our plasticity, we shall keep the stamp which heredity and education have imprinted upon us. Moreover, the question at stake is not to cease to be ourselves ; the end to aim at is to turn what we are to the best possible account.

For this reason, we reduce the formation of our character to three points. Let us begin with the study of ourselves, in order to know the difficulties to be overcome, and the resources which we have at our disposal. Then let us mark out a programme of life, the fulfilment of which must be the object of all our efforts. Lastly, we shall inquire what means we can find to help us in the moral effort upon which all our success will depend.

The Cultivation of Character

I

Self-Knowledge

It is quite an elementary truth to say that, before setting to work, a man must know himself. Our own soul is both the raw material to be worked up, and the instrument we have to work with. But clay cannot be handled like marble, nor iron like withes. So, too, the use of tools requires a certain amount of apprenticeship ; but the clumsy can spoil a fine instrument. Therefore, our scheme of life depends upon our constitution. The man who has no self-knowledge cannot draw up a plan that is suited to him.

But the men who are ignorant of themselves are legion. And where are those who know themselves ? How many are there who make a study of themselves ? The ancients were right in saying to whoever would enter into the way of wisdom : "Know thyself." Socrates, the maker of this precept, knew well that a man's greatest misfortune is to be lacking in self-knowledge. Being ignorant of what they are,

they have no desire for self-cultivation; even if they had made a plan, they could not carry out the work of inward development to a successful issue.

It is all the more important to tell men to study themselves, because they generally fly from themselves. Worldly frivolities fascinate them, and keep them away from their own hearts; for they have not the energy to break loose from them. Besides, to come back to one's self is painful. Our eyes carry us away, and our attention is brought back to ourselves only by a costly effort; none but those who think carve out the path towards themselves. Lastly, we take no pleasure in our own company; our faults fill us with disgust, and we hasten to turn our looks away.

If, then, we have so little inclination to observe ourselves, we must force ourselves by an effort of will to study ourselves. The means to use are the examination of conscience and the warnings of our friends.

The examination of conscience is an indispensable practice for the development of the soul. Moreover,

moralists and ascetics recommend it strongly.

All the founders of religious orders, as soon as they have made up their minds to lead their disciples to the conquest of themselves, in order that they may all go together to God with their souls in their hands, have given in their rules a place of honour to examination of conscience. Silence, which is so favourable to the recollection of all the faculties, is rigorously demanded during a number of hours: a busy and fruitful silence, for each one has then to exhibit great interior activity, to keep watch over his acts, to pass in review the words he has uttered, and to discover at their birth the least leanings of the heart.

To give a stimulus to this inner inquiry, each one is under an obligation to express the result of his inquiry to the director of his conscience. The latter, in turn, contributes the light of his own observations, and gives a definite shape to what is vague in the personal perceptions of the individual, whose eye is too close to make sure of always seeing aright. And if more information is needed the brethren of the

community, who get a profound understanding of the soul as reflected in the outward demeanour, will be interrogated, and will say, as true friends, that which self-love would not dare to acknowledge.

These methods, which hold a sovereign place in the cloister, would also work wonders in the world, if men had only the courage to make use of them. At any rate, Christians, who pray night and morning, should enter into themselves under the light of God, and, in order not to be the victims of any illusion, they should go and ask their best friend : " What do men think of me ?"

To him who makes such a self examination and inquiry honestly, the knowledge of himself is never denied. " Seek, and you shall find," says the Master. Yes, if you seek in uprightness, you will find in truth. You will thenceforward know what your nature is, what you have to fear or to hope from your disposition, what are your short-comings, and what is the value of your capacities, what direction your efforts must take, and what programme you ought to mark out for yourself.

II

The Plan of Life

The best advantage you can get from the knowledge of yourself is to mark out a plan of life according to your measure. For if you have no individual rule to guide you, you will go at haphazard. But this would be a discreditable thing to do, for caprice would only end in the dissipation of the gifts of nature and of grace which God has given you.

You will have a rule, then, to mark out your path, and at every moment it will arouse your courage by the prospect of the work to be fulfilled, which, constantly calling you to some definite duty, will save you from those terrible blanks in life in which souls so easily suffer shipwreck through tedious idleness.

This rule, which must be the outcome of your own initiative, so that you may put all the more heart into your pursuit of it, should nevertheless be revised and approved by your spiritual director. Without such a check upon it, it might be too strict or too slack; if too strict, it would

do you harm by pressing too hardly on you, and wear you out with the burden of regulations ill-adapted to your powers; if too slack, it would not keep you up to the mark, and would not give you an assistance proportioned to your requirements. Therefore, whatever you may decide upon, have it sanctioned by some prudent person who is interested in you.

A good rule of life must include two elements—a scheme of work, and a list of bad tendencies to be reformed and of good habits to be developed.

The scheme of work, while keeping the elasticity that befits human nature, must nevertheless order the employment of every hour of the day, the times of rest as well as the hours of work; for nothing is more fatal than uncertainty of will. The two first points to settle are the hours of rising and going to bed; then put down the time for religious exercises, and then the hours for work and due recreation. If the order of work depends upon yourself, so arrange it that what is urgent and difficult comes first. Let the

maxim, "Do not put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day," constantly stir your will. By following a rule thus ordered, the character gets tempered, acquires a habit of seriousness, and corrects, almost unconsciously, harmful inclinations. So then, ascetic teachers are right, when we go to them to refresh our souls in a retreat, in recommending us, above all, to lay down the definite lines of a special rule for ourselves.

At the outset, the mere fact of determining the order of our employment makes a programme of life which is advantageous to character. But its interests are directly advanced by the resolutions with regard to our inclinations included in our rule.

Begin by making a note of the habits that are hurtful to your character ; some, perchance, are organic, like sensuality, and the love of eating and drinking ; others are moral, like frivolity, fickleness, susceptibility, jealousy, anger, pride, timidity, selfishness, and so on. Next, see what habits would help to raise and strengthen your character, such as blameless uprightness, constant self-

possession, perseverance in your resolutions, kindness and cheerfulness in your intercourse, simplicity and self-restraint in your manners, and the like. And mark especially your dominant failing, which is apt to carry you away and to make you fall into numerous and most serious faults, and definitely resolve to acquire the contrary good quality that best acts as a check upon it.

But take care not to overburden your will with a multiplicity of plans. Take your failings one by one. "If, year by year, you eradicate only one," says *The Imitation of Christ*, "you will soon reach perfection." This is because, in hunting down a single failing, your whole soul is on the strain in the direction of moral effort; and this tension, besides helping daily progress in the acquisition of virtue, is already, in itself, that interior condition which constitutes character in man.

III

The Mainstays of Moral Effort

Although you have done much when you have marked out your programme of life, there still remains a great and laborious course to be pursued. When a sea-captain has marked his destination on the map and traced his course, he does not go to sleep in port, but calls his men together, gets up full steam, and drives his ship through the waves. And you, too, after you have acquainted yourself with your route, must gather up your powers, and give them a sharp impetus, and devote yourself entirely to the work of self-cultivation. Do not hide from yourself the fact that you will need high courage, not only to undertake, but also to persevere in the way of self-discipline and renouncement. For a constant effort of will is the price of embracing and observing a rule of life, despite the weariness of a changeable nature and the daily disappointments of an existence which is dis-

tracted or overloaded with business; and effort is not less required for the daily repression of your most deadly tendency by suppressing the actions that it inspires, and for the continuous development of the inclination that is desirable by a frequent repetition of the acts that create it. The formation of character, like the whole moral life of which it is part, comes back, then, to continuity of effort.

Thus is verified the law laid down by the Master: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." This kingdom, promised to moral energy, is not only that of the world to come, it is also the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of which Christ says: "The kingdom of heaven is within you." It is as if He said: "Use a generous violence in the conquest of yourselves, and you will at the same time gain possession of God."

It is true that effort, by the very fact of making it, becomes less painful; for the will, by its mere exercise, acquires facility, and this is the just recompense of its courage. Nevertheless, whatever moral height

one may attain, one should never make a truce with endeavour, for fear of falling of one's own weight immediately, like a bird that ceases to beat its wings. How many, indeed, in a few days of slackness and relaxation lose the fruit of long and conscientious effort! Therefore, we have to do ourselves violence all through life.

For this reason, whoever wishes to succeed in this high enterprise of self-development must know and make use of the mainstays of moral endeavour. But these indispensable auxiliaries of the will are three in number: the interior life, the impulse given by others, and trustful prayer.

* * * * *

"To withdraw into one's self and into God," says Lacordaire, "is the greatest power there is in the world." No higher praise could be given to the interior life. Further, go and see souls who are recollected, take note of the moral force that they exhibit in the performance of their duties, and you will return convinced that to retire into one's self and to

live in one's inner life is a practice which is supremely fruitful.

The majority of people, who are drawn out of themselves by legitimate employments, cannot dwell within themselves in any continuous way. Yet they would reap the benefit of it if they were to return to this practice twice a day, morning and evening, and also, in a hurried fashion, when some business difficulty crops up. All who are in religion are bound to it by their rule itself: for the period of mental prayer, in the morning and the evening recollection, is nothing else than a time of silence, during which the soul has to come back to itself and take possession of itself. To those in the world, who are usually so distraught by frivolity or absorbed in work, we can give no better advice than to bind themselves without fail to a quarter of an hour's reflection in the morning, and to give themselves another five minutes at least before the close of the day.

In order that these brief moments of interior life may be to you a real renewal of moral force, revive in your heart any noble thought or

generous feeling, and fire your will with victorious determination.

Your thoughts should have a trend something like this: "Life is the great treasure that God has entrusted to my keeping. To waste its gifts would be shamelessly unfaithful no my part, and also an irreparable misfortune. Not only ought I not to lose it in inactivity or in doing wrong, but I have to make it fruitful: it must bring forth fruit for God, for others, and for myself. But, if I lose my time, if I let myself slide down the slope of my bad inclinations, if I do not take shelter from such and such a danger, I shall compromise my eternal salvation, and fritter away my life here. Unless I exert myself, I shall be no better than a useless parasite; but since I want my life to be good and useful, I will be courageous." Then it is that great desires arise in the heart, and St. Teresa tells us that they are always useful, even if one is unable to realize them all; for, like strong beats of the wing, they keep us out of the mire, at least for a time.

Since the convictions of the mind are the motive power of men, the

will is then set going to carry out present duty. Nevertheless, it is a good thing to stir it up by repeated interior acts, which gradually raise the level of our resolutions. Ollé-Laprune thought highly of these inner suggestions with which a man inspires himself, and he advised young people to take a little time every morning to say : " I will, yes, I will !" until they felt sufficiently masters of their will to be sure not to flinch from lions in the path. And every day we must thus regain possession of ourselves, because every day our failings remind us of our weakness. The worst of faults is discouragement. " Uplift your heart when it is cast down," says St. Francis of Sales, " humbling yourself deeply before God for the acknowledgment of your wretchedness, not wondering if you fall, since there is nothing astonishing in the infirmities of the infirm, and in the feebleness of the feeble, and in your own pitiful wretchedness."

* * * * *

In order to recruit one's strength thus in the interior life, one must have already acquired a certain

moral force, one must be able to be self-sufficing. But how many men are thus self-supporting? Are there, indeed, any who are really self-sufficing, and who renew their impulse towards the good by the mere fact of coming into contact with their own hearts? On the contrary, are not all in the condition of requiring a spark from outside to enkindle within them the flame of right aspiration? And whence comes this spark? From men and books.

In an hour of black pessimism, the writer of *The Imitation* said: "Every time I had recourse to men, I came back less of a man myself." Though there are men, and large numbers of them, intercourse with whom is bad, on the other hand, there are others whose company is beneficent. Think of the sad days when your soul has been plunged in dull despondency, when you have thought that truth was slipping away from you, and that your will has seemed to be crushed. The invisible hand of Providence led you to go and see someone who was kind to you; and the mere fact of his kindliness restored

you to peace. But he spoke to you: and with his speech came light. He brightened up in your company: his communicative warmth rekindled your will, and you returned from him full of courage for duty and for self-sacrifice. Yes, man's soul overflows its borders; if it is bad, it defiles; but, if it is holy and generous, it stirs and uplifts life. Moreover, and especially at the outset, you must have a friend to be your mentor: when you feel anxious, you will go to him for light; when you are undecided, he will give you firmness; when you are weak, he will be an indispensable support; when you are apathetic, you will get the vivifying impulse of his strength. "Choose him among a thousand," says Holy Scripture. "And I say, —among ten thousand," adds St. Francis of Sales. He may be your spiritual director; often, he will be preferably a confidential friend, someone with whom you are intimate, and whom you can easily approach, and who has some authority over you through the sympathy with which he inspires you.

Do not have recourse to him out

of idleness, and in order to escape the trouble of willing and acting ; but from zeal, to supply your weakness and to raise the temperature of your spirit. You do not want his influence to absorb or stifle you, but you would have him to help you in bursting the bonds that hold you in captivity. In a word, the man to look for is not to be a warder, but a deliverer.

Those who awaken souls are of inestimable value. Only they are scarce, and sometimes hard to approach. Their want is supplied by their books. True it is that books have not the communicative warmth of life itself : but beneath the ashes of words there are, for those who look, embers of the soul hidden, which will kindle anew and warm the reader. Amongst the works that count there are two kinds of books : books of instruction and books of life. The former teach ; the latter enlighten and enkindle us. Have always at your disposition at least one of these spiritual books. Refer to it morning and evening, and listen to it as to a faithful friend. The activity of a man who is faithful in

taking this strengthening tonic every day never dies out.

Of all moral helps the most powerful is God. God is both within you and around you. He penetrates to your very marrow, just as He envelops you with His beneficent atmosphere.

Doubtless He dwells in mystery; for your eyes see Him not. But He is neither inert nor dumb, for, if you pray to Him with confidence, you will prove by experience that one never returns from Him with empty hands. All fervent prayer makes the mind more enlightened, enlivens the heart, and strengthens the will. It is therefore an inestimable support to moral effort. St. Simon does not hesitate to attribute to piety the happy transformation that Fénélon wrought in his disciple, the Duke of Burgundy. "The wonder," he says, "is that devotion and grace in a very short time made another man of him, and changed such great and formidable failings into entirely opposite virtues." Christian teachers know what victories they enable young people to win by being faithful to the practices of religion.

Moreover, no man of piety can have failed to observe that with the increase of prayer virtue grows, and that with the neglect of prayer quickly come disorder of the spiritual faculties and a slackening of the inner springs of character.

Here, then, is a real force.

According to infidels, prayer owes all its effectiveness to the power of interior suggestion. Of a truth, we shall not deny that prayer includes suggestion. In itself, it is first of all a moral effort and a vigorous straining of the soul towards the good before it becomes a pressing appeal for Divine assistance. We might even say that, as sin is its own punishment by the very fact that it is a misfortune to man, so prayer is its own recompense, owing to the energy that it evokes in the pious soul. Even if it were no more than that, prayer would be far from being a delusion.

But, in the opinion of the greatest number of believers, no matter to what denomination they may belong, God is not deaf to the supplications of those who pray. Besides evoking spiritual activity, prayer draws down

Divine gifts and supernatural and gratuitous graces, the strength of which increases our moral resilience tenfold. Were we to doubt this Divine virtue of prayer, we should prevent it from springing up in our hearts, and deprive our wills of their most effective assistance. Further, why should we doubt, when it is all to our advantage to believe? Is not this the place to recall the saying of the old moralist: "Wait, and do not doubt about God until it has been well proved that He does not exist."

Whether we have faith or are in hesitation, we shall then have recourse to God as the chief moral mainstay. If we have faith, with certainty that He will hear us; if we are in hesitation, with the reasonable hope that our prayer will not be in vain. All who pray will have an inward experience of the fulfilment of the Master's promise: "Ask, and you shall receive."

CONCLUSION

THE writer will be grievously disappointed if, on closing the book, the reader does not decide to labour on his soul, and to cultivate his character.

A human soul is of too great a price to be neglected like common dust. Its destiny is too sublime for one to be careless about fulfilling it.

So great and so profound is the significance of man's life that it must not be left to the caprice of chance. For every life that misses fire is an irreparable misfortune—a misfortune to the individual who suffers from it in this world, and will have to pay the penalty of it in the world to come; and a misfortune to society, which finds an element of disturbance just where it might expect a possibility of help.

Now, it is character that makes life; without character, no life can

count ; and life develops and fructifies in proportion to character.

But character is not given by birth ; it must be developed. By birth, man is like a field in which grow both good and bad inclinations ; by cultivation, he either roots up or cuts down the bad and lets the better predominate.

And upon whom is the choice between these tendencies laid ?

Zealous teachers set about it with all possible care. But, besides the fact that good teachers are rare, and that very few can be counted among them, they do not get a fundamental understanding of the soul ; they can only enlighten and arouse it ; they do not enable it to dispense with the task laid upon the individual.

So that, after all, the work of self-cultivation for each one of us falls upon our own shoulders ; those who *will* it, can succeed in it ; and no one can make good the defect to those who take no interest in themselves.

This book is written to help those who wish it.

In it they have been taught mainly two lessons.

The first is, that no one should grieve over his natural disposition ; but that each one must study it in its strength and weakness to take it in the right way, and to turn it to the best account of which it is capable. It is useless to sigh over what one is ; it is wiser to make use of one's instrument, such as it is.

In the next place, whatever our nature may be, let us remember that it is in our hands, like supple clay in the hands of the craftsmen, and that by acts repeated time after time with patience, we have to make it express the outlines of the moral ideal : a conscience that is unswervingly upright, a will that is bold and free, a heart that is sympathetic and devoted, and a bearing that is never undignified.

" Each of us has a touch of Phidias within him," said Edgar Quinet. " Every man is a sculptor who has to shape his marble or his clay, until, out of the formless mass of rude instincts, he has hewn or moulded an intelligent, free, and just personality."

And the Church tells us that this moral labour must be undertaken by

all who aspire to citizenship in the heavenly city. "For the living stones of which it is built are cut and polished by the hands of the workman before being laid in the place of honour."

R. AND T. WASHBOURNE, LTD., LONDON.

The Angelus Series

OF

Authorized Translations of Standard Foreign Works, Original Works, and Selections

THE FIRST SIX VOLUMES ARE

ON KINDNESS. By Very Rev. J. GUIBERT, S.S. 20,000 *Copies sold in France.*

ON CHARACTER. By Very Rev. J. GUIBERT, S.S. 18,000 *Copies sold in France.*

ON THANKSGIVING. Selected from Father Faber's Works. By the Hon. ALISON STOURTON.

FROM A GARDEN JUNGLE. By AN UNPAID SECRETARY.

ON PIETY. By Very Rev. J. GUIBERT, S.S. 13,000 *Copies sold in France.*

ON THE EXERCISES OF PIETY. By Very Rev. J. GUIBERT, S.S. 13,000 *Copies sold in France.*

OTHER VOLUMES IN PREPARATION.

Art linen, gilt, with ingrained paper sides, 1s. 3d. *net.*
Paste-grain leather, gilt top and side, 2s. 6d. *net.*

LONDON:
R. & T. WASHBOURNE, LTD., PATERNOSTER ROW.