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SERIES
OF
POPULAR ESSAYS,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF
PRINCIPLES ESSENTIALLY CONNECTED
WITH THE IMPROVEMENT
OF THE UNDERSTANDING, THE IMAGINATION,
AND THE HEART.

BY ELIZABETH HAMILTON,
AUTHOR OF LETTERS ON THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF
EDUCATION, COTTAGERS OF GLENBURNIE, &c.

Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part :
Do thou but thine, and be not diffident
Of Wisdom ; she deserts thee not, if thou
Dismiss not her. — MILTON.

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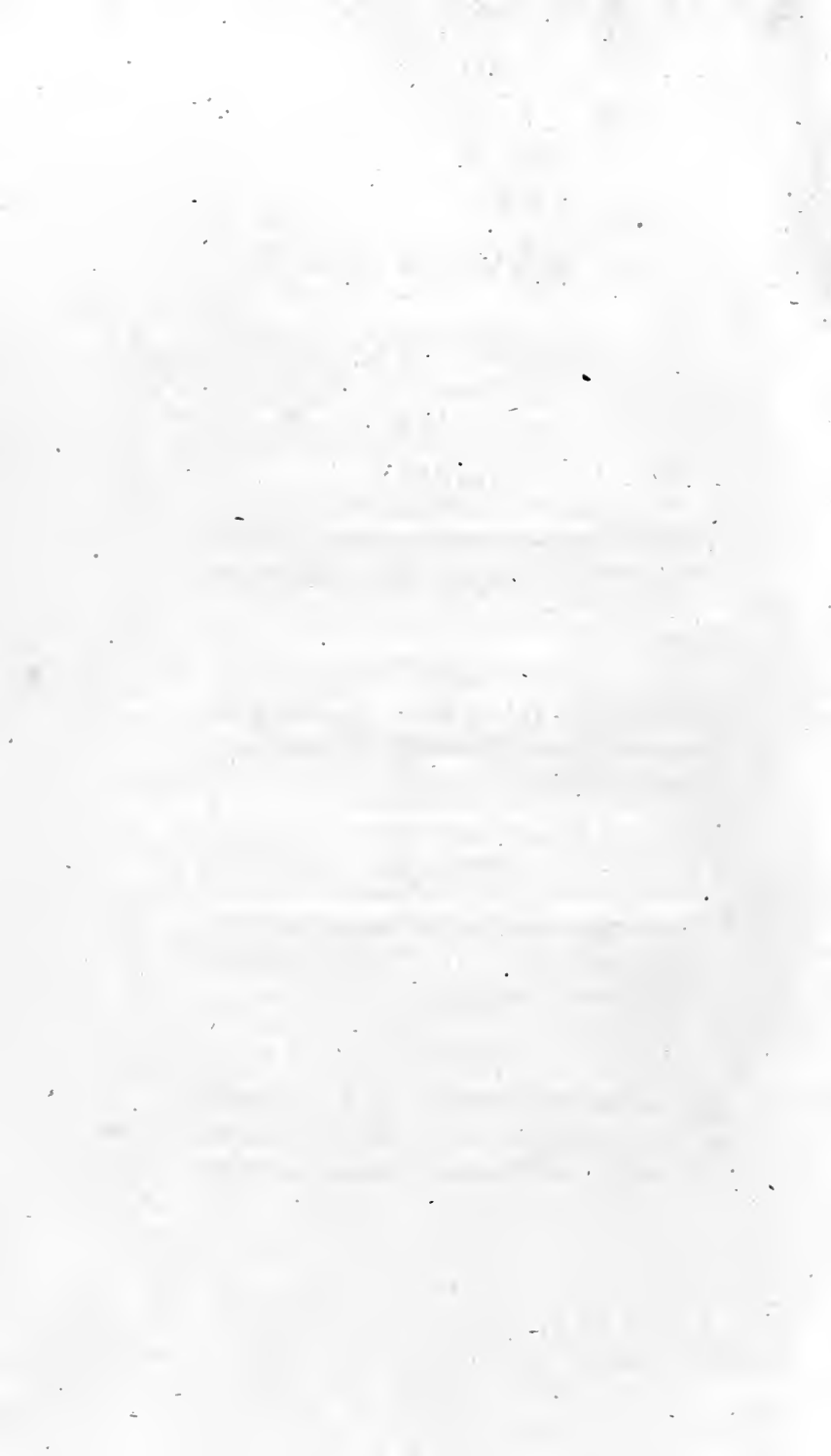
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TO
THE REVEREND
ARCHIBALD ALISON,
PREBENDARY OF SARUM,
AND
SENIOR CLERGYMAN OF THE EPISCOPAL CHAPEL
IN THE COWGATE, EDINBURGH,
THESE ESSAYS
ARE,
AS A TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE
AND AFFECTION,
MOST CORDIALLY AND RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED.



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INTRODUCTION.

IT is so nearly impossible to convey, in the narrow limits of a title-page, any distinct notion of the nature and design of a Work like this, and yet so desirable that the reader should have some guide to his expectations, that the task of writing an Introduction seems to be imposed upon the Author as an essential duty. I must, however, confess, that it is a duty performed with great reluctance; for, whether it be from natural infirmity, or from the habits of my life, such is the repugnance I feel to speaking of my own works, that it re-

quires no inconsiderable effort to address the reader upon the subject. This confession is farther extorted by the consciousness of having, from my backwardness, lost all the advantages which my Work might have derived, had I availed myself of the opportunities which my acquaintance with many eminent judges of literature seemed to offer, of conversing with them on the subjects of which it treats. The inference to be made from this acknowledgment, is, that when I have erred, I am alone responsible for the error.

I now hasten to the explanatory observations that are presumed to be necessary. It has in the title-page been stated, that what is contained in these Essays, is connected with the improve-

ment of the understanding, the imagination, and the heart. I have now to prove the existence, and to explain the nature of this connexion. In order to which it may at the outset be necessary to premise, that it is not in the form of didactic precept, or grave admonition, that I have presumed to offer my assistance, even to the uninformed. It is by calling the attention of the reader to a serious examination of the obstacles which impede our progress, and which must be surmounted, before either the heart or the understanding can be effectually improved, that I have attempted to accomplish the end proposed. The obstacles to which I allude, are not created by external circumstances : they are to be found within, and can only be discovered by an actual survey of our

common nature ; such as may, however, be taken by every person capable of observation and reflection.

It will hence be inferred, that the subjects treated of in the following Essays are nearly connected with the science of mind ; nor is the inference erroneous. I do not indeed know how it is possible to effect improvement, without taking into consideration the nature of that which is to be improved. But let not those who hastily decide upon the merit of a Work by looking into the first pages, hence conclude, that I mean to be dull, deep, and metaphysical throughout. I assure them of the contrary ; and that, as it is not in my power to be very deep, I have taken care to be as little dull as possible.

The conclusions which I have presumed to make, are deduced from facts that are the objects of our familiar observation; and when it has been thought necessary to illustrate them, the mode of illustration adopted will be found to correspond with the term *popular*, assumed in the title.

Those who estimate the importance of every species of knowledge by its utility, and appreciate its utility by the degree in which it is calculated to facilitate their moral improvement, only require to be assured that a subject possesses those advantages, in order to have their attention excited to an examination of its merits. But as prejudice takes a shorter course, it is of

some importance, where metaphysical inquiry is its object, to be able to obviate its influence, by shewing in what a slight degree such prejudice would militate against me.

Of the utility or inutility of the science of mind, few in reality have it in their power to judge. It is to the learned that what is written by the learned is addressed, and it is consequently to the learned, that the knowledge of many useful truths must be confined, until, through the medium of inferior channels, they obtain currency.

To be thought instrumental in thus diffusing the observations or discoveries of superior minds, I should deem no

mean praise. But it is not the object I have had principally in view in writing these Essays. However I have availed myself of the light derived from the investigations of our eminent philosophers, as the object at which I have aimed is distinct from theirs, the assistance afforded has been only partial. Of my design the prominent feature is an attempt to deduce, from a consideration of the nature of the human mind, proofs, that revealed religion offers the only effectual means of improving the human character. I have consequently confined my observations respecting mind, to facts that are within the knowledge of every common observer, and which all have it in their power to investigate and comprehend.

The First Essay in the Series is but remotely connected with the subjects discussed in the succeeding Essays. But as, in the years which have elapsed since it was written, I have not had reason to retract the sentiments it contains, with regard to the advantages derived from the science of mind, it has been retained as a useful, though not essential, preliminary. It is devoted to an examination of the chief objections that have been made to the utility of that knowledge which I deem to be eminently and practically useful; and to an illustration of the advantages derived from it, as affording the only means of detecting what is visionary or unprofitable in our plans of education.

To such of my readers as have no peculiar interest in the subject of education, this Essay may perhaps appear superfluous; but small, I trust, is the number of intelligent persons, to whom what so nearly concerns the happiness of society as the improvement of the rising generation, will appear devoid of interest. As a first step towards the improvement of the understanding, I have, in the succeeding Essay, endeavoured to point out the means provided by nature for the development of the intellectual faculties; showing, that attention is in every instance the agent by whose operation they are developed, and improved.

I am conscious, that in having endeavoured to prove that there is an exact correspondence between the degree

in which we are capable of exercising any, or all of the intellectual faculties, and the degree of attention bestowed on the peculiar objects of that faculty, I have possibly exposed myself to the charge of presumption. It may by some be deemed unpardonable in me, to present the result of my own observations on the agency of attention, unsupported by the authority of any former writer. But it is not the truly great and enlightened philosophers who have devoted themselves to the science of mind, that will be most forward to condemn me. Those will behold with complacency, the genuine fruits of observation and reflection, necessarily untinged by those prejudices and predilections, which are so apt tenaciously to adhere to the disciples of every distinguished

school; and when I have erred, will do the favour to point out my error, with the indulgence due to one who is earnestly bent on the pursuit of truth.

I can no where with greater propriety make a confession of having, in the commencement of that very Essay, unintentionally afforded an evidence of the truth of my remarks with respect to the agency of attention; as, had my attention been more sedulously directed to the powers of language, I should doubtless have expressed my meaning with a precision which would have obviated the necessity of explanation.* Nor is

* The passage alluded to occurs at p. 54. of the first volume. It is there stated as my present conviction, that in having, in a former Work, denominated attention *a faculty susceptible of improvement*, I had committed an

this the solitary instance in which I have applied terms in a way that may to the

error. But, as I fear that I have not with sufficient accuracy pointed out the supposed blunder, that no obscurity may rest upon my meaning, I must request the intelligent reader to observe, that in the Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education, I had ascribed the development and improvement of the faculties of perception, judgment, &c. to the improvement of the faculty of attention; but, on further consideration, had been convinced, that it was not properly speaking to any improvement in the power of attention, but to a certain application of that power, that the cultivation of perception, judgment, &c. ought to have been attributed. I am too little skilled in etymology, to enter into any dispute concerning the propriety of terms; but according to the ideas which I attach to the word *faculty*, as expressive of an operation of the mind, attention is a primary and elementary faculty. The term *habit*, when substituted for attention, denotes to me the application of the faculty, but not the faculty itself. By habit, we acquire a greater facility in the application of attention, and, consequently, whatever tends to produce or confirm this habit, may be said to improve the faculty, though it appears to me, that, in reality, it only enables us to enjoy the benefits resulting from its use.

learned reader seem inadmissible. But if no obscurity has rested on my meaning, if my language has throughout been sufficiently intelligible to convey the observations I intended to communicate, more trifling faults will I trust be pardoned.

In the first part of the Third Essay I have endeavoured to explain the effects that result from a peculiar direction of attention on the power of imagination; and to prove, that all the combinations produced by that complex faculty, however widely they may vary in different minds, in respect to their excellence and utility, constantly, in every individual mind, correspond to the degree in which the faculties of the understanding have been cultivated, and to the nature

of the objects on which they have been employed. Contenting myself with giving a simple statement of the fact, with such illustrations as seemed calculated to render it intelligible to my younger readers, I have left it to those who are capable of pursuing the subject, to make such farther use of the hints that have been offered, as may be useful in aiding their inquiries into the sources of the pleasure derived from works of fancy in general, and more especially from poetical composition. They will quickly perceive, that the imagination of every poet who has any claim to originality, has some peculiar characteristic; and may, by applying the hints alluded to, discover whence that distinguishing feature has originat-

ed, which gives to a certain description of poetry its power to charm.

The second part of the same Essay has been devoted to an inquiry into the emotions of taste, with an intention to show the agency of attention in producing and modifying these emotions.

The nature of the subject has compelled me here to anticipate observations that will afterwards be found more fully stated and explained.

Taste being not only one of the highest exercises of the understanding, but an exercise of the affections of the heart, is, according to my view of the subject, a connecting link between the speculative and active powers of our nature; its

emotions being dependant on both, and never produced by either separately. It should seem as if this ought naturally to have led to an immediate inquiry concerning the nature of the affections, whose operations, mingling with those of intellect, are necessary to the production of the emotions of taste. But, for reasons which will on the perusal of the Fourth Essay be rendered obvious, the consideration of the provision made for the development and cultivation of the benevolent affections, has been reserved for the concluding Essay, and is preceded by observations on the nature and influence of the *propensity to magnify the idea of self*, which appears to me to be the source of all the malevolent and vindictive passions.

This most active principle, if I may dare, without authority, so to denominate a propensity whose operations are spontaneous and universal, has, as far as my very limited information extends, been usually confounded either with selfishness, or with self-love. Its operations may mingle with either; but to me it appears to be specifically different from both. I have endeavoured to point out the distinction, and to display the operation of the propensity to expand or enlarge the idea of self, in a multiplicity of examples. I have detected it as operating in the vain, the proud, and the ambitious; have shown its connexion with party-spirit, and proved it to be the essential constituent of bigotry and intolerance. Whether the facts presented be such as to war-

rant the conclusions drawn from them, the judicious reader must determine ; but the convictions they have impressed upon my own mind, I have thought it my duty to state without reserve.

If I have freely and boldly declared the opinions that are the result of my own observations on human character and conduct, I have been at pains to afford to the reader an opportunity of observing the same objects in the same point of view, that he may be enabled to correct the mistakes I have made concerning them. And having no ambition to be considered as the author of a peculiar theory, am so far from being anxious for the establishment of my own opinions, that I am sincerely and earnestly desirous, that they should

be no farther received than as they are found, on accurate examination, to correspond with truth.

If apology be still deemed necessary, I confess I have none to offer, not having been as yet convinced, that there is any subject within the range of human intellect, on which the capacity of any intelligent Being of either sex, may not be profitably, or, at least, innocently employed. In contemplating the works of God, time can never be spent unprofitably, if these lead to the contemplation of the great Creator. And as all our researches into the works of nature, tend to increase our admiration of divine wisdom, by affording such astonishing proofs of correspondence between the means and

the end, as argues a congruity of design that exalts our conceptions of the Omniscient, we may from analogy conclude, that were the intellectual world as obvious to our investigation as the material; we should perceive, that all which excites our wonder and admiration, in the structure of organized bodies, is as nothing, compared to the wonders of the little world within. The means of investigation are different; but while we have before us so many evidences of the operations of the mind, and may, by an attentive observation of these, obtain a knowledge of its various powers, and of the effects produced on them by circumstances that are either favourable or unfavourable to their cultivation, it is vain to complain that we are destitute of means. Were

our inquiries to answer no other purpose than that of gratifying a laudable desire of extending our knowledge of existing things, it would still be difficult to prove the pursuit unworthy of rational beings, or that it was to be ranked with those which merit no higher praise than that they afford an innocent amusement to the hours of leisure.

To the science of mind, considered merely as a speculative science, plausible objections may be made; but as the knowledge of mind is the knowledge of the most valuable and most unalienable part of our possessions; nay, more, is the knowledge of a treasure which we may use, or abuse, but for the use or abuse of which we are hereafter to be responsible, it cannot properly be

characterized as speculative. Those who are impressed with a deep conviction of their responsibility, will readily acknowledge, that if it can be proved that a knowledge of the various powers and faculties of the human mind may be rendered essentially instrumental in confirming our religious faith, and in improving our moral qualities, no science can be put in competition with it, either as interesting or useful.

It is only to such operations of the mind as are, in this point of view, objects of great importance, that I have presumed to solicit attention ; and as it is not in the vain hope of adding to the information of the speculative inquirer, but for the purpose of directing the spirit of inquiry to the practical advantages result-

ing from observations on the human mind, which all have it in their power to verify, my departure from authorities may, I trust, be deemed excusable. Thus, though in mentioning *the propensity to magnify the idea of self* as a principle of the mind, I may, to profound metaphysicians, appear to have egregiously erred, if my observations, with respect to the effects resulting from that propensity, are found to correspond with truth, the practical benefit will not, by any consideration of error in the classification, be either lessened or destroyed.

If, on reflecting on what passes in our own minds, and on observing what passes in the minds of others, we are convinced of the existence and extensive

influence of that baleful impulse, to which (though not without such definition as must prevent mistake) I have sometimes given the appellation of *selfish principle*, an examination of the means afforded by Providence for counteracting and subduing it, will not be an object of indifference.

An inquiry into these means forms the subject of the Fifth Essay. The provision made by the wisdom of Providence, for the counteraction of that spontaneous propensity which I consider as the origin of all moral depravity, is there represented as having its source in the benevolent affections. The means afforded by the Author of our being for the development and cultivation of the affections, comes in course next into

consideration. I have stated, what seems to me sufficient grounds for inferring, that the affections of the heart are, like the faculties of the understanding, dependant on the agency of attention; and that, consequently, they are developed and cultivated, only in proportion to the degree in which attention has been given to qualities that naturally excite emotions of sympathy. Thus, the quality of goodness excites love, wisdom excites respect, &c. But if attention to these qualities be necessary towards exciting the correspondent emotions, it must of course follow, that if we can suppose a human being to be so circumstanced, as never to have had an opportunity of observing the manifestation of these qualities, he would of necessity be doomed to remain for ever

destitute of the correspondent affections. That this is actually the case I am convinced, and have, as clearly as my abilities permits, stated the grounds of my conviction.

In the views presented to my mind, of the provision made for the development of the affections in the infant heart, which is such as to render their exercise almost coeval with the consciousness of existence, thus precluding the possibility of their remaining in any human being completely dormant, I perceive such demonstration of the benevolence of Deity, as has frequently induced me to wish that another Paley may arise to prosecute the subject, and, from facts respecting the operations of the mind, to produce evidence similar

in kind to those brought forward by that distinguished author, in his well known treatise on natural theology.

If it be almost impossible to contemplate the complicated structure of the organs of hearing, or of sight, without profound admiration of the infinite wisdom which adapted each minute and delicate part of the apparatus to the special end it was designed to answer, and which in every instance employed a series of contrivances to produce the intended effect, I may surely presume, that the same demonstration of unity of design, in what may likewise be called a series of contrivances for the due development of affections that are essential to individual and social happiness,

cannot be contemplated with indifference.

Having stated such arguments as my own reflections suggested, in proof that the benevolent affections are cultivated in proportion to the degree in which they are habitually exercised by attention to their proper objects ; and shown that these objects, viz. qualities that excite sympathy, are, from the frailty of our nature, rarely exhibited in any perfection ; and consequently, that the affections that correspond to the qualities of justice, mercy, benignity, truth, purity, &c. must, from the want of an opportunity of contemplating them, be in the great generality of mankind dormant, unless farther means were given for cultivating them than are presented in the

few rare instances of exalted virtue that occasionally occur ;—I hence infer a reasonable probability, that, according to our notion of the benignity of Deity, such additional means would be afforded.

In divine revelation, it appears to me that these means have been abundantly supplied. With respect to the complete adequacy of the means there presented, for cultivating and improving all the best affections of the heart, I have offered such observations as may, I trust, induce some to pursue the inquiry, to the lasting benefit of their own hearts.

The importance of the inferences will not escape the notice of the intelligent. They cannot be admitted without lead-

ing to serious reflection on the inutility of that religious instruction which tends not, directly or indirectly, to excite or exercise any of those benevolent affections, which divine revelation presents an effectual means of cultivating, and which, by a proper direction of attention, it would inevitably exercise and improve.

The necessity of extending the benefits of education to the lower orders of society is at length perceived, and is, with few exceptions, acknowledged by enlightened minds. But great is the apprehension still entertained by many, with regard to the consequences that may result from putting the Scriptures into the hands of the vulgar, lest they should, peradventure, misconstrue pas-

sages beyond their power to comprehend. By teaching them to consider divine revelation as a means afforded by Providence for opening and improving the pious and benevolent affections, and by directing the attention to the objects it presents, which are peculiarly adapted to that purpose, the objection would be obviated. From those who have imbibed the spirit of Christianity, the church can have nothing to fear; for the instructors in righteousness will by such be regarded with filial veneration. But great is the danger to be apprehended to the Establishment from the reaction of the selfish principle. Great, therefore, ought to be the pains taken by those interested in its preservation, to apply the means granted by Providence for cultivating the affections by which

that principle is most effectually restrained. How far the truths I have offered may in this respect be useful, experience must determine.

It was at first intended, that they should have been accompanied by copious illustrations from history, sacred and profane. But though the materials were collected, the completion of that part of my design, though not entirely relinquished, is, at least for the present, laid aside. Sufficient for me would be the gratification, should any candid minds, from a perusal of the arguments offered in the subsequent pages, be induced to re-examine the principles by which they have been actuated, and the opinions by which they have been influenced, that so they may apply with

increased ardour to the fountain of life and truth.

It now remains to say something with respect to the execution of the Work. By far the greater part of what is now offered to the public was composed, or at least suggested, in the solitary hours of sickness; and may therefore be expected occasionally to exhibit marks of correspondent languor. But as pain, though it frequently interrupted, never entirely broke the chain of thought, I trust that few material chasms will be discovered in the series. Long as the subject has occupied my mind, had it appeared to me that I had any reasonable grounds for expecting that I should enjoy such a period of health, as might enable me completely to finish,

and carefully to revise my Manuscript, I should have been in no hurry to commit it to the press ; and I confess that I already begin to apprehend, that the critics, who are inexorable with respect to offences against verbal accuracy, will, by the severity of their censure, give me reason to repent that I did not delay the printing, until I had it in my power to superintend the revision of the sheets, after the first corrections of them had gone through the press ; as, though to the vigilance and attention of my printers I confess myself under great obligations, a list of Errata has become necessary, to which the reader is requested to refer, in order to mark the passages that require alteration.

BATH,
January 1813.

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ESSAY I.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

UTILITY OF THE STUDY OF THE MIND,

AND OF

ITS CONNEXION WITH THE IMPROVEMENT

OF

EDUCATION.

VOL. I.

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ESSAY I.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE UTILITY OF THE STUDY OF THE MIND, AND OF ITS CON- NEXION WITH THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDU- CATION.

Objections stated and examined. Observations and arguments in support of these. Various illustrations and examples.

IN taking a slight view of the objections that have been made to the study of human nature, the first that occurs to me is perhaps not the least formidable, as it is founded on the nature of the mind, and its prevailing passions. "Impossible," it is said, "absolutely impossible, to render that study popular which offers no gratifications

to human vanity under any of its modifications." But though, under the influence of vanity, the acquisition will never be rendered profitable, it does not seem impossible that vanity may, in the course of events, be interested in acquiring and diffusing the knowledge in question.

I am aware that an abhorrence of mental labour is the concomitant of those habits of luxury and dissipation which characterize the present times. Nor do the variety and multitude of acquirements, which are presented by fashion as essentially necessary to persons of all ranks and conditions, afford any contradiction to the assertion, as these, however numerous, however varied, may generally be obtained without any exertion of the rational powers. But though, in this distinguishing feature in the character of the age, some persons of acute penetration perceive an insuperable obstacle to the more general diffusion of that knowledge respecting

the human mind, to which reflection and observation are alike essential, I would gladly draw from it an opposite conclusion. For if it has indeed become necessary to know a little of every thing, may it not reasonably be hoped, that when a superficial acquaintance with other branches of science has become too common to confer distinction, the science of mind may be resorted to as a desideratum in polite education? And if, amid all the avocations of business, and politics, and pleasure, leisure is found for obtaining some degree of information on subjects far removed from all that used formerly to be deemed useful or essential to the generality of persons, why should we apprehend that time may not also be found for this?

To pave the way for this desirable revolution in public taste, it seems above all things necessary, to divest the subject in question of that metaphysical garb which

proves so repulsive, and is so apt to excite horror and disgust. But this, however desirable, cannot be done by those, who, in order to clear the ground for erecting their own particular theory, find it necessary to prove that it had been pre-occupied by rubbish. A minute description of the wild and visionary speculations, which had formerly been contended for as truths incontrovertible by the learned, becomes in these circumstances requisite, and the only effect produced upon the reader is that of intolerable fatigue. Happily for us we have no occasion to disturb the ashes of any of the numerous theories respecting the mental phenomena which have passed into oblivion. But though these have proved to be "o' the stuff that dreams are made of," their evident want of solidity affords no argument against applying to useful purposes knowledge of more solid texture, derived from observation, and resting on facts familiar to our every day's experience.

As well might we object to making use of the knowledge that has been obtained of the properties of the magnet, on account of the wild speculations and untenable theories at different times suggested concerning the mysterious nature of that subtle fluid; as argue against resorting to the knowledge we have obtained of the operations of the mind, on account of those fanciful conjectures concerning its nature, which for so many ages engaged the attention, and exercised the ingenuity, of speculative philosophers. With as much propriety might we aver, that because it requires scientific investigation to comprehend all the various hypotheses formed on the properties of the magnet, no unlettered mariner ought to steer his ship by the direction of his compass. Of some information concerning the peculiar properties of this unerring guide the mariner must doubtless be possessed; but it is the knowledge of those that have been discovered by observation, and confirmed by experience, that is to him essen-

tial. From observation and experience he learns, not only to what point of the compass the magnetic needle is generally directed, but is taught how far it deviates from that point under particular circumstances. Nor is this knowledge rendered less essentially useful, on account of the speculations that may have been set forth on the causes of its attractive power, however irrational or absurd.

In like manner may the knowledge of the human mind be applied to practical purposes, without regarding any of the visionary theories which aim at gratifying our curiosity concerning the hidden cause, but add nothing to our knowledge concerning the certain effects.

What the knowledge of the properties of the magnet is to the mariner, such, in my opinion, is the knowledge of the principles of the human mind to those who are either bent on self-improvement, or called to ful-

fil the important duties imposed on all who are concerned in the business of education. In this opinion, I regret to find that I have not the happiness of being supported by the authority of all whom I esteem and venerate; but that, on the contrary, while some equally distinguished by the brilliancy of their talents, and the acuteness of their penetration, consider all that is practically useful in the science of mind to be so obvious as not to escape the notice of the least discerning, others deem the subject too far removed beyond the reach of persons of ordinary capacity, to render the explanation practicable; and contend, that, even were it practicable to convey clear and distinct notions of the nature of the human mind to those concerned in its culture, such knowledge would prove detrimental and pernicious.

Of those who have given countenance to this opinion, the most respectable and most respected is the honourable and learn-

ed biographer of the late Lord Kames; and his arguments I shall take the liberty of examining, with that freedom which my knowledge of the candour and liberality of the author encourages me to use, mingled with the deference due to his character from all who are capable of appreciating the value of talents adorned by genuine virtues; a deference doubly due from one whose sentiments of esteem are enhanced by the feelings of gratitude and friendship.

“It is undoubtedly,” says his Lordship, “a very pleasing consideration, that it has been shewn by ingenious writers, from a careful analysis of the mental powers, and an investigation into the principles of moral conduct, that the most rational system of education, such, for example, as is prescribed by Locke, is agreeable to the true principles of human nature, and consonant to the soundest philosophy of the mind. But was the demonstration necessary, or, considering the capacities of those who most

want information on the subject, is it of much practical utility? Hard, indeed, were the lot of the generality of the human race, and precarious their chance of moral and intellectual improvement, if the rearing of infancy and youth, and the training of the faculties and powers to the proper ends of our being, were a deep and intricate science, of which only a few philosophers had ascertained the just principles; or were fitted to prescribe the rules and direct the necessary practice. It may be boldly said, that no similarly deficient economy is observable in the plans of the great Author of nature."

In answer to this I beg leave to observe, that, even according to his Lordship's statement, the chance for moral and intellectual improvement must depend on the degree in which those, who have the training of the powers and faculties of the infant mind, are qualified to discharge the trust. If these are incapable of extending their views

to what is above termed "the proper ends of our being," or, from their ignorance of the nature of that which is to be trained, are incapable of making choice of proper means for "training it to the end proposed," their failure must, in either instance, be almost inevitable; and, hard as it may appear, it has, I apprehend, been the lot of the generality of mankind, through all ages, to hold their chance of moral and intellectual improvement on this precarious tenure. Nor does this afford any proof of inconsistency in the plans of Providence, but, on the contrary, perfectly accords with the ordinances of divine wisdom, as displayed in what we call the natural progress of society. Every step in that progress, from the savage to the civilized state, is effected by the agency of mind acting upon mind. Knowledge flows not like a perennial stream, but, like the rising tide, advances by successive impulses; and as wave after wave imperceptibly gains upon the sandy waste, so does the accumulated knowledge

of one generation advance beyond that which went before it, until it reaches the boundary prescribed by infinite wisdom, and hears the mighty voice that proclaims, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed!"

But in what way is the moral and intellectual attainments of one generation to be transmitted, so as to have an influence in advancing the intellectual and moral progress of another, but through the medium of education? If those who have the rearing of infancy and youth, are to be precluded from making use of the discoveries and observations of superior minds, the progress must necessarily be retarded. In their attempts to train the infant mind, they will, in all probability, bind it in that direction to which the present passion or prejudice may chance to point, however unfavourable to its future advancement in knowledge or virtue. Hence must arise consequences no less pernicious than those

which have resulted from the hasty adoption of visionary theories; consequences which, as I apprehend, can only be avoided by a general diffusion of that knowledge of our nature, of which the practical utility has been called in question; and which, even taking into consideration the capacities of those who most want information on the subject, we have no reason to pronounce beyond the reach of any intellectual being.

It is on these points alone that I have the misfortune to differ from my respected and honoured friend.

While the tide of improvement in every art and science runs high, attempts at improving the art of education will be made. To prevent such attempts I apprehend to be impossible; but to preclude all danger from them, it seems to me essentially necessary to enable parents to judge of their utility, by bringing them to the test of

those principles with which all that is wise and practical in education will ultimately be found to correspond. It is thus, I imagine, that a recurrence of the evils which have arisen from the hasty adoption of visionary schemes and theories, may with greatest certainty be prevented; there seeming little reason to doubt, that, in most of the instances in which the minds of youth have materially suffered, from injudicious attempts at modelling them according to the prescribed rules of some chimerical plan, it was through ignorance that the fatal error was committed.

Why should we not infer, that in education, as in every art and science, the knowledge of first principles is the most effectual preservative against delusion? The parent or preceptor who is either destitute of such knowledge, or, through contempt, rejects the application of it, has no other means of judging of the wisdom or folly, the utility or inutility, of the plans which

fashion from time to time brings into use, but by the slow process of experiment. Should the experiment prove fatal, deeply as he may regret the consequences, he is saved from self-reproach, by the consciousness of good intention. With the same good intention he permits himself to be again deceived by the bold assertions of some other speculatist, and reaps no other fruit from his change of plans, than a change of evils.*

But this is asserted to be the consequence of departing from common sense;—common sense being all that is requisite to enable us to judge of the rationality of the

* The above is not an imaginary case. There are families in these kingdoms, in which the systems of Rousseau, Madame Genlis, &c. &c. have been adhered to in succession, and where every child in the family has been brought up on a separate plan. But I believe there is no instance in which the event has not proved the fallacy of the expectations that were formed from these attempts at moulding the mind into a given form.

plans of education proposed for our use, we ought implicitly to rely on its decision.

In answer to this it may be observed, that as the rationality of any plan consists in the probability of its being adapted to the accomplishment of the end we have in view, if we have no distinct notion of the end to be accomplished, nor of the nature of the thing to be operated on, nor of the instruments to be employed in carrying on these operations, it is utterly impossible for common sense to decide on the degree in which the schemes proposed are adapted to the accomplishment of the ends in contemplation. As an illustration of this, let us suppose that a chymical projector was, in the present day, to offer to the world a plan for converting a piece of wood into one of the precious metals. With what scorn would his proposal be rejected! So universally is some degree of knowledge concerning the difference between vegetable and metallic substances now diffused, that there

is scarcely a peasant in the kingdom, who would not be able to detect the absurdity of the impostor's pretensions. But how short a time has elapsed since common sense would have been no sufficient guard against such species of imposition! At the distance of a few centuries back, the promises of the alchymist would have been listened to with undoubting confidence, not only by the weak and the ignorant, but by those who ranked with the wisest in their generation. Shall we then accuse our fathers of a want of common sense, because they were thus credulous? No; we have certainly no right thus to accuse them, but the very reverse: For it was in them acting consistently with common sense, to place confidence in assertions which were, as they believed, founded on the asserter's knowledge of certain occult qualities and principles, far beyond the reach of ordinary minds to comprehend. Those who held forth the delusive promises were, indeed, worthy of reprobation; be-

cause, without any just notion of the properties of the substances on which they were to operate, they boasted of the power of effecting in them such changes, as were, in the nature of things, impossible.

If we find any resemblance between these pretenders, and the projectors in education, by whose visionary schemes so many are said to have been deluded, we shall be led to conclude, that the same knowledge of leading principles, which now effectually preserves us from being deceived by the specious pretences of enthusiasts of the former description, would preserve us no less effectually from being led astray by the false pretensions of the latter. Why should the dissemination of this knowledge be deemed impracticable?

In support of his opinion of the impracticability of diffusing it, the venerable Judge, to whose work I have had occasion to refer, has done me the honour of extracting

a passage inserted in the second edition of my *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, and introduced the extract by such encomiums as could not fail to gratify the feelings of one who sets a large value on the approbation of the wise and good. The passage quoted by his Lordship contains the substance of an observation made to me by a learned and ingenious friend, on the propriety of explaining the term *association*; from which alleged necessity his Lordship infers the absurdity of all attempts to enlighten those who are called to the performance of one of the most important duties, by giving them some knowledge of the principles on which they ought to act. "What hope," he exclaims, "is there, that to those of ordinary capacity we should convey clear ideas, while we address them in a language of which they do not know the first rudiments?" But to what length does this prohibition extend? It seems to be an absolute *veto* upon giving instruction in any

science; for, unless the ideas and sentiments which are expressed by general terms, be *innate* in the minds of persons of extraordinary capacity, the greatest philosophers the world have ever seen, must, at some period of their lives, have been exactly in the predicament of those whose case is here pronounced hopeless.

If the observation is meant only to apply to persons who have not had the advantages of a classical education, and who must consequently find it more difficult to comprehend the meaning of terms derived from the Greek or Latin tongues, still it does not seem supported by experience; as we have a sufficient number of examples to prove, that persons confined to the use of their native tongue, and able to read no other books than those which are written in it, may nevertheless be able to think, to judge, and to reason, and merely by attending to the manner in which terms, with whose origin they are unacquainted, are

applied, readily acquire a competent notion of their signification.

When any subject is for the first time presented to the consideration of two persons of equally sound understanding, it cannot be doubted, that he who is most familiarly acquainted with the terms in which it is stated, will possess a manifest advantage. But where the subject is extremely interesting, and deeply concerns the prosperity or happiness of the individual, it is wonderful how soon the obstacle opposed by previous ignorance is surmounted; and when surmounted, the balance of benefits to be derived from the knowledge received, will depend more on the comparative vigour of the intellectual powers than on the difference between the parties with respect to erudition.

As those who are capable of taking the most comprehensive views, are ever the most remarkable for candour and libera-

lity, I with confidence appeal to the wise, and learned, beseeching them to consider, whether, by representing that species of knowledge which is the result of inquiries into our common nature, as far above the reach of ordinary minds, they do not labour to perpetuate all the evils which result from the darkness of ignorance, and all the immorality which proceeds from depraved affections.

The great mass of mankind must ever be precluded from the possibility of acquiring many speculative ideas; but it is only in those nations where bigotry and prejudice have endeavoured to perpetuate darkness, that there is an utter incapacity for discerning truth. In the natural course of things, knowledge, like light, has a tendency to diffuse its rays in all directions. Those who are placed in the least favourable situations will be the last to receive its beams, but in process of time they will experience their salutary influence, and re-

joice in that light, which, though too faint to fertilize the soil, they find sufficient to direct their steps.

If there is any species of knowledge which we might presume more likely than any other to be diffused with spirit, it is the knowledge of the principles of our common nature; a "knowledge which rests ultimately on facts for which we have the evidence of our own consciousness."*

This conclusion is, however, not warranted by experience. The utility of those sciences that are connected with the improvement of the arts, commerce, and manufactures, is so much more immediately obvious, that they must necessarily be considered by the mass of mankind as of more essential importance. But it is only since their utility has been universally experienced, that it has been thus generally ac-

* STEWART'S Outlines.

knowledged. A century has not elapsed since chymistry, to which almost all the arts have been confessedly so much indebted, was deemed a legitimate object of ridicule by all professed wits. How fatally would the progress of science have been retarded, had ingenious men been deterred, by the scoffs and sneers of their contemporaries, from directing their attention to an object, of which, notwithstanding the absurdity of the speculations to which it had given rise, they perceived the value and importance!

Let us reflect on the progress which chymical knowledge has made in our own days, and observe to what extent it has been diffused. How often are its principles referred to and applied, and properly applied, by those who have no pretensions to science, nor possess any information beyond what is common to all tolerably well educated persons? Such is the natural progress of knowledge. At first, the object

of speculative inquiry to the learned or curious, who by their investigations separate truths from errors, and, by simplifying what was complex, render obvious what had been considered most obscure. When their discoveries are capable of being applied to useful purposes, the application of them becomes familiar; principles which had been deemed so far beyond the comprehension of vulgar minds, as to be attainable only to the few who devoted their lives to study, are gradually unfolded to the general view, and so completely explained as to be rendered level to the capacity of every person endowed with common understanding.

There seems no good reason for affirming that the science of mind differs in this respect from other sciences. But should prejudice retard its progress, the interests of society, as these embrace the improvement of the rising generation, must inevitably suffer. Those to whom the conduct of

education is entrusted, whether parents or preceptors, will remain liable to fall into one or other of the following errors:— Either, by adhering to established forms and plans, after the circumstances in which these originated have undergone material change, they will disqualify their children from taking their place in the society in which they are to live; or, directed solely by the example of their neighbours, and implicitly relying on the power of chance, or nature, or contingent circumstances, for making their children as wise and good as the children of others, will expose them to the dominion of every prejudice, vice, or folly, which prevails in the society in which they happen to be thrown.

It is from the ignorant that empirics of every description reap their golden harvest. A person acquainted with the theory of vision, will not be apt to listen to the flattering promises of the pretending quack, who proposes by his nostrums to cure the

natural effects of age on the organs of sight. But let him propose his scheme to one who knows nothing of the construction of the eye, and it is a thousand to one that he will gain credit for the infallibility of his nostrum.

A curious illustration of my present argument might be drawn from a supposition, which, however fanciful, is not beyond the power of a lively imagination to conceive. Let us for a moment suppose, that of the various parts which compose the organs of vision, the rudiments alone appeared in infancy, and that the arrangement of the different lenses, the development of the coats, the density and quantity of the humours, the distribution of the nerves, and the power of the muscles, were left dependent on parental care:—let us suppose, that the part from which was withheld the due degree of nourishment and exercise, was to wither and decay;—and let us imagine how it would fare with the

sight of the rising generation! How many ingenious devices would be contrived for hastening the slow process of nature, and improving on her plans! From one projector we should have an infallible recipe for improving the crystalline humour, by certain liquors distilled in his laboratory: From another we should be taught, that the humours of the eye are of no manner of consequence, and that our attention should be exclusively directed to the adjustment of the nerves. While this doctrine remained in fashion, the muscular fibres would of course be suffered to perish for want of exercise and nourishment, and the medium through which the rays of light ought to be transmitted, having been weakened or destroyed, the poor child would remain in utter darkness. Or, admitting that the parts neglected had only suffered partial injury from that neglect, the vision would still be weak and imperfect.

The consequences of this injudicious management may easily be conceived. On one hand we should perceive persons having their eyes permanently fixed in a condition fitted for the perception of distant objects; but utterly incapable of perceiving those that are near; and, on the other hand; behold persons doomed for life to depend upon report for all that was not placed within an inch of their noses: Some with their orbs turned towards the skies; some with theirs immovably fixed towards the earth; and each so proud of being able to see what the other did not see, as to despise his neighbour, and reject with disdain the assistance or information he had it in his power to afford him.

Such, judging from what we may every day observe with regard to mind, would be the deplorable result of our attempting partially to improve the constituent parts of these bodily organs. But suppose that, instead of aiming at thus improving them, it

was thought sufficient to tell children what they ought to see, and that we were to give ourselves credit for having improved their organs of sight, in exact proportion as we have succeeded in teaching them to repeat from us the description of surrounding objects, can we believe they would be gainers by this change of plan? In vain would they in after life attempt to make use of those nerves and muscles which we had permitted to remain inactive, and their sight would consequently remain for ever in so imperfect a state, as to render them dependant on the eyes of others through life. Do we imagine that we should blame the parents who have thus doomed their children to irremediable darkness? On what grounds should we condemn them? Did they not, in the first instance, employ the most expensive apparatus, and take infinite pains to procure the best advice? Did they not, in the latter case, tell their children all they saw, taking every possible care to supersede the necessity of using

their own eyes? And did they not in either instance adhere to ancient custom, or follow the example of their neighbours? It is true, that had they taken the trouble to inform themselves of the structure of the eye, and the laws of vision, they would instantly have detected the errors in both systems of management, and used such precautions as would have preserved all the parts of the machine in order, and rendered them capable of performing their several offices with facility. And why was not this necessary information obtained? Was it because they had no opportunities of acquiring it? No: All the information requisite was forced upon them every day of their lives: they had only to attend to the manner in which they moved their own eyes, in order to know that their children must be enabled to move theirs in order to see in the same direction; and that it was not by teaching them to describe objects placed beyond the reach of vision, that this power was to be obtained. To

suppose such a degree of wilful inattention to the nature and uses of the several parts of the complicated machine, which it was their duty to bring to the greatest possible perfection, appears so very absurd, that had we never met with any thing analogous to it in our own experience, the illustration on which I have ventured would, with justice, be condemned as totally inapplicable. But do we not every day of our lives witness the effects of misdirected efforts to give light to the mind, independent of the cultivation of its faculties?

A good education,—an excellent education,—a complete education,—are terms with which the ear is so familiar, that to insinuate a doubt concerning the accuracy of the ideas they convey, will, to many, seem unreasonable or absurd. Let us, however, put the matter to the test, by asking the first ten persons with whom we have an opportunity of conversing, to

give a definition of these several terms; and we shall probably find, that no two persons in the number specified have attached to these terms ideas exactly similar. But however they may disagree, as to the number and nature of the accomplishments which they associate with the idea of a good, an excellent, or a complete education, we shall find, that not only not one of the ten, but perhaps not one of a thousand, connects with the idea of education, even when pronounced superlative, any notion of the general improvement of the faculties of the human mind, the regulation of the passions, or the cultivation of the affections. I do not say, that these are by so large a portion of mankind considered as unworthy of attention, but that, in speaking of education, they are not considered as the great, the primary objects of attention; and that education is not pronounced *good*, nor *excellent*, nor *complete*, in proportion as it has tended to exercise and invigorate all the faculties of the soul, and

all the affections of the heart, but as it has imposed upon the memory a certain number of facts, and of words descriptive of the ideas or opinions of the wise and learned, and produced a facility in the performance of certain external acts, and in the pronunciation of certain sounds. Now, though there can be no doubt, that, in the course of these various exercises of the memory, a number of ideas must necessarily have been conveyed to the mind, it is by no means clear, that the instruction given has had any tendency to improve all the intellectual faculties, or to cultivate the affections, or to controul the operation of the selfish principle ; all of which circumstances ought, according to my view of the subject, to enter into our definition of the terms *excellent* or *complete*, when applied to education.

Justly may we call that a good education which tends to develop and bring into action those faculties that are most essen-

tially requisite in conducting the ordinary business of life, and at the same time gives such a direction to the active principles of our nature, as is essential to the happiness of the individual and of society. A good education may, according to this definition, be the privilege of a peasant as well as of a prince; nor is the cultivation of the primary faculties of the mind more essentially necessary to the latter than to the former.

When we connect with the term *education* ideas that are foreign to those which imply an improvement of the rational faculties and moral principles of our nature, we must appreciate the advantages of education by a false and ever-varying standard; and as soon as the utility of any of those branches of knowledge, associated in our minds with the idea of education, appears questionable, we shall be disposed to deny that education has any beneficial effects.

I believe, that in this false association all the prejudices that have been conceived, and all the objections that have been made, to the education of the lower orders, have solely originated. The arguments employed in support of these objections, will, I suppose, be allowed to stand as follows.

“ Habits of industry and sobriety are essential to the poor : From experience we learn, that reading and writing does not necessarily render people sober and industrious ; and as the education of the poor consists in being taught to read and write, it is inferred that the poor receive no essential benefit from education.”

The arguments that have been most commonly resorted to, in support of the opposite opinion, may be stated within equally limited compass. “ Knowledge, it is said, being the most valuable of all acquisitions, ought to be placed within the reach of all who have a capacity for acquiring it :

It is by reading and writing that knowledge is with greatest facility acquired and communicated ; and, therefore, all classes of persons should be taught to read and write."

According to my view of the subject, the real merits of the question have not been fairly stated by either of the parties. It yet, therefore, admits of being presented in a third, and, as I conceive, a juster and more appropriate form.

Education, I would say, is the means employed to cultivate the moral and intellectual faculties of human beings, to the degree that is requisite to render the individual capable of fulfilling his religious and relative or social duties. The poor are called to the performance of these several duties, and therefore their moral and intellectual faculties ought to be cultivated ; and if reading be an effectual mean of their cultivation, the poor ought to be taught to read.

On examining the subject we shall, I apprehend, see reason to conclude, that the advantages resulting to the lower orders from instruction in the use of letters, has not been more under-rated by one party than it has been over-rated by the other. Persons whose faculties have been imperceptibly unfolded at an early period of life, are so unconscious of the mighty blessing, that, in comparing themselves with the ignorant, they are apt to ascribe to the knowledge they have derived from books, the difference so apparent between them and vulgar minds. Hence, when they in their benevolence desire to unbind the fetters of ignorance, and give light to those who sit in darkness, they consider the knowledge of letters as all-sufficient. The art of reading they view, not as one of many means to be employed towards the accomplishment of a certain end, but as the sole and effectual mean through which their purpose is to be accomplished. But, if to cultivate the moral and intellectual facul-

ties, in the degree that is requisite to enable them to discharge their several duties; be the end proposed, instruction in the art of reading must be considered as no farther valuable than as it conduces to that end : And as it is obvious to demonstration, that no further benefit can in any case be derived from what is read, than as the mind is capable of apprehending it, we must conclude, that where the faculties of the mind have become torpid for want of exercise, it is not merely by attention to the shape of letters, and to the sounds of words, that the power of conception will acquire sufficient vigour to enable the mind to receive any accession of ideas from the words pronounced. In such instances, to what does the sum total of the benefit derived from having learned the use of letters amount ?

Great, unquestionably, are the advantages that may result to the children of the poor, from the establishment of schools appropriated to their instruction : But these ad-

vantages must, as I conceive, be in exact proportion to the degree in which the real object of education is kept in view. Nor are these observations, concerning the consequences that must inevitably ensue from our mistaking the object at which we ought to aim, applicable only to one class. They will, alas! be found to apply but too generally.

It seems, indeed, as if it were always in proportion to the magnitude and importance of the object, that mankind are liable to be imposed upon by the false views presented of it, and that credulity never operated so extensively as in regard to points which all had an equal opportunity of examining. What so interesting to intelligent beings, as to know what were the terms of acceptance with the Deity! Yet for how many ages did the Christian nations of Europe tamely forbear to search the only record in which an answer to the question was to be found! Even since

the sacred volume has been placed within reach of all, how often has prejudice, incredulity, or indolence, rendered the inestimable privilege abortive! In possession of a test whereby to judge of every rule and opinion asserted to be of essential efficacy, how often do we indolently acquiesce in the assertion, without giving ourselves the trouble to inquire in what way the rule or doctrine is likely to influence the heart, whose affections it is the province of religion to elevate and improve!

Those who are convinced, that it is in proportion as we acquire just and accurate notions of the effects which religion ought to produce upon our heart and conduct, that we become truly religious, should, I think, be prepared to acknowledge, that it must also be in proportion as we acquire just and accurate notions of the effects which education ought to produce, that education will be so directed as to become truly beneficial.

Why do we now smile at the mistaken zeal of the pilgrims and crusaders of a former age? Is it not, that we now perceive there is no connexion between such external acts and that purity and holiness which the gospel teaches us to be essential constituents of the religious character? But are not crusades and pilgrimages as necessarily, as essentially connected with our improvement in all the Christian virtues, as the things to which we sometimes give the name of education are connected with the improvement and cultivation of the principles and faculties of our nature?

From the light we have acquired by the study of the word of God we have learned, that it is by our obedience to the will of the Supreme Being, and not by the performance of certain fantastic or difficult actions, that we are to judge of our progress in the religious life; nor dare we whisper peace to our souls, until every desire of our

hearts is brought into subjection to the divine will. It is, however, evident, that our notions concerning the divine will, may, if founded on conjecture or hypothesis, be extremely erroneous; nor will they fail to be so, if they rest solely on such foundation; a remark finely illustrated by Dr Paley in the following passage.

“An ambassador,” says he, “judging by what he knows of his sovereign’s disposition, and arguing from what he has observed of his conduct, may take his measures in many cases with safety. But if he have his instructions and commission in his pocket, it would be strange not to look into them.” Equally strange, and in my opinion, equally unjustifiable, is the conduct of those who, in their attempts to develop the faculties of the understanding, and to regulate and controul the desires and affections of the heart, consider the nature of those faculties and affections as totally unworthy of consideration. To this

infatuation may fairly be ascribed all the mischiefs that have arisen from a partial cultivation of certain of the faculties of the understanding, to the utter neglect of faculties that are no less essential in every operation of intellect. Hence the little attention paid to the cultivation of the affections, though, when these are wanting, the very faculties that have been exclusively cultivated become either useless or applied to unworthy purposes. There is thus a waste of education, an absolute throwing away of time, and trouble, and expense.

If the increased attention that has of late years been paid to the education of children in all the different classes of society, had been really calculated to improve and invigorate all the moral and intellectual faculties, what age could have stood in comparison with the present for wisdom and virtue? Are we then to blame this increased attention to the subject of educa-

tion, as unnecessary and pernicious; or to conclude, that if it has not diminished the empire of vice and folly, it is because it has been exclusively occupied by objects of an inferior nature? Objects which, having no tendency either to cultivate the affections of the heart, or to improve the intellectual faculties, can only with respect to vice and virtue be regarded as neutrals.

The best apology that can be made for having confined our attention to these is, that we implicitly rely on nature for bringing the intellectual faculties to maturity; and that, on the hearts of *our children in particular*, the benevolent affections are her spontaneous production. But if it can be proved, that faculties which are never exercised remain dormant, and, after a time, become to all intents and purposes extinct; and that, without great care and vigilant attention, the selfish principle is apt to get the better of the benevolent; our reliance on nature for performing our

work in addition to her own, will appear to be somewhat misplaced.

If I presume to hope that some additional light has been thrown upon these subjects in the following Essays, it is not from any confidence in my own powers that that hope has derived its nourishment, but from a consideration suggested by a truly great and enlightened mind, and which I shall present to the reader as an apology for my presumption.

“ Let it be remembered,” says Mr Stewart, “ that when any subject strongly and habitually occupies the thoughts, it gives us an interest in the observation of the most trivial circumstances which we suspect to have any relation to it, however distant; and by thus rendering the common objects and occurrences which the accidents of life present to us, subservient to one particular employment of the intellectual powers, establishes in the memory

a connexion between our favourite pursuit, and all the materials with which experience and reflection have supplied us, for the further prosecution of it."

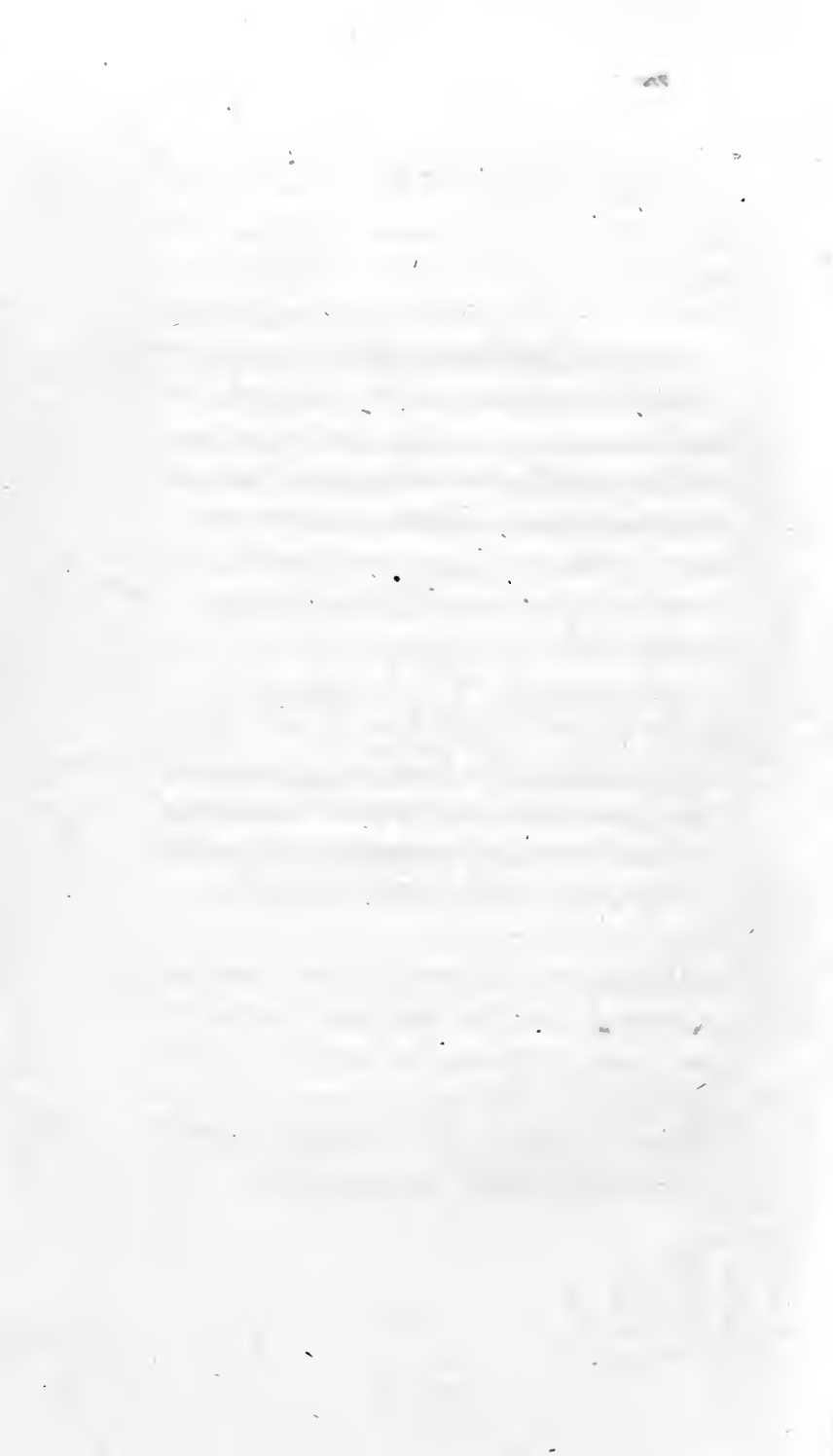
Great is the encouragement I have derived from the above remark, in the prosecution of my plan. Conscious of the length of time in which the subjects of these Essays have strongly and habitually occupied my thoughts, I might present them to the Public with some degree of confidence, were it not from an apprehension, that the very degree of attention I have bestowed upon them, may have produced in my mind an exaggerated and erroneous notion of their importance. That the reader may fairly judge how far I have deceived myself, I shall frankly state the sum of those advantages, that an attentive consideration of the principles I have endeavoured to elucidate seems calculated to produce.

A knowledge of these principles appears to me useful, first, in assisting us to form a just estimate of our own abilities, and thus preventing us from falling into the errors which result from conceiving, that because some of our faculties have obtained considerable strength and vigour, we must, therefore, be capable of exerting all of them with equal force and precision ; secondly, in presenting us with such views of the whole of the powers and faculties of our nature, as must deter us from weighing the merits of our own characters, or the characters of others, by the existence of a part ; and, lastly, in exalting our conceptions of the divine nature, confirming our faith in divine revelation ; assisting us in acquiring that knowledge of our own hearts which is essential to their improvement ; and in subjugating those sinful passions which are the source of all the misery we feel or fear.

I shall only add, that though, in speaking of the human mind, I have been, in a manner, compelled to treat of certain of its operations in succession, and to describe them under the denomination of powers, faculties, &c. as if they had a distinct and separate existence, nothing is farther from my intention than to represent the mind as being, like the body, made up of parts. The terms I have employed have, therefore, been resorted to with no other view, than as affording the most effectual assistance in conveying distinct notions of the states of mind it was my purpose severally to describe. I am, indeed, anxious to have it understood, that I adopt not the language of any class of metaphysicians in preference to that of another, but adopt the language sanctioned by custom in preference to every other, without regarding by what school of philosophy it has been most commonly used.

ESSAY II.

ON THE AGENCY
OF
ATTENTION
IN THE
DEVELOPMENT AND CULTIVATION
OF THE
INTELLECTUAL POWERS.



ESSAY II.

ON THE AGENCY OF ATTENTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTIVATION OF THE INTELLECTUAL POWERS.

CHAPTER I.

On the correspondence between the degree in which we enjoy the advantages of quick and accurate perception, and the degree of attention habitually given to the objects of perception in general, or to certain classes of these objects. Application of this doctrine in regard to the education of the lower orders.

ATTENTION is a term in such common use, that I shall not perplex the reader by any definition of it. Neither shall I enter into any disquisition concerning the propriety or impropriety of denominating it a faculty of the mind; being much more soli-

citous to shew to what important purposes it may be rendered subservient, than to evince a critical skill with regard to the proper classification of that or any other of the mind's operations.

In the *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, I have, indeed, classed *attention* among those faculties of the mind which it is in our power to cultivate and improve. On farther consideration, however, I perceived that I had, in doing so, committed a blunder not unfrequent with novices, that of confusing the ideas of cause and effect. But the error into which I had inadvertently fallen was, in fact, of small importance; the force of the representations made on the consequences produced by directing the attention to proper objects, being nowise affected by any inaccuracy in the use of terms.

It will be seen from what follows, that, so far from having found it necessary to

retract the opinions I had before given on this subject, additional experience, and more accurate observation, have not only strengthened my conviction of their truth, but have produced so many evidences in favour of their importance, as has encouraged me to proceed in my inquiries. In the observations that have occurred to me, concerning the correspondence which subsists between the degree in which any sense, or faculty, or passion, or affection, habitually operates, and the degree of attention given to what may be termed the proper objects of that particular sense, faculty, passion, or affection, as I am unsupported by the authority of any great name, the reader will be determined by his own judgment in pronouncing on their value; they will therefore be approved or rejected, as they are found consonant to his own observation and experience, and not as they oppose or correspond with the doctrines of any particular school, or the opinions of any favourite author.

In the present Essay it is intended, first, to examine what are the effects produced by directing the attention to certain classes of the objects of perception, in impeding or enlarging the use of our senses ; and, secondly, to examine whether each of the intellectual faculties be not so entirely dependent on the power of attention for their development, as to be either operative or torpid, according as, in the mind of the individual attention has, in early life, been directed to the objects which are calculated to exercise and improve them.

At the conclusion of every chapter, I shall take the liberty of introducing a few remarks, particularly addressed to those who are interested in the subject of education ; and shall throughout endeavour as much as possible to lay my views open to the inspection of readers of every description, and to enliven the dulness of explanation by selecting, from familiar objects,

the examples necessary to illustrate or confirm the arguments I advance.

The examination of the manner in which attention operates, in giving habitual facility to the exercise of certain passions and affections, shall be reserved for future consideration. Confining myself at present to that part of the subject which I have described above, I now proceed to observe how much we are dependent on the operation of attention, in enjoying the full use of our external senses. To avoid repeating myself, I must beg leave to refer the reader for preliminary observations on this subject, to a former work,* in which I have, as I hope, satisfactorily proved, that when, by the loss of one sense, additional attention is naturally given to the objects of the remaining senses, as in the case of the blind and deaf, the senses thus exer-

* See Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education, Vol. II. Letters 2. and 3.

cised become apparently vigorous and effective. Hence, the peculiar delicacy of touch observable in the blind; hence, the quick-sightedness of the deaf, who, in many instances, especially where the intellectual faculties have been cultivated, seem intuitively, at a glance, to comprehend what could not without circumlocution be explained to persons whose powers of attention had not been thus concentrated.

In these instances, the senses which appear to have gained a supernatural degree of vigour, have only been exercised by a more than ordinary degree of attention. By whatever means the same degree of attention is produced, the effects will be equally conspicuous. In the practice of those arts which require great delicacy of touch, by the attention given to that sense, great delicacy of touch will infallibly be acquired: In those which exercise the attention in the perception of distant objects, the eye will acquire the power of

discriminating such objects; and in those which call for minute examination, the attention being directed to minute objects, will enable the sight to discriminate them. The same observations apply to the other organs of sense. To a cultivated ear many sounds appear harsh and unpleasant, which the vulgar pass unnoticed. Nor is this altogether the effect of association: It is the effect of attention to that class of perceptions. Call the attention of your servants to the creaking of a door, they will not say that the sound is a pleasant one; yet will they perhaps acknowledge, that the door might have thus creaked for a month without their having once observed it.

The effects of attention in enlarging our power of discrimination, with regard to music, are extremely curious.

The pleasure we derive from music in general, and from our national music in

particular, has been satisfactorily traced to association,* by one whose name is associated with all that is excellent and respectable in human character. But when the pleasure, derived from the repetition of harmonies to which the ear has been long accustomed, is observed to be most vivid, it sometimes happens, that every species of music, but that to which the ear has been accustomed, fails to please. Unless when nature has bestowed an uncommon portion of sensibility, even the simple melodies of other nations are not at first hearing pronounced melodious; and, to a certainty, all the intricate and artificial combinations, which, when skilfully managed, produce harmony-delightful to the ear of the connoisseur, are to the untutored listener a continuation of vague and unmeaning sounds. It was by repeated attention that the connoisseur was gradually enabled to

* See *Essays on the Principles of Taste*, by Mr ALISON.

trace and to follow all those combinations which now inspire him with unfeigned delight. Without having it in our power to give a similar attention, it is only vanity and folly that can lead us to pretend to connoisseurship. It is indeed only by the repeated exercise of attention, that we can be enabled so far to perceive the design of the composer, as to have our imaginations influenced, and our sensibility awakened; and as this degree of attention is seldom given by those to whom music is only an occasional recreation, it is, I believe, would they confess the truth, only such simple melodies, as may without any great effort of attention be followed, that afford to such persons any real pleasure. It is nevertheless very commonly supposed, by those who feel themselves deeply affected by simple melody, and by that alone, that the cause of their exclusive preference is no other than the uncorrupted purity and simplicity of genuine taste; and according to this decision of self-love, they are extremely willing to

ascribe to affectation the emotions produced in others by combinations of harmony, which their perception, for want of exercise, cannot enable them to trace or comprehend. There is no reason to doubt that our perceptions, with regard to smelling and tasting, are regulated by the same laws, and will in general be found more or less acute, according to the degree of attention habitually bestowed on the objects of smell or taste. Without any essential difference in the natural sensibility of the organ, extreme attention in one person to each variety of smell, and extreme inattention in another to the sensations excited through that sense, may create such a difference in respect to the acuteness of their perceptions, that while one is so exquisitely susceptible as to "die of a rose in aromatic pain," the other shall walk through a grove of odiferous plants, or through the dirtiest lane in the most ancient part of this ancient city, without being sensibly affected by the

change; nay, without once perceiving that the air is not in both places equally delicious!

In those who live only to eat, and in those who only eat to live, a similar proof of the effects of attention is exhibited with regard to the sensibility of the palate. By devoting his attention to the subject, the epicure is quickly enabled to discriminate, with unerring sagacity, the peculiar flavour of each of the constituent ingredients in his favourite sauce. While to him who eats to satisfy his hunger, the same sauce appears homogeneous, and is simply reckoned good or bad, according as custom has rendered its predominant flavour agreeable to his palate.

Let us now imagine what use may be made of the above observations, and endeavour to point out the benefits that may be derived from their practical application, in

the education of each sex, and of all the different ranks in society.

First, with regard to the education of the lower orders; a subject which begins to occupy that share of public attention which its importance so highly merits.

As to touch, taste, and smell, the poor are certainly gainers in some instances, by having their perceptions blunted by disuse. How multiplied would be the hardships of their lot, if every slight pain were to be acutely felt; the organs of taste rendered so exquisite, as to nauseate viands that had no other recommendation than being cheap and wholesome; and their perception of smell so lively, as to render the habitations, in which multitudes are huddled together in large towns, odious and detestable.

But admitting that the perceptions, with regard to these senses, may be permitted to remain dormant without much inconve-

nience, it is far otherwise with respect to sight and hearing. Precious as these are to all, to persons destined to labour for their daily bread they are particularly precious.

The organs of these senses are, in general, given by Providence in a state so perfect as not to stand in need of human aid for their improvement. But do all that have eyes observe what is placed before them? Do all whose hearing is perfect distinguish the sounds which they hear with their ears? By none who have paid due attention to this subject will the affirmative be asserted. But reconciled by custom to the stupidity of persons in certain situations, we neither trouble ourselves to inquire into the cause, nor to provide a remedy for the defect. Even by those to whom the faculties of men in the lower walks of life appear of some importance, the faculties of the other sex in the same humble station, are deemed unworthy of a thought. Those who would travel a thou-

sand miles, to satisfy their curiosity with regard to the peculiar habits of any rare species of wild animal, will, for years of their lives, suffer daily inconvenience from the obtuse perceptions of the domestics on whom they depend for many of their essential comforts, without having the curiosity to inquire whence that strange obtuseness originates. That the cause lies within reach of discovery is evident; for nature has not given greater quickness of perception to one class of persons than to another; neither does a few degrees of latitude effect such a change in the organization, as to account for the different degrees in which the perceptions seem capable of exercise in the female children of the poor, in the different parts of this our beloved island. By a very little observation the cause would be fully ascertained. If we invariably find, that where habits of cleanliness and order have been established among the poor, the male and female children are, in the early period of life, equal

to each other in point of intelligence ; and that where contrary habits prevail, the girls evince a manifest inferiority, it must be to the difference, in respect to the habits of cleanliness and order, that we must look for an explanation of the circumstance. In the former case the attention requisite for preserving cleanness, and neatness, and order, awakens the perceptions, and gives them perpetual exercise. It is on the female part of the family that these demands upon attention are particularly made. The consequence is, that the daughter of the cleanly peasant, having been taught from infancy to observe every slight alteration produced in the appearance of the objects around her, by any casual spot or stain, and having been compelled to attend to the proper place and situation of every article that pertains to the homely dwelling, acquires habits of observation and activity, which remain with her through every period of life. Destined as she is to labour for a subsistence, those

habits are to her of obvious advantage. By the cultivated state of her perceptions she is enabled quickly to learn, and accurately to perform, every species of domestic work, as far as the performance of it requires only the use of her hands and eyes; and though, in many branches of household economy, there is so much minute detail, and the objects of attention are so numerous, as to seem, at first view, extremely intricate, we find from experience, that where the perceptions are quick and accurate, none of those various branches escape attention. And as whatever has been an object of attention makes an impression on the memory, even when the parts of the business are multiplied and intricate, we shall find, that where the perceptions have been cultivated, as above described, it seldom happens that any are neglected or forgotten.

Let us now consider the situation of the female children of the poor, where habits

of dirt and sloth prevail. Their attention never having been directed to any of the objects around them, but in a slight and superficial way, these objects afford not any exercise to the perceptions. Their perceptions, of consequence, become so languid, that they have no power of observing what is placed before their eyes. They know no distinction between black and white, clean and dirty; and as the stupidity that arises from languid perceptions renders every species of exertion painful, such habits of sloth are formed as frequently prove incorrigible, and are not without difficulty to be even partially conquered. Thus prepared, they are sent into the world to earn their bread in service; and at a period of life when the power of observation ought to have been vigorous, they have still to learn to observe: compelled by necessity, however, they do so far learn, as to acquire the method of employing their hands in such branches of domestic work as they are disposed to en-

engage in ; but, from want of perception, are incapable of observing the advantages to be derived from any improvement of the method they have first been taught, and from their slothful habits, are rendered so averse to the trouble of learning farther, that time and experience adds nothing to their skill. Having once attained the power of going through a certain routine mechanically, they continue to go through it with as little fatigue of attention as possible ; and as in every department of household economy, thorough cleanliness requires that perception which depends upon attention, in every department in which they engage they will, in that material point, be found deficient.

The male children of the same family, or of families of similar description, labour not under the same disadvantages. By the active sports of childhood they have their perceptions exercised. At liberty to range abroad with their companions, their

attention is called to the examination of a variety of objects, and is often beneficially exercised in providing means of escape from the dangers into which, by their rashness, they have been precipitated. Of what importance this previous cultivation of the perceptions is found, when school education commences, I shall hereafter have occasion to notice. It will at present be sufficient to observe, that where, from the circumstances in which a child has been placed, the perceptions have been permitted to remain dormant, the knowledge of letters will go but a short way in supplying the defect.

In order to ascertain this, let us examine how far the perceptions are cultivated in learning to read.

The printed letters are objects of perception to one of the senses, as the sound on pronouncing them is to another; but that it requires attention, in order to ren-

der the perception of them in either instance accurate, is well known to all who have at any time taken the trouble to teach a child its letters.

By the attention given, the perceptions are no doubt exercised. So they would be exercised, though not perhaps in the same degree, by learning to distinguish between the tongs and poker. When the pupil advances from letters to words, the demand upon attention is considerably increased; and it will be observed by all who are led anxiously to watch the progress of mind, that the increased exercise thus given to the power of perception, has a very considerable effect in expanding the faculties. Were learning to read of no farther use, it could not be pronounced useless.

But where the perceptions are only cultivated on this one class of objects, reading will, I apprehend, be attended with little advantage: and for this reason, that before

any notion of the meaning of what is read can be conveyed to the mind, another faculty must be called into exercise, which it never is, but in proportion as the perceptions are vigorous and acute.

The truth of what has been here advanced may be easily ascertained. There are still many schools in which, by the method of teaching, the perceptions are never exercised, but on the shape and sound of letters, and combination of letters. Let the scholars in such schools be examined on their conception of the meaning of what they read, and it will be found, (as far as my experience extends it has been invariably found), that the conception is accurate in exact proportion to the degree in which the power of perception had been exercised in infancy, by attention to surrounding objects. Thus, in large towns, especially in countries where the lower orders are the reverse of cleanly, the boys, for reasons before stated, will be found to

have so much the advantage of the girls, with respect to a ready apprehension of the meaning of what they read, as to seem endowed with superior intelligence.

But how is the evil to be remedied? How is the defect produced by habits of sluggish attention to be supplied? Is it necessary that every village dame, and every parish domine, and every master and mistress of a charity school, should study the philosophy of the human mind? I answer, that every person capable of filling these situations with credit, is already in possession of all the knowledge that is requisite; and that all they want, is to learn to apply the knowledge they possess. Let us inquire of these persons, and we shall find that there is not a faculty of the human mind with whose powers they are not in some degree acquainted; and though the terms by which they express them may be very different from those of the philosopher, their definitions are in general sufficiently

correct. In describing the characters of their pupils, they will not say that the perceptions of this one are dull and languid, or that that other is deficient in the powers of conception, judgment, or imagination; but they will tell, that this one is so stupid he takes no notice of any thing, and that the other is so senseless he cannot take up the meaning of a word that is said.

Question him a little farther, and he will confess, that even the child least capable of taking notice, has been compelled to take so much notice of the letters, as to be able to pronounce them at sight, and may, step by step, be brought on to read, which is all that he desires to accomplish. How far the merely being enabled to pronounce the sounds of words, on seeing them in print, will contribute to prepare him for the performance of his several duties, while the perceptions remain torpid, from never having had farther exercise, is no concern of his. But ought those who take an interest

in the instruction of the poor to take no farther interest in the subject? Should it not, on the contrary, be a primary concern with them to render school education the means of supplying the deficiencies of home instruction, by remedying those mental defects that are, under certain circumstances, inevitably contracted?

Why not engage the teacher to try other methods besides the stated lesson, to awaken the perceptions of the stupid? This I conceive would, to a certainty, be effected by methods so simple, that they are, for that very reason, held in contempt.* But if, in tracing the cause of stupidity in

* In appreciating the superior advantages to be derived from this or that mode of teaching, the degree in which it is calculated to awaken and exercise the perceptions is too seldom taken into the account. Between two plans that are in other respects equal, the preference seems to me to be undoubtedly due to that, which, while it keeps the attention in a state of perpetual requisition, gives it that direction most favourable for the development of the infant faculties.

children of a certain class, it is found to originate in circumstances which have prevented attention to the objects of perception, it is only by producing attention to those objects that the defect can be remedied. In this respect infinitely more will be done, by teaching a child to notice every object within the reach of vision, and to mark every minute change that takes place in the form, colour, or situation of the things around him, than by fixing his attention to the mere form of letters. The children whose perceptions are already quick and lively, may, with advantage to themselves, be rendered instrumental in cultivating in others the power of observation ; and both will thus be so prepared for the further exercise of attention in the book lessons, as to enable them to reap from it a greater benefit than they would otherwise have done.

As in every species of labour dexterity is only to be attained by the exercise of per-

ception, it seems wonderful, that, in the education of the labouring classes, so little pains should be taken to cultivate that faculty which is to them so essential. That this important faculty will be more beneficially exercised, by such a habit of attention to surrounding objects, as shall enable a young person to see at a glance how many forms or chairs are in his school-room, and whether they be clean or dirty, whole or broken, than by learning to tell from books how many planets are in the heavens, there can I think be no question. But much as depends upon its cultivation, it is only accidentally and without design that it is ever cultivated; and the consequence is, that where infancy has been passed in situations unfavourable to its development, it remains defective through life.

CHAPTER II.

Subject continued. Effects of a partial cultivation of the faculty of perception exemplified in various characters. Views of its consequences in domestic life.

IN every class above that which depends on manual labour for support, the perceptions are, during the period of infancy, imperceptibly cultivated in some degree by the variety of objects presented to the attention. That they are, however, in many instances, even in these favourable circumstances, frequently defective, and that the defect arises from their partial cultivation, is evident, from observing the number of persons who, among the infinite variety of objects placed before their eyes, are blind to all but the objects of that particular class to which they have long and habitually directed a particular attention.

Among the vain, frivolous, and uncultivated of my own sex, attention is chiefly directed to dress. The perceptions with regard to every change of fashion, and every minute particular in the form, colour, and arrangement of personal ornaments and decorations, will, in such persons, be found astonishingly acute. Neither bead nor bugle will escape their notice. But let us not imagine that, if the attention has been thus engrossed, the perceptions with regard to other objects will be found equally lively. No. The same person whose perceptions, with regard to every article of dress, are in the utmost perfection, may possibly be so void of perception, with regard to other objects, as to pass many of the most striking, both in the works of nature and of art, without perceiving their existence. Nay, so deficient may she be in point of observation, even with regard to objects that are continually before her eyes, as to be unconscious of the existence of those articles with which the

carelessness of servants or children may have littered her apartments.

In the middle walk of life, the woman whose perceptions have been thus partially cultivated is, in some respects, less qualified for performing those duties which include attention to domestic economy in all its branches, than if she were entirely blind. For, in the latter case, the more vigilant exercise of attention would compensate in a great measure for the deficiency; whereas, in the former case, attention is absorbed by the class of objects to which it has been exclusively directed. Nor will the consequences, to those who are connected with her in domestic life, be much less fatal, though the objects that absorb her attention be of a superior class.

The same want of perception, exemplified in the woman whose attention has been occupied by dress, may, alas! be sometimes observed in minds of higher order. How

often, with grieved hearts, have we listened to comments on the effects of this deficiency, produced in triumph as decided proof of the pernicious, but inevitable, consequences of directing the female mind to the acquirement of superior knowledge or superior taste.

If, in order to obtain superior knowledge, or superior taste, it were absolutely necessary to forego attention to common and familiar objects, the argument would be indeed conclusive. But if, by directing the attention to such objects, a quick perception with regard to them may, even in infancy, be acquired, and, if once acquired, will be constantly and habitually exercised without effort, and even without consciousness, may we not reasonably conclude, that, in all such instances as those to which I have alluded, the deficiency complained of is the consequence, not of any application of the mind to literary acquirement, or of the cultivation of its higher faculties, but to the

little pains that have been taken in early life to awaken the perceptions. Never shall we find reason to conclude that the all-wise Creator has formed the human mind on so limited a plan, as to render it necessary to annihilate one faculty, in order to make room for the operation of another!

Such, however, are frequently the effects produced by a partial cultivation of the faculties, as to induce a prevailing opinion, that the operation of the first and most essential is impeded, or circumscribed, by the introduction of new ideas, which necessarily multiply the objects of attention. It is, therefore, of great importance to the interests of society, to shew on what false foundations this opinion rests, and, by a careful investigation of facts, to prove, that whenever the perceptions appear languid or defective, except with regard to objects of one particular class, that the defect arises from want of that cultivation of the faculty in early life, which it

receives from having the attention directed to the observation of all surrounding objects.

Where habits of general observation have not been thus acquired, we have reason to believe that no part of the surrounding objects are perceived, except in cases where the attention is particularly directed towards them for some particular purpose. And as even men of science may sometimes labour under this disadvantage, I shall, from that respectable class, produce an illustration.

A landscape painter, if deficient in habits of general observation, while he directs his attention towards those combinations of objects which are associated in his mind with the ideas of sublimity or beauty, observes not the peculiarities of the soil, nor of the plants which cover it: he gazes on a mass of rock without perceiving that it differs, except in

respect of form, from any other rock ; and, if a wretched human figure meets his eye, thinks only of the picturesque effect of the rags by which it is partially clothed.

Let us suppose him to be followed through the same scene by a mineralogist, whose perceptions have also been but partially cultivated. With what insensibility does he pass the venerable oak, whose tortuous branches had at first sight attracted the attention of the painter, and excited his warmest admiration ? Whether clothed in the green livery of summer, or in the sober tints of autumn ; whether their tender stems bend flexile before the breeze, or their firm and stately trunks bid proud defiance to the storm, the children of the forest alike escape his notice. He may, indeed, observe the form of the lofty craggs which overhang the cataract, and, if they serve to confirm his favourite theory, will observe them with no small interest ; but of the peculiarities which

constitute, in the eye of taste, their sublimity or grandeur, he is quite unconscious. Neither does he cast a glance towards the ruins of the ancient castle which frowns upon him from the brink of the steepy rock; nor hear the clamour of the noisy daws, which, roused by the sound of his hammer, fly tumultuous over his head. The botanist, meanwhile, absorbed in the objects of his own pursuit, visits the same scene, and perceives in it nothing but the plants of which he is in search.

“From giant oaks that wave their branches dark,
To the dwarf moss that clings upon their bark,”*

not a single species among the vegetable tribes escapes his observation: but creation presents to his eye no other objects. If he looks to the rocks, it is merely to observe with what species of lichen they are covered: If he walks by the silver stream or

* DARWIN.

spreading lake, it is not to rejoice in their beauty, for to him every stream and every lake are the same, that are bordered by plants of the same genus.

Such are the consequences of habitually confining the attention to the examination of any one distinct class of the objects of perception, where habits of general observation have not been previously formed. Had either the artist or the men of science above described, been possessed of that power of observation which arises from the cultivation of the perceptions, it is evident that the number of ideas which each received in the course of his morning walk must have been nearly tripled; and they would have been thus augmented without any detriment to the peculiar object of pursuit; for in such an astonishing degree does habit facilitate the operation of attention, that, especially with regard to the objects of perception, it becomes involuntary, is carried on, not only without effort, but

without consciousness. It must be confessed, that among men of science instances of limited observation are extremely rare; it being among the advantages attending an early taste for scientific pursuits, that it affords a salutary exercise to the perceptions. And, accordingly, it is to the observation of men of science that we have been chiefly indebted for such valuable information, with respect to the countries they have visited, as has added to the stock of general knowledge, improved the public taste, and increased the fund of our rational pleasures.

The importance of cultivating the power of observation is indeed greater than we can possibly conceive. It renders our lives useful to others, and augments beyond calculation the sum of our innocent enjoyments.

Shall we then say, that the cultivation of this power, important as it is to our fu-

ture happiness, ought to be left to chance? Or what is yet worse, shall we continue to applaud ourselves for depriving our children of the chance of having it in some degree cultivated, by the natural curiosity which would not fail to direct their attention to external objects, instead of giving to that natural curiosity a proper bent? Will all the wisdom that a child can gain from books, will all the lessons he can learn from masters, compensate to him for losing the power of perceiving all that is placed before his eyes? But with judicious management the cultivation of the perceptions, so far from interfering with those branches of education concerning which we are so exclusively anxious, may be made to go hand in hand with them. Never, however, where unfortunate children, after having been cooped within the limits of a nursery with ignorant domestics, are turned over to the tutelage of pedants of either sex, never will this primary and essential faculty have a chance of being

brought forward. Nor does it fare much better under the tutelage of parents of superior description. In the anxiety for improving the mind by knowledge, and for storing the memory with facts and observations, persons of excellent sense are apt to forget, that by directing the attention exclusively to such objects, they cripple and destroy that faculty on whose exertions their children must ultimately depend for the acquirement of new ideas.

I have already glanced at the disadvantages attending a defect in the power of observation in my own sex; and, as that defect cannot be deemed of trifling moment which disqualifies a person for the performance of any essential duty, I shall take the liberty of still more earnestly urging the consideration of the subject upon my female readers.

The propriety of domestic arrangement depends solely on the degree in which she

who presides at the head of the establishment possesses the power of observation. It is on the quickness of her perceptions, that those who live beneath her roof are dependent for every domestic comfort. In these originate that perfection of order, which in a well regulated family appears to be the work of destiny or chance, so effectually are the moving springs concealed from view. Where the perceptions have been early exercised, this attention to present objects operates with such certainty and celerity, that it interferes not with the exercise of any of the faculties. Where, on the other hand, the perceptions have become obtuse, the exercise of them is attended with sensible effort. Examples of this are frequent in the middle walks of life. There, from the limited number of domestics, more incessant demands are made on the attention of the mistress; and if, from the slowness of her perceptions, she is incapable of answering these demands without renewed and conscious

effort, what anxiety,—what bustle,—what everlasting to and fro,—what complaints of the negligence of servants,—what chiding,—in short, what misery ! I had rather be a galley-slave than live with a good woman of this description ! And yet, nevertheless, she merits praise and approbation ; for, though she proves an intolerable annoyance to all around her, she is anxiously bent on the performance of her duties. How much then is it to be regretted that she was not enabled to perform them with ease ?

Nor will the consequences be rendered less unfavourable to her family or friends, if, labouring under the same defect with respect to the power of observation, she makes no effort to direct her attention towards domestic concerns. Her house will be the abode of disorder and confusion. At her ill provided board all will be either bad or incongruous. Even should expense be no object, though her house may abound

with luxuries, it will be destitute of comfort ; for if her perceptions are torpid, the riches of the Indies will not supply the deficiency. To casual guests, indeed, her wit, her powers of conversation, or the display of her acquired accomplishments, may compensate for the absence of comfort ; but to her husband, her family, her children, what compensation will they afford ?

I shall rejoice, if by these considerations any of my readers are induced to take such pains, in directing the attention of their children, in early life, to the examination of present objects, as shall produce in them that quickness of observation, with regard to such objects as cannot fail to prove essentially useful throughout every period of their future lives.

CHAPTER III.

On the correspondence between the quickness of our apprehension and the degree in which the faculty of conception has been exercised by attention to the objects of that faculty.

I HAVE, in a former Work,* been at much pains to show that our conception of what is described to us, with regard to sensible objects, depends solely on the degree in which we have exercised the power of perception.

I now propose to make some farther remarks on that faculty of the mind, which, when it operates with precision, enables us to form clear and distinct notions of what

* Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education, Vol. II.

is related or described, either in books or conversation.

We must all have observed, that among individuals who are supposed to have had the same advantages of education, the power of apprehending, like that of perceiving, is possessed in very different degrees: some, instantly and without effort, seeing all the parts of a subject, which it requires from others much effort and labour to enable them to comprehend. On such occasions the questions immediately suggested are, whether this difference in the quickness of apprehension between those two persons be owing to the original constitution of their minds, and that the faculty of conception is naturally stronger and more efficient in one of the parties than in the other? or, whether the difference be merely accidental, originating in circumstances which have impeded the exercise of the faculty, and have of consequence limited its operations?

According to my view of the subject, the question, difficult as it appears, is capable of easy solution. If we find that in every instance, and upon all subjects, the conceptions of the slow are equally defective, we may safely refer the defect to original conformation; but if there be any subjects on which it operates with facility, we may, I think, with confidence, assert, that nature has not been to blame, and that the faculty has suffered through neglect or partial cultivation.

When the usual routine of school exercises have been relied upon as the sole means of cultivating the power of conception, it will, with few exceptions, be found dull and languid; except upon such subjects as have accidentally been forced upon the attention; and, with equally few exceptions, shall we find a more extensive exercise judiciously given to this faculty, in early life, productive of ready apprehension and quick discernment.

That the faculty is capable of improvement is from these examples evident. The means of improving it is also, by such examples, rendered conspicuous. In order to enable the mind readily to exercise the faculty in question, the attention, it appears, must be early and habitually directed to the objects of that faculty, or, in other words, to the ideas presented to the mind by what is seen, or heard, or read. When this habit has been early acquired, the power of conception will always be found to operate with proportionate facility. From being accustomed to pay attention to the meaning of what is said or written, on every subject within the limits of the capacity that happens to be presented to the youthful mind, all the difficulty and labour attending the acquirement of new ideas will be completely obviated. When, on the other hand, habits of inattention, with regard to the ideas presented in books or conversation, have become inveterate,

nothing will be quickly apprehended or clearly understood, except on the few subjects which, from their perpetual recurrence, have in a manner forced themselves on the attention.

When ideas of that particular class, to which the mind has thus become familiar, are presented, the power of conception may nevertheless appear sufficiently vigorous. Give, for example, to a young lady who has been accustomed to novel-reading, an account of a tender scene between two unfortunate lovers. How readily will she conceive all that you describe of the circumstances and situation of the parties! How easily will she enter into the feelings of the tender pair! Their looks, their dress, their behaviour, will all be present to her imagination, and, by the strength of the impression which they make, evince the power of the faculty under consideration.

But if, instead of such a scene, you present to her one that is perhaps a thousand times more interesting to your feelings,—for instance, that of Marius contemplating the ruins of Carthage; where will now be that quickness of conception which had, in the former case, excited your admiration? In vain will you represent to her the circumstances and situation of the hero: In vain will you endeavour to describe the vast variety of mixed emotions, which, in the view of the scene before him, swelled his heart. As to all conception of these, you will find her stupid and impenetrable as the clod beneath her feet. And why this stupidity in a mind capable of conceiving quickly and accurately all that you had described on the former subject? For no other reason that can be given, but because to ideas of the former class her attention had been previously directed, and by this partial exercise given to the faculty, it had been fitted for this confined and partial exertion.

Again, in every worshipful corporation in the kingdom, we shall find men of quick discernment in all that concern the pecuniary interests of the petty communities over which they preside. Describe to such men the advantages of a canal, or dock, or railway, you will find their conceptions upon the subject to be apt and lively; but change the discourse, and describe to them the advantages which their town would derive from improvements that would prove sources of health and enjoyment to its inhabitants, and think yourself happy if you can find among them one that can comprehend your meaning. Speak of the beauty of a shady walk, and they will instantly calculate the value of the timber.—

“Forth to the lofty oak they bring the square,
And span the massy trunk, before they cry 'tis fair!”*

It rarely happens that those, who have not at an early period of life been accus-

* SHENSTONE.

tomed to enter into the associations of others, ever acquire that facility in discerning them which distinguishes the high-bred men of the world. But this quick conception of what is felt or conceived by those with whom he converses, is so essentially requisite to the man of rank, who, from his situation in society, is destined to mingle with persons of various descriptions of character, that attention to the signs which indicate the feelings and notions entertained by those with whom he converses, becomes habitual to him, and is, indeed, generally habitual to persons of exalted station. The result of this direction of attention is perfect good-breeding. It is for the acquirement of this accomplishment, (so necessary to the man of rank), that attention to the feelings and conceptions of others is inculcated by his friends and preceptors; and, as it is his own glory, his own advantage, that are held up as the motives for attending to the objects in question, attention is stimulated to exer-

tion as far as is necessary to accomplish the end proposed. Thus, without one feeling of sympathy, he learns to appear completely to sympathize in the feelings, the tastes, and sentiments, of those he desires to please. Of these sentiments, and tastes, and feelings, he seems to have an intuitive perception, and, consequently, fails not to insinuate himself into the favour of all who are willing to be deceived. Why does he not estimate the value of the sentiments, nor pursue the tastes, nor evince in his conduct any traces of the sensibility which he seems so thoroughly to understand? Because his attention was never directed to their truth, or propriety, or intrinsic value: it was solely occupied in discovering their nature, in order to render the knowledge of it useful to himself. Independently of this consideration, his conceptions of what is generous, or noble, or amiable in sentiment or conduct, are so dull and languid, that he seems utterly incapable of discerning the

excellence or utility of such modes of thinking or acting.

Persons of this description seldom read from any other motive than in order to make a figure with their knowledge; but when they have any particular object in view, the result of the attention which, from this motive, they are induced to pay to the subject they wish to appear masters of, is conspicuous; and, when the clearness of their conceptions on this particular subject is compared with the confusion of ideas which they betray on other points, becomes truly astonishing. What advantage they derive, from the knowledge of which this casual application of attention puts them in possession, it is not at present our business to inquire; I only notice the fact, as affording a proof, that great deficiency in useful information, and great slowness of apprehension, is not so frequently to be ascribed to any peculiar defect in the faculty of conception, as

to habitual inattention to the objects of that faculty ; and that when the attention is stimulated by any powerful motive to a particular subject, though the exertion be made with effort, it is never made without effect.

By proper management the necessity of effort would have been frustrated ; for the mind having been accustomed to seek for, and to obtain clear and distinct notions on other subjects, would, without difficulty, have comprehended all that was new or peculiar in this particular one. But if we admit, that we only obtain with facility just and accurate conceptions on subjects that have engaged much of our attention, it may seem to follow, that all which we can do for the cultivation of this faculty, is to acquire a great variety of knowledge. The conclusion would, however, be erroneous. In our endeavours to cultivate and strengthen it, either in ourselves or others, the most effectual method we can adopt

is, to acquire such command over the attention, as to keep it fixed on the subject in hand, until the conceptions with regard to it are clear and accurate. By hurrying from subject to subject, we prevent the mind from obtaining clear ideas upon any subject. From our vain attempts at knowing every thing we know nothing. Of the indistinct ideas thus huddled higgledy-piggledy in the mind we can make no use. When we talk or write upon any subject, we are therefore obliged to have recourse to the ideas of others; and, whether they be just or erroneous, true or false, we must borrow them in the lump, for we are incapable of examining or distinguishing them.

Our incapability, as it is not owing to any deficiency in the mental powers, but to a defect in the habit of mental application, admits of remedy, and may be cured even at a late period of life. If we set our hearts on curing it, we must resolve never to lay down a book which we think worth

our perusal, until we have obtained clear, and distinct, and accurate ideas of the author's meaning, and of all that he suggests, or relates, or describes.* This effort of attention will at first be painful. It will produce a sense of fatigue which may discourage us from proceeding in our attempt. But let us remember what slight degree of attention it now costs us to understand whatever relates to subjects with which we have been long familiar, or that have to us a peculiar interest; and we may assure ourselves, that by cultivating a habit of attending to what we read or hear, we shall in time be as unconscious of any effort, in giving the degree of attention necessary for obtaining clear ideas on subjects which we have indolently imagined beyond our reach, as on those with which we are most conversant.

* In cultivating the faculty of conception, attention to what passes in conversation is of infinite service, if it be directed to the objects above described.

A young gentleman resolutely bent on self-improvement, might, by persevering in this course, have the faculty of conception in his mind so strengthened by habitual exercise, as to be able with as much facility to comprehend the reasonings of enlightened men, with regard to the interests of his country, as the conversation of his huntsman, groom, or jockey, upon the subjects of their several employments; and find as much entertainment from reading the works of the best authors, as from killing time in any of the modes prescribed or practised by the idle and the dissipated.

Of the numbers of young men who, on their entrance into life, give themselves up to low and unworthy pursuits, I am persuaded that by far the greater part are driven to resort to them, not so much by depravity of taste, as by the consciousness of that defect, which renders it difficult for them to acquire clear and distinct ideas on

subjects with which they have not been habitually familiar. The effort of attention is to them so painful, that they have not courage to attempt it; and, unwilling to shew that they cannot obtain clear ideas upon subjects that are understood by others as soon as stated, they endeavour to make it appear that their neglect of them is voluntary: And to prove that it is not from want of capacity, but from want of inclination, that they do not apply their minds to nobler pursuits, they proudly display the quickness of their apprehension in regard to those to which they choose to give their attention. Can we possibly doubt, that if these young men found it as easy to obtain clear ideas on every useful and important branch of knowledge, as in the trifling or ignoble arts to which they direct their attention, that they would not prefer the acquisition of the former?

Even admitting them to be stimulated solely by vanity, what young gentleman

would prefer the applause of grooms and coachmen to the approbation of the enlightened and discerning? or receive higher gratification from the consciousness of being able to manage a certain number of horses, than from the consciousness of possessing that superior knowledge which must give him power and influence in society?

It is the dread of that pain, which, wherever the faculty of conception has not been duly cultivated, attends the effort of attention necessary for its operation, that determines his choice. Horses, and all that relates to the management of horses, have, from infancy, been to him objects of attention; and therefore, whatever new ideas he receives upon the subject, from the honourable fraternity of grooms and jockeys, he conceives without effort. Had he been accustomed, from infancy, to give to every object which, in the course of his education, was presented to

his mind, that degree of attention requisite for enabling him to receive clear ideas from such objects, there can, I think, be little doubt, that the habitual exercise of the faculty, would have given such facility to its operations, that the acquirement of clear ideas upon one subject would have been attended with no more difficulty than the acquirement of clear ideas upon another.

It is one of the greatest of the advantages attending the usual course of education at public schools, that the attention requisite for obtaining a knowledge of the languages, gives such exercise to the conception as must be extremely favourable to the development of that faculty. But if the attention be confined to points of grammatical accuracy; if it be occupied and absorbed by what relates merely to the structure of language; and if never directed towards the ideas contained in the works of the poets or moralists, which are

read with so much precision, and studied with so much care, an essential part of the advantages attending a classical education will undoubtedly be lost. I pretend not to say that it is always so; but from the examples given, am induced to conclude, that the benefits of a classical education are, in many instances, reduced to almost nothing, from the little care that is taken to exercise and strengthen the faculty of conception in the acquirement of clear and accurate ideas.

The same observations apply with still greater force to the mode of instruction usually adopted with regard to females. From the dame's school in the country village, to the great seminary where young ladies are taught every accomplishment, the primary faculties of the mind are injured by neglect. It seems to be the business of governesses of all ranks and denominations, to confine the attention to a certain number of objects within a beaten

track; and as those are all addressed to the external senses, it is to objects of that description only that attention can, without effort, be directed at any period of life. They read, but, from the little pains taken to examine whether they understand what they read, the habit of reading without attention is acquired, and becomes permanent. Books that require attention are therefore never opened. Fictitious narrative is the only species of literary composition from which such persons can derive any amusement; and with it they are amused, exactly in the same way that children are amused with the tales of the nurse, without observing in the description either congruity or incongruity, or perceiving in the moral tendency ought to reprobate or approve. Even this source of amusement is, by repetition, exhausted. Tales of wonder cease to interest, and the vacant mind, when the stimulating influence of society is withdrawn, sinks into listless langour. Needle-work used for-

merly, under such circumstances, to supply a salutary resource to females, in affording occupation to the heavy hours of solitude. But accomplishments are only for exhibition, and to uncultivated minds are of no use, but as traps for admiration. How then are the many hours of leisure to be spent?

Many an amiable disposition is thus, merely from being destitute of resources, driven to the necessity of calling in the aid of pernicious stimulants to give a zest to existence. Let us reflect in what degree their innocent resources would have been multiplied, if, by having had the attention exercised in early life in the acquirement of ideas, they could, without effort, have applied their minds to the pursuit of knowledge. Let us reflect, that no subject is dull that affords to the mind a supply of new ideas; and that, consequently, by giving the means of acquiring them at pleasure, we increase the happiness of the indivi-

dual, and transfuse a sense of enjoyment into every hour of existence.

I have already dwelt too long on this part of my subject; but, before quitting it, must beg leave to notice the effects produced by inattention to the development of this faculty in early life, as prejudicial to the moral character.

From the want of due care to make children distinguish between the ideas presented by memory, and those combinations produced by their own conceptions, they may be observed frequently to mistake the one for the other; and thus it sometimes happens, that habits of falsehood are acquired, which are never afterwards conquered. I have heard an infant of five years of age tell numberless stories, which he had conceived in his own brain, and pondered over until he mistook them for realities; or at least until he believed that they were suggested by memory. I am persuaded that

story-telling liars in general are under a similar delusion ; and that, in all the lies they utter, they have seldom any intention to deceive, but are, on the contrary, impressed at the moment with a sort of conviction of their truth. The most egregious vanity could not produce this effect, where the conceptions had been exercised in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. It were vain to seek for a more convincing proof of the importance of watching over the development of the faculty of conception !

CHAPTER IV.

Agency of attention in cultivating the faculty of judgment, illustrated by a variety of examples.

THE total inefficiency of the faculty of judgment,* wherever it occurs, is almost universally considered as a proof of some original defect in the constitution of the mind. That it may fairly, in many instances, be ascribed to this cause, I shall

* Although I have treated of perception, conception, and judgment, as if they were always distinct operations of the mind, I am sensible that their operations are often so blended and simultaneous as to prevent our being conscious of the distinction. Judgment is, indeed, a necessary ingredient of perception, and in the exercise of the perceptions that it has its rudiments. In its maturer form it is exercised on the conceptions or notions received, not only from our external senses, but from reflection.

not take upon me to deny. But if, in instances in which it is found capable of operating to a certain length, we find that this capability has been derived from the exercise of attention upon certain objects, we may safely conclude, that had attention been more widely exercised, the faculty of judgment would have been rendered capable of further exertion.

The arguments employed by the discoverers of the new world, in support of their assertion with regard to the natural inferiority of the Indian race, presents us with an example in point. These are given at large by a celebrated historian, from whose account of South America many passages might be selected for the purpose of elucidation. Speaking of the scattered tribes, Dr Robertson observes, that, "their vacant countenances; their staring inexpressive eye; their lifeless inattention; their total ignorance of subjects which seem to be the first that should occupy the thoughts of

rational beings, made such impression upon the Spaniards, when they first beheld these rude people, that they considered them as animals of an inferior order, and could not believe that they belonged to the human species."

We are afterwards informed, that, to put the matter beyond all doubt, an experiment was made on the faculties of the natives, which all the Spaniards interested in the result confidently asserted to be decisive. A number of these wretched beings, now sinking under the Spanish yoke, and dispirited by oppression, were collected and settled in two villages, where they were left at perfect liberty to exert their talents in cultivating the ground for their own advantage. Instead of enjoying a situation, which Spanish labourers would have found most eligible, they seemed insensible to its comforts; and though removed from under the immediate controul of their masters, seemed

still to languish for freedom. They neither adopted the Spanish modes, nor made use of the Spanish tools; nor did they cultivate the ground according to the Spanish method, though so obviously superior to their own; but, from being utterly incapable of assuming new habits, neither evinced solicitude concerning futurity, nor foresight in providing for its wants. The Spaniards required no further proof of their intellectual deficiency, which they thenceforth pronounced radical, and consequently incurable.

But, before coming to this decision, the experiment ought to have been carried a little farther: The Spanish Governor and his attendants ought to have accompanied an equal number of Indians into the wilds in which the latter had been accustomed to roam, and, laying aside their European garments, have followed their companions through pathless forests, in quest of the game on which they were to subsist.

How quickly would their notion of the radical defects in the mental constitution of the newly discovered race have vanished, on perceiving that “hardly any device, which the ingenuity of man has discovered for ensnaring or destroying wild animals, was to them unknown?” With what astonishment must they have beheld themselves surpassed in discernment and sagacity by the objects of their contempt? Then, without doubt, was the time to form an opinion of the degree in which nature had endowed them with those faculties which characterize our species.

“While engaged in this favourite exercise,” says the historian, “they shake off the indolence peculiar to their nature, the latent power and vigour of their minds are roused, and they become active, persevering, and indefatigable. Their sagacity in finding their prey, and their address in killing it, are equal. *Their reason and their senses being constantly directed to-*

wards this one subject, the former displays such fertility of invention, and the latter acquire such a degree of acuteness, as appear almost incredible. They discern the footsteps of a wild beast, which escape every other eye, and can follow them with certainty through the pathless forest. If they attack their game openly, their arrow seldom errs from the mark ; if they endeavour to circumvent it by art, it is almost impossible to avoid their toils. Among several tribes their young men were not permitted to marry, until they had given such proofs of their skill in hunting, as put it beyond doubt that they were capable of providing for a family. Their ingenuity always on the stretch, and sharpened by emulation as well as necessity, has struck out many inventions which greatly facilitate success in the chase.”

In this display of the operation of their faculties we have a very striking demonstration of the agency of attention. As it

is to certain classes of external objects that the attention of the savage is exclusively directed, it is only on such classes of objects that his discernment and judgment can operate; but even in this partial operation of these faculties, we have sufficient evidence of their existence; and wherever judgment is capable of operating on any particular class of objects, or in any given direction, we have reason to conclude, that its apparent deficiency, when applied to other subjects, is occasioned by defective cultivation.

Thus, in my own sex we may sometimes perceive unerring judgment, with regard to propriety of manners and of dress, and of all the minute detail of domestic economy, in persons who, in other respects, are so deficient in judgment, as to be incapable of distinguishing in affairs of moment between right and wrong.

Women of this description generally give themselves, and indeed receive from the

world, great credit for their extraordinary prudence and decorum. But in the education of their children something more than prudence and decorum is requisite. The judgment that has been merely exercised on external objects cannot be prepared to decide on the true interests, or even appreciate the faculties of intelligent beings; far less can it distinguish the means by which these interests may best be promoted, and those faculties most effectually improved. Accordingly, we shall find, that where the exercise of judgment has been thus limited in the mother, the children are, in most instances, not only destitute of mental cultivation, but often defective in moral principle, and this notwithstanding the imposing appearance of decorum and propriety, which, when children, they were forced to assume.

We may reverse the picture, and it will exhibit a repetition of the same phenomena under different aspects. When, by

any fatal neglect or mismanagement in the early part of life, the attention has been prematurely absorbed by any branch of science, or any subject of reasoning, it is upon such objects that the judgment, as well as the conceptions, will have been exclusively exercised; and upon such subjects alone will it be found qualified to decide. The observations made by females of this description, upon the branches of science, or subjects of reasoning, to which their attention has been directed, will often be found admirably judicious. To such persons will their friends resort for advice in all cases of difficulty and importance. Nor will their advice be less valuable, or less to be relied on, on account of the great want of judgment which they may perhaps evince in many parts of their own conduct. To common things, to those minute objects which enter into, and make up the current business of the day, their attention had never been directed. On them their judgment had never been so far exercised

as to enable them to discriminate between the proper and the improper, the right and the wrong.

In neither of the instances given does the faculty of judgment appear in itself to be defective. As far as the attention has been directed, it appears, on the contrary, to have been capable of operating with great effect; and I think there can be no doubt, that if, in either instance, the direction given to the faculty of attention had been reversed, the characters would have likewise been reversed; or that if, in either instance, the attention, instead of having been exclusively directed to one class of objects, had been judiciously led from one to the other, the judgment would with facility have been exercised on both.

Among the many glorious results of a free constitution, one of the most important to individuals is that of the opportunity it affords, not only to the exercise,

but to the cultivation of judgment; and this by directing the attention to a multiplicity of objects, toward which, in despotic states, it is peremptorily forbid to turn. Does the faculty of judgment appear to be weakened by this extensive exercise? No; it, on the contrary, is evidently strengthened and improved; and the greater the number of the objects of judgment to which the attention is directed, the more conspicuous will be the improvement. To no other cause than this can we ascribe the manifest superiority, in point of judgment, observable in the peasantry of Protestant countries, over persons of the same class in Roman Catholic states; and this even when the governments are equally arbitrary. It is not then to be wondered at, that, under our own happy constitution, of which civil and religious liberty form the secure and solid basis, the capability of exercising the faculty of judgment should be more widely diffused, and enjoyed by a greater number of individuals than in any

other nation of Europe. Hence our superiority in every species of manufacture, towards the execution of which something more is requisite than the mere perceptions of the copiest. This I take to be the case, wherever the machinery employed is of so complicated a nature, as to require in its application the exercise of judgment; and I the more readily adopt this opinion, from the consideration of circumstances communicated to me by a gentleman, whose name will long be celebrated, as connected with some of the most valuable of the mechanical improvements that have been the boast of the eighteenth century. On speaking to him on the subject of these then recent inventions, I took occasion to ask, whether he did not think that some of the nations on the continent, the French in particular, would be likely, by inveigling a number of the workmen from ****, and getting models of the machinery, contrive to rival that as yet unrivalled manufactory? I was thus answered. “No, Madam, of that we have

not the slightest apprehension. The attempt you speak of has been already made. Our workmen they have contrived to inveigle; our machinery they have contrived to imitate; and, while the workmen who set it a-going remained with them, it seemed tolerably to succeed; but no sooner did they leave them, (and they could not be induced long to stay), than the whole went to wreck: They had no heads to contrive how to set things to right that had once gone wrong. The scheme was in consequence given up; the place deserted; and all the expensive machinery suffered to rust and rot, as it is doing at the present hour."

I may be pardoned for making a few observations on a subject of such importance, as I am aware that, from the gross ignorance and depravity of the greater number of those employed in our English manufactories, a plausible objection may be brought against the conclusion I am

anxious to establish. But, though it be acknowledged that the most effective workmen are often the most profligate, and that these are stimulated to work, by no other motive than that of procuring, by their labour, the means of sensual gratification, it must be remembered, that persons of this description are regarded by their employers as parts of the machinery, and that it is by workmen of superior character that these inferior wheels are set in motion. It is on the knowledge and judgment of these few that the master manufacturer depends for his success. He succeeds; and, if he be a man of narrow mind, cares not how vicious the propensities are, which, in the lower orders, operate as an incentive to exertion. Imagining his interest to be concerned in promoting these propensities, he dreads the introduction of principles that would check or control the sensual appetites, improve the judgment, and convert the living tool into a rational agent. But, happily, more enlightened views now very generally

prevail. Experience has proved, that motives of a higher and more generous nature may be no less operative than those that are brutal and vicious; and that, in proportion as the capability of exerting the mental energies has been extended, industry and application have been substituted for those violent but transient efforts produced by the avidity for sensual indulgence.

It has been found, that in proportion as the judgment has been enlightened by education, attention has been providently directed towards the future, and that the desire of respect, or distinction, or honourable independence, acts with no less vigour than the desire of present enjoyment. It is only by cultivation that the sphere of judgment can be thus enlarged; and I am, I confess, extremely anxious for the establishment of this point, as I consider it to be one in which the interests of society are deeply involved; for, if the judgment is to be improved in exact proportion as the

objects on which it is exercised are multiplied, it affords an unanswerable argument, not only for extending the advantages of education, but for permitting the freedom of discussion to all orders and classes in the community.

But to return from this digression, to consider a few more instances of the effects arising from the partial direction given to the power of attention, in partially invigorating the judgment, and they shall be taken indiscriminately from different ranks and descriptions of persons.

The exercise of judgment is, in many instances, eminently conspicuous in the works of the painter and the poet. No work of either kind, in which it is not conspicuous, ever yet obtained more than ephemeral applause. But do these poets and painters, who have exhibited the most irresistible proofs of judgment in their compositions, invariably show the same

superiority of judgment in the conduct and business of life? In some unfortunate instances we have had convincing evidence to the contrary; and, on examining these instances, we shall have ample reason to conclude that the faculty of judgment, whatever original vigour it might possess, was confined in its operations to that particular class of objects to which the attention had been exclusively directed. Hence appears the inconsiderate folly of those who imagine that the man who has evinced penetration and judgment in his verses, will necessarily evince the same qualities in the management of important enterprises. A great statesman may, it is true, make very pretty verses, for on no man was the epithet *great* ever deservedly bestowed, who had not all the powers of the mind in that state of perfection which argues their being capable of varied, and almost unlimited, exercise; and, if a mind of this high order does not excel in poetry, or any species of composition, it is only because the desire of

excelling in those elegant arts has no place in it, and, consequently, it is only incidentally that they engage its attention. The *mere* poet, on the other hand, however highly his talents may have been applauded, will evince the weakness of his judgment, as soon as he steps out of that line to which the exercise of it had been habitually confined.

Even in persons whose judgment has been most effectually cultivated, we may still observe how much the facility of its operations depends on the direction given to the power of attention. Illustrious examples might be given of men who excelled in oratory, and who, nevertheless, have miserably failed in literary composition; while, on the other hand, we have numerous instances of men, who, in their writings, exhibit incontestable proofs of their having acquired the utmost command of language, and the greatest felicity of expression, and who yet are incapable of

speaking with tolerable accuracy. Now, there can be no doubt that the proper selection of words, either in public speaking or in writing, is an exercise of judgment. But, as the same form of expression which best suits the purposes of the orator, would by no means be suitable to the philosopher or historian, the attention will, in either instance, be directed towards those combinations which, when clothed in appropriate language, are calculated to make that sort of impression which he desires to effect. His judgment will consequently be habitually exercised in the same direction, and in those, as in every other instance, will be found to operate with more or less facility, according to the degree of attention that has been bestowed.

CHAPTER V.

On the agency of attention in cultivating the power of reasoning. Effects of a partial cultivation of this power exemplified. Inference.

WE are apt to consider the power of abstract reasoning, and also the powers of taste and fancy, as gifts which nature has bestowed with a sparing hand; and that they have in every age been only conferred on a few of her chosen favourites. But if the statements I have made be admitted as correct, the rareness of the instances in which those faculties appear pre-eminent, will not be admitted as conclusive proof of nature's partiality.

The attention of the great mass of mankind ever has, and ever will be, directed towards other classes of objects than those

which are within the immediate province of the faculties just now mentioned. In conducting the routine of business, they are seldom found so requisite as to force attention to those objects on which they alone can be exercised, and by which alone they can consequently be improved.

If, then, the direction given to the power of attention be in a line diametrically opposite to the objects on which these faculties are to operate, we have a sufficient cause for their non-operation, and have no reason to lay the blame on nature. This may be farther illustrated, by examining a few of the many instances in which the powers of reasoning, taste, and fancy, have a partial operation, and are readily exercised on some peculiar class of objects, but seem totally inefficient when applied to others equally within the province of the same faculty.

Let us observe, in the first place, the effects produced by directing the atten-

tion, in every process of reasoning, exclusively to the strict and proper meaning of words. Words are the signs by which the ideas signified are to be conveyed to the mind, and, consequently, towards the exercise of the power of reasoning, attention to the force and meaning of the terms employed is indispensably requisite. Without such attention we can neither reason nor understand the reasonings of others.

But if attention be exclusively directed to the signification of words and terms, it will be only concerning the meaning of words that the power of reasoning will be found to operate. The reasonings of such a person, with regard to the propriety or impropriety of adopting certain phrases, or certain modes of expression, will, in all probability, be just and accurate; but it is as probable that his reasonings, on the truth or falsehood of a proposition in politics, morals, or divinity, will be weak, inconclusive, or absurd. They can scarcely, indeed,

be otherwise, if, instead of attending to the sense in which the terms of the proposition are evidently stated, he takes them in another sense; and into this error, from the previous habits of his mind, he will be extremely liable to fall.

A similar consequence will result from habitually confining the attention to any particular field of inquiry, or any particular mode of reasoning. It is thus, that among great scholars we sometimes meet with men, who comprehend not the force of any arguments that are not formed on the model of their particular school. To persons of this description wisdom will cry in vain, if she does not send her voice from the rostrum; and truth will pass unknown, unless she be arrayed in the dress in which they have been accustomed to contemplate her. It may likewise be observed, that the same cause which prevents them from discovering truth out of the limits of their own school, renders them

extremely apt to be imposed upon by phantoms dressed in its garb, when these happen to appear where they take it for granted that truth has fixed her constant residence.

In every such instance we shall find, that attention, instead of having been directed towards the examination of those ideas which form the basis of the argument, has been occupied by certain particulars that have no necessary connexion with the point in question. This is rendered especially evident, as soon as they begin to reply to the arguments that have been urged, in support of opinions to which they have conceived an aversion, and which they believe it easy to refute. But in vain do they arm themselves for the combat; in vain do they, in attacking the adversary, put forth all their strength. From being incapable of taking a full view of what they combat, they never direct their blows so as even to hit what they intend to destroy.

When two disputants of this description stand up as the champions of their respective parties, the contest becomes very amusing to a by-stander. Like two ships of war coming to an engagement under the direction of blind men, they waste their fury on the air, but are each so delighted with the noise of their own cannon, that, in listening to its roar, they assure themselves of victory; and, after having fired a few harmless rounds, sail away in triumph, each with equal truth boasting of his conquest. Let us now examine the cause. The degree of attention which the young student finds it requisite to give, before he can thoroughly understand the nature of a simple proposition, is at first made with effort, more or less difficult, according as his apprehension is more or less acute. But when attention to the ideas contained in the questions proposed to him has been so repeatedly given, as to become habitual, the effort which it formerly cost is forgotten; and

he thenceforth finds it as easy to discern the whole scope and tenor of the proposition addressed to his reason, as to behold what is placed before his eyes.

When this facility has not been acquired by habit, no proposition will be understood, without such an effort of attention as few, who believe themselves arrived at the years of wisdom, will bestow. By such, therefore, the whole of the ideas contained in any one of the links which form the chain of the speaker's argument, will never be discerned. Attention will never be directed to those: the effort would be too painful. How much more painful and laborious to examine the relation of the several propositions to each other, so as to discover their agreement or disagreement! There remains then but one alternative. Persons who have not, by habitual attention, acquired a facility in discerning the ideas which form the substance of a question, must either totally decline discussing the questions, of

whose merits they are thus necessarily ignorant, or they must speak of them according to the notions conceived of them in their own imaginations. The less they have been accustomed to examine and to analyze, the more liable will they be to adopt the latter alternative. Hence the prevalence of prejudice and self-deception. Hence, too, one of the greatest and most formidable of the impediments which retard the progress of truth.

It may justly be reckoned among the merciful dispensations of Providence, that by the constitution of our minds we are, when incapable of fully exercising any one of the intellectual faculties, incapable also of being rendered sensible of the deficiency. The person whose perception of external objects is defective, will acknowledge that the objects pointed out to his observation were not perceived by him in that particular instance, but is not sensible that he does not, in general, make as good

use of his senses as others do. The same may be observed with respect to all the other intellectual powers : but it is with regard to the power of reasoning, that this unconsciousness of our own deficiency is productive of the most unpleasant and pernicious consequences ; for where we are incapable of discerning the agreement or disagreement between ideas, there is no possibility of convincing us that those which we suppose to be inseparable have no connexion, or the reverse.

Hence arises the eternal disputations carried on by persons who are utterly incapable of examining the real merits of the question in dispute. Hence the confidence with which the wise in his own conceit utters the pompous nothings which he mistakes for arguments of weight irresistible. Hence the violence with which people espouse one side or other, where the matter in debate is beyond their capacity to comprehend, and concerning which

they are utterly destitute of the necessary information.

I make no doubt, that in the society of men, instances of this sort may sometimes occur; but in female society their occurrence is certainly not unfrequent. Is it not, then, a powerful argument for the cultivation of the reasoning faculty, that it would put an end to the vain attempts at reasoning upon subjects, concerning which, from our situation or circumstances, we can only obtain limited and partial information? Knowing by experience the degree of attention it required to enable us to investigate the subjects we have thoroughly examined, we shall certainly not be forward to decide on those which we have had no opportunity to examine or investigate. Having obtained clear views of such subjects as we have applied our minds to, we shall not think ourselves entitled to pronounce on those of which we can only have a glimpse.

These considerations ought to have some weight, in balancing the advantages to be derived to both sexes from the cultivation of that faculty, whereby we are enabled to make any advances in the discovery of truth, or in the acquisition of useful knowledge. It is indeed professedly the prime object in the education of young men. When, therefore, young men, after all the pains bestowed, are still incapable of reasoning justly, are we thence to conclude, that the inability arises from a natural defect in the intellect? "This," to answer the question in the words of Mr Locke, "is the case of very few. The greater number is of those, whom the habit of never exerting the thoughts has disabled: the powers of their minds are starved by disuse, and have lost that reach and strength which nature fitted them to receive from exercise."*

It is not impossible that years may be spent at a university, without acquiring

* LOCKE on the Conduct of the Understanding.

that quick perception of truth which is the great desideratum towards sound reasoning. The knowledge of mathematical science, which is generally deemed an all-sufficient aid in the cultivation of the reasoning powers, will, according to my view of the subject, be seen to afford only partial assistance in their cultivation. By habitual attention to the ideas contained in propositions that are capable of demonstration, the mind will acquire a facility in discerning truths of that particular class. But though habit may have rendered this peculiar exercise of attention easy and delightful, if attention has never been directed to truths of another description, these will not be discovered without effort; and the man who piques himself on his quick discernment of truths that are susceptible of demonstration, will, of all others, be least inclined to make an effort for the purpose of ascertaining probabilities.

In this opinion I have the happiness of being supported by an authority, which will

have deserved weight with such of my readers as know how much good sense, just reasoning, and exquisite taste, has been comprised within the narrow compass of the small treatise to which I refer. "Such," says my estimable friend, "such is the clearness, such the irrefragable and indisputable evidence of mathematical demonstration, that it may be doubted, whether those who are perpetually accustomed to contemplate it, may not resemble persons who have never been used to view objects of sight except in the most luminous point of view possible; the sensibility of the organs, in both cases, is liable to be impaired by the force of frequently repeated and very strong impressions. On this principle it has been remarked, that many very eminent mathematicians, committing themselves on other subjects, have manifested no superior powers of reasoning or argument; the lighter, and even the stronger shades of evidence, appeared to have escaped them: dealing in their proper vo-

cation only with *certainties*, they become less qualified to judge of *probabilities*; and never having occasion to settle the meaning of any disputed term, they are less qualified to mingle in a debate, the issue of which depends on the correct use of terms, having, perhaps, in common and philosophical language, several different acceptations.”*

It may, on the other hand, be observed, that where attention has been solely occupied in weighing or examining the form of evidence, on subjects that admit not of demonstration, the mind will rarely acquire that accuracy and precision which have to the mathematical student become habitual. Hence the advantage of exercising the attention on every various species of knowledge. If the power of reasoning be in-

* See three Discourses on Literary Taste, delivered at the Anniversary Meetings of the Literary Society at Chichester, by the President.

deed the glory of our nature, whatever tends to give us the enjoyment of that power ought to be held precious ; but if, with all the advantages of superior education, men sometimes exhibit proofs of habitual inattention to the agreement or disagreement of ideas, in their own reasonings, or in the reasonings of others, it is not surprising that women should still more frequently be incapable of reasoning with accuracy or precision.

Even where great pains and care is bestowed on the cultivation of the female mind, it is seldom these are calculated to enable the object of them to exert her own reason in the discovery of truth. Our chief aim is to enable our pupil, not to examine, but repeat our arguments, and to rest satisfied with our conclusions.

We ought, however, to reflect, that a time may arrive when even the most bigotted adherence to the opinions we have

taught, and the rules we have prescribed, will not secure her from error, and when she would find it of more advantage to be able to exert her own reason, than to refer to ours. Is it then fair to deprive her of the power by which she might be enabled to decide on points that intimately concern her happiness, but on the occurrence of which we have not calculated, and against which we have consequently made no provision?

But even these arguments, plain and simple as they are, must be urged in vain to those who are incapable of the effort of attention requisite to examine whether they directly bear upon the subject or no. It is therefore only with parents who can reason, that they will have any influence, and by such alone can the real and permanent interest of a child be kept steadily in view.

While it is the custom to devote the most precious years of life to the acquire-

ment of accomplishments, in which the rational faculty is rarely, or perhaps never, exercised, attention will habitually be directed to objects so remote from those to which it must perseveringly be given in every process of reasoning, that when a question of moment is started, the only possible way by which the mind can judge of its merits must be, that it is approved or disapproved by such or such a person, or supposed to favour the opinions of such or such a party.

Too often, indeed, may we observe men who are capable of reasoning wisely and justly, judging of the weight of their opponent's arguments, not by the matter they contain, but by some adventitious circumstance ; and still more frequently may we observe, that in discussions on whatever subject, even candid men sometimes seem to forget or to be unconscious of all that is said by the opposite party. Both these evils originate in certain habits of attention :—

attention being, in the first instance, attracted to accessory ideas by association; and, in the second, too much absorbed in the contemplation of the speaker's own ideas, to enable him to notice those of his opponent.

It is therefore of the first importance, in the cultivation of the reasoning faculty, to accustom the mind to what may be called integrity of attention. This habit, essential as it is, can only be obtained by such repeated efforts, as none will have courage to make in whom the love of truth is not paramount. The conclusion is obvious. From the above statement it necessarily follows, that, in order to prepare the mind for the exercise of the reasoning faculty, it is above all things necessary, to inspire it with the love of truth. I do not mean of truth merely as opposed to falsehood, but of truth as the end of knowledge, the object of all science—truth immutable and universal.

This necessity will, I flatter myself, be rendered still more apparent, from the view that will hereafter be given of the nature of a principle, which, in all its operations, has a direct tendency to diminish our regard for truth, by giving to other objects a primary interest in our hearts.

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ESSAY III.

ON THE EFFECTS
RESULTING FROM A PECULIAR DIRECTION
OF ATTENTION
ON THE
POWER OF IMAGINATION,
AND IN PRODUCING
THE
EMOTIONS OF TASTE.

1811

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ESSAY III.

ON THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM A PECULIAR DIRECTION OF ATTENTION ON THE POWER OF IMAGINATION, AND IN PRODUCING THE EMOTIONS OF TASTE.

CHAPTER I.

Observations on the power of imagination as affording exercise to such of the intellectual faculties as have previously been developed and cultivated. Correspondence between the degree in which any of these faculties habitually operate, and the nature of the combinations formed in the imagination, illustrated by various examples.

IMAGINATION is not a simple faculty, but a complex power, in which all the faculties of the mind occasionally operate. I now propose to show, that the operation of these faculties upon the power

of imagination, bears an exact proportion to the degree in which the objects of these faculties have been objects of attention; or, in other words, to the degree in which these several faculties have been previously cultivated. There can be no doubt, that the imagination of the person in whom they have all been cultivated will be rich and vigorous. In the combinations which it forms, the operations of quick discernment, ready apprehension, sound judgment, taste, and reason, will be equally conspicuous. From minds thus endowed have proceeded all such works of genius as have contributed to the delight and improvement of successive ages. In all these extraordinary instances, however, the faculties will not only be found to have been universally cultivated, but to have been endowed by nature with an uncommon degree of strength and vigour. Where nature has been less liberal, it will not be possible, by the most assiduous cultivation of the faculties, to

render the produce of the imagination eminently sublime or beautiful. But, even where there are no pretensions to such superior genius, the imagination that has been enriched by a variety of ideas, will not only prove a source of perpetual enjoyment to the possessor, but of delight to all who have the happiness of his acquaintance. When, in persons thus endowed, the talent of conversation has been also cultivated, such is the pleasure derived from their company, that they may, without hyperbole, be termed the sun-beams of social life.

Let us now view the power of imagination, as it operates under less favourable auspices.

In the mind of the person whose primary faculties have been no farther cultivated, than as impelled by necessity, or excited by some selfish impulse, the imagination may be equally active as in minds of a

superior order; but, when the attention has never been directed towards subjects of an intellectual nature, we may easily conceive how little its utmost activity can produce. In such instances, the combinations formed by imagination will, when the passions do not interfere, be like the dreams of children, made up of incongruous assemblages of external objects; but when any of the passions predominate, those images, however incoherent, will from that passion take their form and colouring; which will easily be accounted for, when we consider how naturally the object of every passion attracts and occupies the attention.

In the songs, or ballads, or other species of poetical composition, which are known to have been popular at any particular period, or in any particular country, we have a certain means of judging of the degree in which all, or any of the faculties, were cultivated at the period, or in the

nation that produced them ; and of the passions and affections that predominated among the people with whom they had obtained popularity. For as the imagination can only operate on such classes of objects as have previously engaged the attention, poetry, which is addressed to the imagination, must keep within the same limits, or it will fail to please.

As a proof of this, we find the poetry of savages abounding in images of cruelty, and expressing the horrid triumphs of revenge ; but in the description of natural objects so defective, as to evince, that the perceptions were in so uncultivated a state as to be only partially exercised, and this only when excited by the passions.

In the poetry of the oriental nations we perceive greater proofs of observation and discernment, whilst we, at the same time, perceive such incongruities as manifest a total deficiency in judgment ; and in their

description of passion, such want of tenderness, as shews that love was with them a passion unmingled with affection. I know that there are exceptions, and that some of the oriental poets have occasionally struck all the chords of sympathy; but, in general, their compositions denote not the possession of many ideas derived from any other source than attention to external objects. From these objects the imagination of the eastern poet selects the materials with which he builds his monstrous fabric; towards the rearing of which nothing more is necessary, than to combine what nature has disjoined, or to multiply that to which the laws of nature has prescribed certain immutable limits. Thus, for instance, to the creature of his imagination the poet gives as many eyes, or hands, or arms, as he pleases; and liberally bestows on him the wings of a bird, or the fins of a fish, or the size of a mountain, or the power of transporting himself from place to place at a wish. And to those who have never paid

such attention to the objects of affection as to render them capable of entering into the description of human passions, and human feelings, such descriptions prove highly acceptable. All the objects they present belonging to that class on which their attention has been chiefly occupied, they are more readily seized by the imagination than the description of human feelings or affections would be. But where the mind and heart are in a more cultivated state, it requires something more than the mere combination of external objects to satisfy the imagination. The sympathy that has been awakened by attention to human feelings, becomes, in such circumstances, the prime conductor by which the imagination is to be kindled; and the productions which afford no exercise to that sympathy, whatever merit they, in other respects, possess, will have no chance for popularity. The effects of this attention to human feelings, in the cultivation of the affections, may be seen

in the rude compositions of nations that have little claim to civilization, as well as in the popular poetry of the highly civilized.

The fragments of Gaelic poetry which have, without dispute, been preserved from periods of great antiquity, furnish abundant proof of having been produced among a people to whom all that interests the affections had been objects of attention. Their descriptions of love denote not the excess of passion, but the exquisite tenderness of affection : Their descriptions of war denote not the blind fury of revenge, but notions of liberty and justice, derived from the same source as their other affections, viz. attention to the natural feelings of the human heart. Imagination having such materials to work on, formed from these her combinations, and not being reduced to the necessity of modelling material objects into monsters to prove her power, she gave to the scenes of nature no adventitious

colouring, but painted them in such true and fair proportions, as evinced a considerable degree of judgment and observation.

And here it may be proper to remark, that as in every exercise of imagination attention is directed towards the ideas which the mind has received from observation or description, constant employment, if it be of a kind that demands attention, must necessarily impede the exercise of imagination, as idleness must, on the contrary, promote its exercise. Wherever, therefore, imagination prevails, we may be certain that there industry does not flourish; and where habits of industry are prevalent, there we need not expect to meet with many proofs of imagination. But as, among the various avocations of busy life, there are some which make comparatively little demand upon attention, and as imagination will ever, in such instances, be found extremely active, it is of great importance

to society to provide against the evils which this activity must produce, where it has no materials to work upon but such as are of an inflammable nature. In this consideration we have an unanswerable argument for paying that attention to the education of the lower orders, which is essential towards enabling them to store the mind with such ideas as may be contemplated with advantage to the moral character; and, while they occupy the imagination, may elevate the feelings and improve the heart.

With regard to the higher classes, who enjoy the privilege of leisure as a birth-right, imagination must, in their minds, have an almost perpetual operation; and according to the degree in which all the faculties have been exercised, and the desires regulated, will the operation be salutary or otherwise. Where the attention has been habitually directed to mean and unworthy objects, it is by objects of

the same description that the imagination will be solely occupied : And those who, from base and sordid views, seek to gratify the imaginations of persons of this description, must exhibit such pictures as accord with the depraved habits of their minds. It is shocking to reflect how frequently genius has stooped to this ignoble office ! We may, however, with propriety conclude, that the poet or the painter who thus employs the powers of invention to cater for the corrupt imaginations of the vulgar great, does not possess that intellectual vigour essential to the production of whatever is truly admirable or excellent. The judgment must be very defective that does not quickly perceive, that neither fame, nor glory, nor honour, attach to talents, when they forsake the service of virtue.

If imagination be so active in the idle as I have represented it, whence comes it that the idle are generally so dull ? In

answer to this question it may be observed, that as the indolent and uncultivated have few ideas, though imagination may be occupied in forming new combinations of these, they are seldom worthy of being communicated. They are even, for want of variety, tiresome to those who form them, and consequently render the spirits flat and joyless. Such persons, though they have no true relish for the pleasures of social intercourse, are always ready to bestow their weariness on strangers. At home they have no resources, but to re-dream the dreams that have been already dreamed; at home they are consequently wretched.

Among uneducated women of all ranks and situations, we may find numerous examples to illustrate the truth of the above remark.

I have, in a former section, in treating of the effects of attention in awakening

the perceptions, pointed out the consequences which result from having the attention habitually occupied by dress. The pleasure which we naturally derive from the beauty of colours, from novelty, and variety, may sufficiently account for the facility with which the love of ornament is thus inspired. It is not, however, until it seizes the imagination, that it becomes a passion: But when in an empty mind the love of dress thus predominates, how melancholy is the result! Could the combinations produced in the imaginations of such persons be exposed to view, what heaps of foil and feathers, what glittering store of jewels and embroidery, would meet our dazzled eyes! When these brilliant reveries are unbroken by the rude voice of conscience calling to the performance of active duties, it is astonishing to what lengths they may be carried. I have myself known more than one instance of women, whose imaginations, from childhood to old age, have been thus occupied,

and to whose minds these day-dreams have afforded a chief source of enjoyment; and this without any stimulus from the desire of admiration! Let that desire be added, and the effect upon the imagination will be incalculably increased.

From the pains usually taken to direct the thoughts of young women to matrimony, it is not surprising that the idea of matrimony should, in some instances, engross their whole attention. From the time that the attention is thus absorbed by one object, no improvement of the faculties can, for reasons before stated, possibly take place. The mind must consequently, thenceforth, remain stationary; while the one predominant idea, uncontrolled by judgment or reason, keeps possession of the imagination. To imagination all things are possible:—under its deluding influence the homely girl sees men who are most sensible to the power of beauty captivated by her charms; the vulgar is led to the

altar by the man of taste ; and the poor makes conquest after conquest of lords, nabobs, and contractors ! Instances have been known to occur, of persons not naturally deficient in understanding, who, for thirty or five and thirty years of their lives, have incessantly pursued such phantoms of felicity ; and this without having experienced for one of all the various objects that from time to time engaged their thoughts, a single spark either of esteem or affection.

What a waste of the intellectual faculties do such instances exhibit ! What regret must it produce in every thinking mind, to behold this utter annihilation of all those mental energies, which, had the attention in early life been properly directed, would have been rendered instrumental to the happiness of the individual and of society.

It is true, that while the mind is engaged in forming these visions of happiness it experiences a certain gratification. Life

may, however, extend far beyond the period in which it is possible, even for the most visionary, to indulge in these chimeras; whereas imagination, in the cultivated, affords enjoyment to life's latest verge.

When we consider how wide is the field on which imagination operates; that it presents to us "images of absent objects of every kind; that visible figure, sounds articulate and musical, all modifications of language, and symbolical representations of ideas, fall within its province;" and that it likewise has the power of forming combinations of these;—we will acknowledge, that it is not by confining the attention to one class of objects, that the imagination can best be rendered a source of happiness. The value of its combinations, appreciated by the degree of gratification they are calculated to afford, will, I am persuaded, be found to bear an exact proportion to the richness and variety of the materials on which it operates. Even when it operates

with most facility, this observation will be found strictly applicable.

From circumstances apparently trivial, a word casually uttered, an object accidentally presented to view, a lively imagination will rapidly, from association, create a picture, whose origin it may perhaps be impossible to trace. This picture of its own creating it may contemplate with delight, and if the objects that compose it be in their natures noble and dignified, and calculated to produce in the mind a state of elevation somewhat similar to that produced by the contemplation of truth, the pleasurable effects of the emotion may continue to be felt, even after the cause that gave rise to them has been forgotten. The pleasure experienced by an uncultivated mind in the indulgence of its reveries, is, on the contrary, transient; never extending farther than to the moment in which the dream is broken. But in minds destitute of cultivation, the combinations

of imagination are frequently worse than useless, they are *positively pernicious*. They debase the mind, by rendering it familiar with low and grovelling objects, and even while the conduct remains without reproach, deprave the character by polluting the purity of the heart. It cannot be denied, that these opposite effects naturally and inevitably flow from the opposite nature of the objects to which attention has been habitually directed.

In female education, as it is generally conducted, the imagination is stimulated, while the stock of ideas is yet too scanty to afford a supply of wholesome materials for its operations. And here it may be proper to remark, that it is not by attention to the objects of perception that this active faculty is first awakened. Though powerfully affected by visible objects, I question whether, by the contemplation of visible objects merely, the imagination was ever yet excited. It is by the description

of objects, and not by their actual presence, that the spark is kindled, which, in the language of poetry, is described as a spark from heaven !

Very different is the origin ascribed to it by a certain class of gloomy enthusiasts, who deem it a prime merit to libel this work of God. The pleasures of imagination, the purest and most refined of the pleasures of which it has pleased the divine Being to render us susceptible, are represented by bigots as snares which our Creator has, in forming us, laid for our souls. Imagination is by their accounts a faculty proscribed, lying under an anathema, every exercise of it hateful in the sight of God, whose gift it is!—But while they thus abjure the works of imagination, mark the inconsistency of their conduct. To what faculty but to that of imagination are their harangues addressed? Were the imagination extinguished, in vain would they exhibit their gloomy images of terror ;

in vain would they vent their spleen on the innocent amusements of life, and the salutary gratifications of social intercourse. It is only by obtaining power over the imagination that they can possibly make a single convert; and this power they will find more or less easy of acquirement, as the imaginations of those to whom they address themselves have been occupied by mean or noble objects. Those to whom knowledge has never opened her splendid stores, whose judgments have remained weak for want of exercise, and who have consequently remained destitute of taste, if nature has given them sensibility, will, under these circumstances, have their imaginations easily kindled by the flame of enthusiasm. They are like jars filled with electric fluid, ready to explode at the touch of the conductor. The more lively their imagination, the more apt are they to become the prey of their credulity. "Such despise sound doctrine, and having itching ears, turn away from the truth to fables;—

knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings.”*

Such, to the end of the world, will be the consequences of exciting the imagination, while the reasoning faculty is, for want of culture, unable to direct its operations or restrain its flights. Hence the importance of turning the attention of the youthful mind to objects, which, while they afford exercise to all the powers of the understanding, have a tendency to elevate the imagination, and improve the taste.

Since the above was written Mr Stewart's Philosophical Essays have been given to the Public, and in them I have the inexpressible satisfaction to find many ideas similar to those I have expressed, stated with a precision, and illustrated with a force

* See PAUL'S 1st Epistle to Timothy, 6th chapter.

of argument, that infinitely enhances their value. With the following passage from that estimable work I shall conclude this slight sketch of the operation of attention in the development of the intellectual powers.

In speaking of those who have, to the latest period of life, retained the powers of genius, Mr Stewart observes, that “ in them imagination will be found to be only one of the many endowments and habits which constituted their intellectual superiority; an understanding enriched every moment by a new accession of information from without, and fed by a perennial spring of new ideas from within; a systematical pursuit of the same object through the whole of life, profiting at every step by the lessons of its own experience, and the recollection of its own errors: above all, the steady exercise of reason and good sense, in controlling, guiding, and stimulating this important, but subordinate faculty;

subjecting it betimes to the wholesome discipline of rules, and, by a constant application of it to its destined purposes, preserving to it entire all the advantages which it derived from the hand of nature.”

CHAPTER II.

The emotions of taste ; not to be produced by the operations of intellect, or of the affections separately, but by their combined operation. Manner in which the affections of the heart, and the faculties of the understanding, are blended in the exercise of taste, illustrated, &c.

THE nature and principles of taste have been so beautifully explained and illustrated in the valuable treatise of Mr Alison, that it is impossible to add force to demonstrations so peculiarly clear and convincing: And hence it may seem, that all which remains to one who adopts his views upon the subject, is to refer to the work in which they have been with inimitable eloquence described.

But it appears to me that the subject is not yet exhausted; and that, subscribing

to the principles which Mr Alison has with so much taste and skill developed, some important considerations, connected with these principles, still remain the proper objects of inquiry and investigation.

As the capability of enjoying all the refined pleasures of a just and discriminating taste, must ultimately depend on the degree in which the individual is capable of exerting those powers of the mind, whose operations are essential towards producing the emotions of sublimity or beauty, it becomes a question of some moment to ascertain, what are the powers which, in the exercise of taste, are called into action. Are those of the understanding only requisite? Then all who are capable of exerting the powers of observation, and judgment, and reasoning, must be in proportion possessed of taste. If, on the other hand, we suppose that a great susceptibility of the emotions of affection will suffice for the production of the emotions of taste,

we must in that case infer, that wherever the affections are cultivated, taste will be experienced. To whichever of those opinions we are inclined to subscribe, (and we may observe, that in disquisitions on the subject of taste one or other of them has usually been adopted), we, according to my apprehension, will be apt to mislead those who are desirous of cultivating a faculty which we justly consider as the source of the most refined enjoyment. Few who take the trouble of consulting authorities upon the subject, will think that taste, like reading and writing, according to Dogberry, comes by nature; though it has been justly observed by an enlightened critic, whose analysis of the work to which I have alluded has been much and deservedly admired, that “the first notion most people have about taste is, that it is a peculiar sense or faculty, of which beauty is the appropriate object, as light is of the sense of seeing, or sound of hearing; and this being once settled, there

is with many an end of the whole question. Beauty is that which gratifies the faculty of taste, and taste is that by which we are made sensible of beauty; and this is, as they conceive, all that is to be known of the one or the other.”*

Considering how averse people generally are to the trouble of thinking, it is not to be expected that those who have thus comfortably made up their minds upon the subject, will readily be persuaded, while they continue to view the subject in question as merely speculative, to submit their opinions to a rigorous investigation. “What good,” say they, “can possibly arise from ascertaining with precision the nature and origin of the emotions we occasionally experience? Would it quicken our perception of beauty, or increase the gratification we derive from it, were we

* See the critique on Mr Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, in the *Edinburgh Review*, NO. 35.

enabled to decompose our sensations, or to resolve them into their original elements? If the negative be admitted, it is evident that knowledge upon this subject is not power, and consequently is not of any real importance." But the negative we do not admit: we, on the contrary, assert, that our knowledge of the principles of taste has a direct tendency to quicken our perceptions of the sublime and beautiful, by awakening our attention to qualities that excite the emotions of sublimity and beauty; and also tends to increase the gratification derived from these emotions, by increasing in the heart the influence of the best and noblest affections.

In this point of view, taste is seen as connected with the moral principle, and appears, not indeed as an additional faculty bestowed on a few fortunate individuals, but as an operation of the mind, to which all the faculties that have been passing in review before us, and all the affections and sympa-

thies of which we have yet to speak, are alike essential. In the emotions of taste they are united. It is this union that constitutes these emotions; and, consequently, the capability of experiencing them must depend, not solely on the degree in which we are capable of exercising the one or the other, but on the degree in which we are capable of exercising both.

To the illustration of this point I beg leave to devote a few pages, in hopes of convincing my young friends, that in cultivating taste on just and real principles, they are not only augmenting the sources of innocent enjoyment, but ennobling their natures, by increasing their susceptibility to emotions more nearly allied than they are perhaps aware, to piety and virtue.

As it is extremely obvious that all do not perceive beauty in the same object, it is not merely from the perception of the object that the emotion of beauty is deriv-

ed. In order to excite that emotion, the object must recall to our recollection some pleasurable feelings or sensations formerly experienced. These, again, on examination, will invariably be found connected with the affections or sympathies of the heart. To elucidate this by an example familiar to all, let us take the instance of light.

“It is pleasant to the eyes to behold the sun,” says the wise king of Israel: and, doubtless, it is to the original frame and constitution of our nature, that the pleasure we derive from light must ultimately be referred. But let us examine the nature of the pleasurable emotion we experience on beholding the light of day, and we shall find, that it is by no means produced simply by the effect of light upon the external organs, but by calling up in our minds certain trains of ideas that are all of a cheerful cast, and are consequently exhilarating.

In the benevolence of the Creator it has been decreed, that the consciousness of existence should impart delight, and that every animal should rejoice in the exercise of the powers and functions that belong to its nature. Hence evidently arises much of that pleasure which we perceive to be enjoyed by infants, in fixing their eyes on luminous objects. As such objects have for them peculiar attractions, it is probably in contemplating them that they first learn what may properly be termed *the art of seeing*. Thus may light, even in the earliest period of infancy, be associated with pleasing ideas ; or, in other words, produce the recollection of former gratification.

As we advance in life this pleasing association is confirmed and augmented by a vast accession of ideas, derived from all the various objects of sight, at a period when whatever delights the eyes affords gratification to the heart. Thus the ideas of light and joy may become inseparable ;

and, with the exceptions hereafter to be mentioned, they are inseparable: and so universally is the association understood, that in figurative language one may be substituted for the other, without any risk of misconception. The connexion between light and truth is formed by a similar process; and this association is imperceptibly strengthened in pious minds by scriptural imagery, in which the idea of light is frequently introduced as descriptive of some of the attributes of Deity.

How sublime is the idea of light to him, who, in the contemplation of it, is impressed with a solemn recollection, that "*God is light, and that in him there is no darkness.*" The emotions produced by this association are sublime. Those produced by a connexion between the ideas of light and of human virtue, may be instanced as emotions of beauty. Thus, in describing the happiness resulting from the consciousness of integrity, when the prophet de-

clares, that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," we instantly adopt the association; and, when we do so, experience from the idea of light an emotion of beauty.

But does the idea of light invariably produce the same effect upon our minds? Is it always accompanied by emotions of sublimity or beauty? If not, upon what circumstances does the recurrence of these emotions depend? The reply to this will, I presume, have been anticipated. It is only when the ideas that are connected with the ideas of light occupy a certain portion of attention, that the perception of light excites in us any sensible emotion. Nor can this appear extraordinary; for if, as was formerly stated, we do not perceive what is placed before our eyes without a certain degree of attention, it will follow, of course, that towards the perception of such qualities as by their association with ideas of affection have a tendency to pro-

duce certain emotions, a still greater effort of attention must be requisite.

It appears, then, that the emotions of sublimity and beauty depend on a twofold operation of attention, which serves to unite, or rather blend, two distinct principles of our nature—the affections of the heart, and the faculties of the understanding. In order to experience the emotions of taste, both of these must necessarily be cultivated; and there is no other way in which they can be cultivated but by attention to their proper objects.

When it is the mental faculties only that have been improved by habitual exercise, the eye will perceive, and the ear will hear, and the judgment will determine, with accuracy; but if the affections be in the meantime dormant or obtuse, nothing that is seen, heard, or understood, will produce an emotion of taste. If, on the other hand, the affections have been culti-

vated by attention to the proper objects of affection, the heart will certainly be rendered susceptible of veneration, love, joy, pity, admiration, gratitude, &c. and have all its tender sympathies called forth when the objects of these affections are presented to the sight, or to the memory ; but if the intellectual faculties be in the same mind feeble, or only capable of partial and limited exertion, there will, in this instance likewise, be an utter incapability of experiencing the emotions of taste. Nor will these be experienced by him who has had both his heart and understanding cultivated in the highest degree possible, unless he has habitually directed his attention to the discovery of such qualities in external objects, as, by analogies or resemblance, are calculated to excite, through the medium of the imagination, the same affections as are inspired by the proper objects of his love, pity, admiration, &c. It is on the discovery of these analogies that the emotions of taste depend, and only by a pecu-

liar exercise of attention that they can be discovered.

When attention has been but rarely, or occasionally, given to what are termed objects of taste, it is impossible, for reasons stated at length in the former Essay, that the perception of those qualities which are by association connected with ideas of affection, can be so quick as instantaneously to affect the mind with correspondent emotions. Hence we must infer, that habitual attention to these qualities in external objects is indispensable to the cultivation of taste, however brilliant the imagination, and however ardent the affections.

I shall endeavour to illustrate these remarks by familiar examples. First, with regard to the man of uncultured mind, but cultivated affections. In every such instance we shall find, that the affections, however ardent, are limited to their proper

objects : they are never capable of being excited by remote resemblances to the qualities which endear the human beings with whom he is connected to his heart.

An ignorant peasant may give the most striking proofs of tender affection for his infant offspring ; and this affection will expand his heart so far, as to inspire him with tenderness for children in general, and perhaps awaken kindly and benevolent feelings for every object of human sympathy. But will any of the most beautiful scenes in nature have such power over his imagination, as to recall the ideas of infancy, and thus to excite emotions of tenderness similar to those we suppose him to have frequently experienced ? No ; the return of the vernal season will be hailed by him as the return of the season of profitable exertion. But it is not in a mind so constituted, that “ the soft and gentle grass with which the earth is spread, the feeble texture of the plants and flowers,

the young of animals just entering into life, the remains of winter yet lingering among the woods and hills, will *inspire something of that fearful tenderness with which infancy is usually beheld.*"*

We need only ask a few questions of any uneducated person, to be convinced of the extreme insensibility with which objects, which we justly deem eminently beautiful, are surveyed by those whose attention has been habitually engrossed by vulgar cares. I was not long ago told by a young woman, born and bred in the country, that she had never in her life observed the beauty of the setting sun; and must greatly doubt, whether there are, among our common labourers, many to whom we could apply the poet's description of the swain, of whom we are desired to ask,

" As he
Journes homewards from a summer day's

* *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste.*

Long labour, *why*, forgetful of his toils
And due repose, he loiters to behold
The sunshine gleaming, as through amber clouds,
O'er all the western sky?"*

So far is attention to such objects from being universal, that the instances in which they occur among untutored minds are always considered as extraordinary, and are pointed out to our notice, as indicating something peculiar in the mind of the individual. It is in such cases that we perceive the clearest proofs of the differences which exist between mind and mind, in respect to that natural susceptibility of impression which is termed original genius. This observation is finely illustrated by Dr Beattie in the *Minstrel*; where, in tracing the progress of a mind susceptible of all the finer emotions of taste, he, with admirable skill, displays the first symptoms of dawning genius in an early sensibility to the charms of nature.

* Akenside.

Lo! where the stripling, wrapt in wonder, roves
 Beneath the precipice o'erhung with pine,
 And sees on high, amidst the encircling groves,
 From cliff to cliff the foaming torrent shiue ;
 While waters, woods, and winds, in concert join,
 And echo swells the chorus to the skies.
 Would Edwin this majestic scene resign,
 For aught the huntsman's puny craft supplies?
 Ah! No: He better knows great nature's charms to
 prize.

It is difficult to forbear pursuing the description, it is so eminently beautiful; but of more consequence to my argument to observe, with what just discrimination the poet describes the effects of young Edwin's superior taste on his rude associates:—

“The neighbours stared and sighed, yet blessed the lad,
 “Some deemed him wondrous wise, *and some believed
 him mad.*”

Those who have never paid so much attention to any external objects, as to perceive in their forms, or colours, or combi-

nations, that beauty which, when perceived, never fails to excite agreeable emotion, must consequently remain ignorant of the nature of emotions they have never experienced; nor will they perceive, in the form of any external objects, analogies or resemblances to any of those qualities which they know to be characteristic of some of the natural and immediate objects of affection. Even when attention to such qualities has become habitual, if it be by any circumstance interrupted, the mind will, during that period, be incapable of experiencing any emotion of sublimity or beauty. Thus, for example, it is possible that a man passionately addicted to the pleasures of the chase, may, at the same time, be exquisitely susceptible of the emotions of taste. In contemplating the beauty of autumn in his solitary walks, the decay of nature may produce in his mind feelings congenial with the season; and while every minute circumstance which indicates the death or approaching departure of the summer's

glories, augments the impression, by uniformly presenting those solemn images of decay that are to mortal beings so peculiarly interesting, there is no doubt that correspondent emotions will touch his heart. But let us observe him, amid the same scenery, and in the same season, engaged in pursuit of a fox, following the hounds through glens that rustle with the fallen leaves, and over plains that have recently been divested of their beauty, and we shall quickly perceive, that the sight of these objects no longer produces in his mind any emotion whatever. A proof, that the emotion in every instance depends on the degree of attention given to those qualities which we assimilate in our imagination with those that are properly the objects of human sympathy.

The perception of these qualities will be more or less quick, in exact proportion to the degree in which they have occupied our attention; and as it is the immediate

perception of them, accompanied by exquisite sensibility to the emotions of affection, that constitute the essentials of taste, where either of these are wanting it is vain to expect, that emotions of sublimity or beauty will be excited by any of the charms of nature, or any of the productions of genius.

But as it frequently happens, that from some peculiar circumstances the mind becomes habitually disposed to the exercise of affections of one particular class, we must naturally expect, that in such instances attention will be chiefly directed to the discovery of qualities which assimilate with the affection that predominates, and with the objects of which the mind is, of course, most familiar.

As a confirmation of the above remark I believe it will be acknowledged, that in proportion to the number of persons who are susceptible of the emotions of beauty, there are comparatively few who are capa-

ble of experiencing the emotions of sublimity.

Let those who are most susceptible of them, reflect on the state of mind they produce, and on the nature of those trains of ideas to which they immediately give birth, and they will be convinced, that they are in all respects the same as are produced by profound veneration. Veneration, though mingled with awe, is not to be produced through the medium of fear; and though connected with love, is never by love alone to be excited. It is in the contemplation of certain moral qualities, *as co-existent*, that the pure sentiment of veneration first inspires the breast. In the attributes of Deity, these qualities are alone to be contemplated in perfection. Hence it should seem to follow, that the habitually pious must be particularly susceptible of the emotions of sublimity. Nor would the inference be erroneous, were it not, that as piety may be, and in fact frequently is

produced by attention to *certain* of those attributes, exclusive of the rest, though it will in such instances exercise the affections of love or of fear, it will not be productive of veneration.

When we solemnly contemplate the nature and excellence of any one of the divine attributes, as power, justice, wisdom, or goodness, we are immediately sensible of an emotion corresponding to the nature of the attribute on which we fix our attention : But it is by viewing these attributes as combined in inseparable union, that our hearts are filled with that profound veneration due to infinite perfection. In like manner, when in beholding the characters of infinite power, or strength, or wisdom, or beneficence, impressed on any of the objects in creation, if our attention be exclusively directed to one of these qualities, though we may hence experience the solemn emotions of fear, or the cheerful emotions of admiration and gratitude, we

shall not experience the emotions of sublimity.

As an illustration of the above remark, let us suppose ourselves placed at the base of a stupendous mountain, in a situation to behold rock piled on rock, in a manner that threatened, by the fall of the projecting mass, to crush us into atoms: Few objects in nature present to the imagination a spectacle more sublime. It may nevertheless be beheld without producing one emotion of sublimity. It will excite no such emotion in the mind of him whose attention is directed solely to the danger that would attend the fall of those lofty craggs, which appear prepared to descend in vengeance on his head. Neither will the emotion of sublimity be felt by him whose attention is occupied in measuring by his eye the height of the precipice, and comparing it with what he has heard of the height of other mountains. Nor by him who, from having contemplated

the Deity exclusively in the attributes of power and justice, connects with these his works, the appalling ideas of unappeasable wrath, and unlimitable puissance.

It is in the mind of him to whom all that is vast or magnificent in the fabric of the universe serves to recall the ideas, not only of infinite power and wisdom, but of infinite beneficence and mercy, that such a scene will awaken the pure emotions of sublimity; and as in his mind the ideas impressed by the contemplations of all the various moral attributes are firmly associated, whatever tends to recall any one of these perfections, will introduce the other. By whatever objects these ideas are recalled, the emotions connected with them will be excited; but unless the mind is capable of discovering in the object those analogies so frequently alluded to, it is plain that no emotion can be experienced. The discovery of these analogies between certain qualities in the object, and

qualities or attributes that only belong to intellectual natures of the highest order, is evidently the result of attention; and in attention to these qualities, therefore, does the emotion of sublimity depend. When, in expressing our feelings, we speak of the grandeur of a lofty mountain, or of the sublimity of the ocean, we only shew that we have discovered in these objects qualities that correspond with our notions of grandeur and sublimity: These notions again, could we trace them to their source, we should acknowledge to have derived, not from the contemplation of any material forms, but from qualities evinced in the actions of intelligent beings.

In this way only are the emotions of sublimity produced. And as the associations on which they depend are formed by attention to qualities that are seldom contemplated by vulgar minds, it is not to be expected that the vulgar of any rank should evince a taste for the sublime.

It has already been observed, that, even in the mind that is most susceptible of these emotions, their duration and intensity will be found to bear an exact proportion to the degree in which the qualities, associated with the idea of sublimity, happen at the moment to engage our attention.

The sight of the ocean in a storm, whilst we ourselves are in a tranquil state of mind, never fails to produce, in a person of cultivated taste, a strong emotion of sublimity. But let us view this sublime object at a moment when we are intent upon prosecuting a voyage, and impatient at the delay occasioned by the fury of the adverse waves, how completely, under such circumstances, are the emotions of sublimity annihilated!

How sublime in description do some of the scenes in Iceland appear to our imagination, as they have been forcibly deli-

neated by the travellers who have recently visited that region! There, amid sterility and desolation, nature exhibits her wonders. Let us for a moment contemplate some of the striking features presented in Sir George Mackenzie's description of the Geysers. These celebrated springs, from which jets of boiling water have been thrown up at regular intervals from time immemorial, are, he informs us, "situated on the verge of that vast district of uninhabited and desolate country, which forms the interior of Iceland."

In a country whose every feature bears marks of desolation; where mountains, whose tops are covered with perpetual snow, emit from their bosoms volumes of flame and torrents of lava, every object connected with such extraordinary phenomena must tend to excite the mind to an elevated tone. In the midst of this sterile region, where from experience one expects every crevice to be filled with

frozen snow, we should imagine that fountains of boiling water could not fail to excite astonishment and curiosity. We are nevertheless assured, that "at the present day the number of the natives who have visited these springs is comparatively very small, and that by those who live near them, their extraordinary operations, constantly going on, are regarded with the same eye as the most common and indifferent appearances of nature."*

* "The descriptions we had read, and the ideas we had formed of their grandeur, were all lost in the amazement excited on their being actually before us; and though I may perhaps raise their attributes in the estimation of the reader, I am satisfied that I cannot convey the slightest idea of the mingled raptures of wonder, admiration, and terror, with which our breasts were filled. On lying down we could not sleep more than a minute or two at a time, our anxiety causing us often to raise our heads to listen. At last the joyful sound struck my ears. In an instant we were within sight of the Geyser; the discharges continuing, being more frequent and louder than before, resembling the firing of artillery from a ship at sea. This happened at half past eleven

That no familiarity with the objects alluded to, could have annihilated the feelings of admiration in minds capable of discerning in such phenomena the qualities that excite emotion, is, I think, extremely obvious.

From a perusal of the note the reader will perceive, that the scene must unquestionably be in a high degree sublime. Whether the attention be directed to the majesty of the

o'clock ; at which time, though the sky was cloudy, the light was more than sufficient for shewing the Geyser ; but it was of that degree of faintness, which rendered a gloomy country still more dismal. Such a midnight scene as was now before us can seldom be witnessed. The Geyser did not disappoint us ; and seemed as if it was exerting itself to exhibit all its glory on the eve of our departure. It threw up a succession of magnificent jets, the highest of which were at least ninety feet. No drawing, no engraving, can possibly convey any idea of the noise and velocity of the jets, nor of the swift rolling of the clouds of vapour, which were hurled one over another with amazing rapidity."

Travels in Iceland, p. 224.

ascending column of water and steam, rising to immense height, or to the irresistible force which impels its motion, or to the incomprehensible depth of that magnificent laboratory in which nature prepares materials for these works of wonder,—such infinite power, immutability, and wisdom, must necessarily occur, as cannot fail to produce in full extent the emotions of sublimity.

By the poor inhabitants of the sterile region, no emotions of sublimity are, however, experienced. In viewing this astonishing phenomenon, they simply attend to the quality of the boiling water, and in experiencing the convenience of being constantly provided with a supply of this essential article, are grateful to the power which opened the mighty cauldron for their use.

Whatever turns our attention from those qualities or circumstances which serve to

recall the ideas of veneration, will as effectually prevent our experiencing the emotions of sublimity, as the most profound ignorance. Thus we may observe, that in contemplating the glories of the firmament, where the evidences of infinite wisdom, eternal stability, and omnipotence, are most obviously displayed, it is not always by those who have made the heavenly bodies their peculiar study, that the emotions of sublimity have been most deeply felt.

As an astronomer, the shepherd king of Israel was probably much inferior to La Place. It is, however, more than probable, that the former in exclaiming, "When I consider the heavens, the work of *thy* fingers—the moon and the stars which *thou* hast ordained!" &c. experienced such emotions of sublimity as were never known to the sceptic philosopher, even in the happy moment of ascertaining the laws by which the evolution of the

stars were regulated, or in that of discovering the means employed by Omnipotence for chaining the ocean to its mighty bed:

Is, then, the cultivation of science inimical to the cultivation of taste? By no means. It is only when secondary causes have *exclusively* occupied the attention, that the pursuit of science can produce insensibility to those finer emotions. When all the qualities which excite veneration have exercised the heart, attention will never be so exclusively occupied by the forms or qualities of matter, as not occasionally to be directed to those analogies, which are no sooner perceived than correspondent emotions are excited. When the perception of these relations has become habitual, the attention will habitually revert to them, and thus the pleasures arising from the discoveries of science, be augmented by the pleasures of taste.

As the origin of the emotions of sublimity may be discovered in the emotions of veneration consequent on our contemplating the qualities we attribute to a superior nature, the origin of the emotions of beauty may, in like manner, be traced to the emotions consequent on our perception of those qualities which awaken our sympathetic affections, when contemplated in the conduct or sentiments of our fellow creatures.

The connexion between taste and virtue is hence discernible. For from those premises the inference is plain, that in order to be habitually susceptible of the emotions of taste, we must be habitually susceptible of those emotions which spring from the exercise of exalted piety and social affection. And if it be the best, the noblest affections of our nature, that are the prototypes of the emotions of sublimity and beauty, when these affections are uncultivated, or unfelt, all pretensions to taste

must be destitute of any solid foundation. As some of the pleasures of taste may, however, be derived from secondary sources, these shall in due time be examined. But before proceeding to that part of our subject, I think it may be useful to trace to their respective sources, a few of those associations, by whose powerful influence inanimate objects are rendered capable of touching in our hearts the chords of sympathy, and even of awakening there, feelings, similar in their nature to those we experience when contemplating such objects as have primarily excited the affections.

Those who have it in their power to observe what passes in the minds of children, will easily be convinced, that their notions of beauty and deformity are not always a mere transcript of the notions they hear expressed by those around them; and that the pleasure they derive from looking at certain objects, or listening to certain

sounds, cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by supposing that they are reminded by them of something that has formerly excited agreeable sensations.

With respect to the pleasure derived from light, it appears evidently the effect of associations formed at a very early period; and is, of course, very universally experienced.

The pleasures arising from the gratification of curiosity, which is the incitement to the acquirement of new ideas, is likewise a pleasure of infancy, and is perhaps the origin of the pleasure derived from discovering, in external objects, qualities that excite wonder or admiration. The frequent recurrence of this emotion in childhood, may be reckoned one of the prime sources of enjoyment at that tender age. But could we preserve a perfect recollection of the circumstances connected with our liking or aversion to certain objects in

early childhood, we should, I imagine, be still more thoroughly convinced, that the sense of pleasure or pain we experienced in beholding them, was occasioned by perceiving in the object something that reminded us either of former pleasure or pains, associated with the idea of some mental quality or affection.

Thus, as gentleness and good nature are qualities which the experience of infants teaches them early to appreciate, we may observe, that whatever expresses those qualities has for them peculiar attractions. I have seen a child so charmed by the smile of good humour on the swarthy cheek of a negro, as to be instantly reconciled to the uncommon appearance of his uncouth features and complexion; and at the same time turn with aversion from an admired, but cold and haughty beauty. Even in the inanimate objects with which it is surrounded, a child, whose perceptions have been awakened, will frequently descry in

the shape or colour, such resemblances. The vulgar, who, from want of cultivation, retain the associations of infancy, afford us frequent proof of this in their common forms of expression; as *sonsy*,* honest like, &c. applied to material and inanimate substances.

As far as my observation has extended, good nature is the quality invariably connected, in the mind of an infant, with the object of its liking, and the idea of ill nature that it as invariably associates with the object of its aversion. Can we doubt, that as the sphere of the affections enlarges, every emotion of which the heart then becomes susceptible, may in like manner be excited by objects of whatever kind, (whether presented to the eye, or to the ear, or to the imagination,) which serve to awaken the same train of ideas, or bring the mind into the same state? It is then in vain to

* Placid, inoffensive.—*Scottish dialect.*

search for the principles of beauty in any peculiar form or tint, for with every form into which matter can be arranged, with every colour by which it can be adorned, such associations may be connected in the mind of the beholder, as will inevitably excite the emotions of beauty; emotions as various in kind, as the affections that produce them. Thus, in respect to vegetable forms, it is observed by Mr Alison, that "many of the classes of trees have distinct characters. There are, therefore, different compositions which are beautiful in their forms; and in all of them that composition only is beautiful, which corresponds to the nature of the expression they have, or of the emotion they excite. The character, for instance, of the weeping willow, is melancholy, of the birch and of the aspen, gaiety; the character of the horse-chesnut, is solemnity, of the oak, majesty, of the yew, sadness. In each of these cases the general form or composition of the parts is altogether different; all of them,

however, are beautiful : and were this proportion in point of composition changed, were the weeping willow to assume an equal degree of variety with the oak, or the oak to shew an equal degree of uniformity with the weeping willow, we should undoubtedly feel it as a defect, and conclude, that in this change of form the beauty of the character and of the composition was lost." And whence this conclusion, but because the characters we formerly recognized in them, from being connected with qualities that are the proper objects of human sympathy, excited correspondent emotions; and the mixed character which they now assume, not being calculated to recall the idea of any quality productive of emotion, they consequently lose the power of exciting in us the idea of beauty.

But are the qualities which have been assigned to each of the trees above enumerated, as obvious to every eye, as are the

external signs of gaiety, sadness, solemnity, &c. displayed in the human countenance? No. So far are they from being thus obvious, that to by far the greater number of beholders, their forms seem not to express any qualities but those which they possess in common with all material substances, and are regarded only as they differ from each other in size or solidity.* The perception of these qualities being the result of a particular exercise of attention, it is only where attention has been thus exercised that they will be perceived; and, consequently, only in such instances that the correspondent emotion will be produc-

* "How beautiful!" exclaimed my female attendant, on a journey, as we passed through some of the finest forest scenery I ever beheld. Readily assenting to the justice of her remark, I pointed to a groupe of ancient oaks, whose majestic forms had particularly attracted my attention. "O, them are but common trees," she returned; "but please look on the left to these tall ones, whose branches grow so evenly, just as if they had been shaped by a pair of scissars!" Need we ask by what associations her notions of beauty were influenced?

ed. And, for this reason, minds equally susceptible of the emotions of beauty will be very differently affected by the same object. One, for example, by directing his attention to the light texture of the birch and aspen, perceives, in the smooth and glossy bark, and animated motion of the pendant leaves, waving on their slender stems, the characteristics of youthful vivacity ; an idea strongly associated with images of gaiety and joy, and therefore delightful to his imagination. He looks on the oak and the chesnut with an expectation of experiencing from them a repetition of the same emotion, but in vain ; and he is therefore disposed to deny that they too are beautiful. Another, by directing his attention to the massive structure, and dark and thickly clustering foliage of the chesnut, perceives in its aspect an air of solemnity, which in his mind may be so strongly associated with ideas of inflexible integrity, firmness, and wisdom, as to excite emotions similar to those he had ex-

perienced from these respectable qualities, when contemplated in human conduct. There can be no doubt, that by him the horse-chesnut will be deemed eminently beautiful. But let us suppose these two gentlemen entering into a dispute respecting the superior beauty of the objects they severally admired, is it not obvious, that while their respective associations remained in force, the dispute could never be brought to termination? Yet into such sort of disputes are people who give themselves credit for superior taste, very apt to involve themselves, by contending for the inherent beauty of the scenes or objects they admire, and denying the same portion of inherent beauty to those which are seen by others with equal admiration.

In the contempt which each expresses for the opinion of his opponent, he doubtless imagines he gives proof of his superior taste; but, in reality, he affords incontestible proof that his taste is partial and

defective, and that his attention has been so exclusively directed to analogies and resemblances of one particular species, that others, though not less obvious, have escaped his observation.

This leads to conclusions of no slight importance. For if the emotions of taste depend on our perception of qualities that are not to be perceived without a certain portion of attention, and if it be only in certain classes of objects that we have, by attention, discovered qualities connected with ideas of affection, we may hence infer the absurdity of arrogating to ourselves the right of deciding on all subjects of taste, from having on certain occasions experienced its emotions. The man who has successfully cultivated taste in literary composition, and who, in the perusal of a favourite author, experiences the emotions of sublimity or beauty in exquisite perfection, may nevertheless view unmoved the *chef d'œuvres* of art, and pass the most

grand and lovely scenes in nature, without being conscious of their peculiar charms. While, on the other hand, the connoisseur who is thrown into raptures by the works of a Phidias or Praxiteles, and who dwells with ecstasy on the mutilated fragment of an ancient statue, may be observed to listen with indifference to those choice morsels of eloquence, which, by all judges of literary composition, are pronounced inimitable! In like manner, the person who directs his attention exclusively to the productions of the painter, the poet, or the landscape gardener, may be enabled to perceive, and to feel, what is either sublime or beautiful in the objects on which his imagination delights to dwell, without a perception or feeling of the beauty or sublimity of which other objects are to other minds expressive.

This partial taste is seldom indeed to be observed in those in whom the faculty of perception has been duly cultivated; for

it is only in such cases that the exercise of the faculty requires such effort, as necessarily to confine its operations within certain bounds. The result of this laborious effort is pedantry; and against pedantry of every sort, habits of extensive and general observation is consequently the only infallible preservative.

But even where the perceptions are most acute, and the sensibility most exquisite, we may still observe the effects of the peculiar direction of attention. “Raffaello and Titian” (says Sir Joshua Reynolds) “seem to have looked at nature for different purposes; they both had the power of extending their views to the whole, but one looked only to the general effect as produced by *form*, the other as produced by *colour*.”

The objects of taste being almost infinite, this peculiar susceptibility with regard to beauties of one description, must be in

some measure inevitable; and, certainly, every lover of the fine arts will rejoice, that Raffaele and Titian selected different qualities for the objects of their particular attention. But had Raffaele denied to Titian the praise due to his superior taste in colouring, and Titian refused to acknowledge that there was sublimity in Raffaele's designs, the taste of both might justly have been questioned.

The farther we extend our observation, the more reason shall we have to conclude, that the aptitude to consider that only as beautiful, in which we perceive beauty; and that only as sublime, from which we experience the emotions of sublimity; is the consequence either of a very limited acquaintance with the objects of taste, or of very uncultivated affections. A few instances will suffice for the illustration of this remark:

Those who have been accustomed to dwell with nature in her lone abodes, may, in listening to the roar of the mountain torrent, and in beholding the gigantic forms of barren rocks and precipices, find exquisite delight; and, if they possess the indispensable requisites, will frequently experience, in contemplating them, the emotions of sublimity. The man who has thus cultivated his taste exclusively on this model, however, contends not for the sublimity only, but for the *pre-eminent* beauty of the scenery by which he is surrounded. With every spot of verdure which he has discovered in his native glen, with its transparent rivulets, its waving birches, its scarlet rowans, and even with its purple heath, he connects ideas of beauty, evidently derived from ideas of affection; for in those he contemplates the images of objects that have most deeply affected his mind with complacency, tenderness, and joy. To him, therefore, the scene is certainly beautiful.

But when he descends into more fertile regions, does he there view the face of nature with indifference or disgust? Does he hold in great contempt the taste of him, who, as he sits by the oozy banks of some slowly gliding stream, marks with complacency the bushy pollards which denote its course through the distant meadows? Does he sneer at the satisfaction with which the inhabitant of the cultivated vale contemplates flat fields waving with corn, and well fed herds ruminating beneath the shade of lofty oaks or spreading beeches?— He doubtless piques himself much on his own superior taste; but on what grounds are his claims to this superiority founded? Is it his own want of perception with regard to the images of peace and plenty, and rural industry, and rural happiness and comfort, that entitles him to scoff at the man in whose mind these ideas are associated with the scene which he has contemptuously pronounced insipid? His attention never having been given to such

objects, he cannot perceive in them the analogies which, when they are perceived, excite correspondent emotions. His want of perception is, therefore, no subject of censure; but it is surely no subject of triumph, no proof of superior taste!

It then remains to be asked, why the person whose attention has been occupied by those images which are presented to the mind amid scenes of cultivation, should not consider himself as superior in taste to the man who views such scenes without any perception of their beauty? Why does he, when dragged through the horrid glen, where he sees only the images of solitude, sterility, and desolation, silently acquiesce in the eulogium pronounced by his conductor on the sublimity and beauty of the scene?—

Because the bold features of romantic scenery have ever been described to him as objects that are admired by all persons of

taste. He consequently thinks he ought to admire them, he goes prepared to admire them, and if they excite emotions in his mind very remote from those excited by the exercise of any of the affections, he does not dare to acknowledge it. He conceives, that in confessing himself incapable of enjoying pleasure from the sight of objects which others profess to behold with ecstasy, he should make an acknowledgment of his inferiority, and be accused of stupidity or dulness. What relief would it afford him to be assured, that the want of taste he has in this instance evinced, is no proof that he is not susceptible of the emotions of taste, but simply proves, that his attention has hitherto been exclusively directed to certain classes of the various objects that are equally calculated to excite these emotions.

CHAPTER III.

Taste cultivated through the medium of descriptions that excite the imagination. Effects of confining the attention to certain models. Criticism. Important consequences resulting from it. Conclusion.

THE examples produced in the last chapter do by no means authorize us to conclude, that the emotions of taste can only be experienced to the extent of our actual observation. The man who never saw a mountain in his life may have his imagination so stored with corresponding ideas, that at first sight it shall produce trains of associations replete with delight; while, on the other hand, the man who has all his days been confined within the rocky boundary, may have connected so many pleasing images with the idea of flowery lawns and

peaceful groves, as to be immediately charmed with the scenes in which he perceives those images to be realized.

Even by the inhabitant of the dusky city, imprisoned as he is by stone walls enveloped in smoke, the emotions of sublimity and beauty may doubtless be experienced in nearly as great perfection as by those who have enjoyed more ample opportunity of contemplating the sublime and beautiful in the works of nature. For as the emotions of taste are not only delightful but salutary to the human mind, it has pleased our heavenly Father to make such provision for our enjoyment of them, that to every heart in which the affections glow, sources are opened, whence this purest of pleasures may be derived. Even where the fair face of nature is a stranger to the sight, the imagination may be warmed by a description of her charms. And as objects presenting to the mind the ideas of utility, or of propriety, fitness, symmetry, and con-

gruity, or their opposites, are every where to be seen; emotions consequent on the perception of those qualities may be experienced by all to whom they become objects of attention. The man who aspires to the possession of critical taste, multiplies these associations, by connecting with the idea of each of their several qualities, all the rich store of imagery derived from the perusal of works in which they have been exhibited or analyzed. With a mind thus prepared, he, in beholding the forms and colouring of nature, as they are reflected in the mirrors which poetry and painting hold up to his view, nicely discriminates between what is intrinsically beautiful and that which is accidentally beautiful: The former deriving its beauty from associations that have an universal influence; the latter, from associations that are casual and temporary. The critic who departs from this rule of judgment, and condemns, as destitute of beauty, that which is intrinsically beautiful, or gives the praise of beauty

to that which possesses no beauty but what is local or fictitious, we may without hesitation pronounce unqualified for the high office which he has assumed. He may, it is true, be wholly unconscious of the defect in his title, or endeavour to cover the flaw by the high tone of infallibility; but when an appeal is made to the heart, his decisions will be utterly reversed. It will then be discovered, that the interest excited by descriptions which derived all their power to charm from associations that were merely accidental, cannot, by any art, be prolonged beyond the memory of the circumstances in which it originated. While, on the other hand, such of the compositions of genius as address the imagination through the medium of associations that have an universal influence, will be found to possess a principle of vitality, through which they will be enabled to resist the assaults of time, and to survive the more violent attacks of tasteless criti-

cism.* According to the observations made in the preceding Essay, it must follow, that when attention has not been habitually directed to the discovery of beauties, there will be no immediate perception of beauty; and that when attention is habitually given to faults and blemishes, it will be in the discovery of faults and imperfections only, that the discernment will be quick and penetrating.

Such habits of mind must necessarily be inimical to the cultivation of taste; nor from the person who has acquired them need we expect that discrimination which carefully distinguishes between intrinsic and fictitious beauty. It is vain to ima-

* It may be proper to observe, that when I speak of critics, or of criticism, I apply the terms generally to all who pretend to be judges of composition in literature or the arts, and to the judgments they pronounce, and do not by any means intend, that the remarks I make on these should be considered as exclusively applicable to professed critics or their writings.

gine, that the person who does not discern should ever point out to us those qualities, or combinations of qualities, which, from being associated with certain ideas of affection, are calculated to delight the imagination and the heart. We again repeat, that this power of discrimination is only to be obtained by that enlarged exercise of attention, which produces an immediate perception of those analogies and resemblances that are no sooner perceived than they excite some emotion of affection. It may farther be observed, that if attention, instead of having been directed to the nature of these emotions, has been exclusively occupied in the study of certain rules of art, and in the productions in which these rules are exemplified, these will become the only measure of excellence. The taste will thus be formed upon a certain model, and within its narrow precincts all the notions of sublimity and beauty will continually dwell.

A person of this description, in contemplating that model, may doubtless experience the emotions of taste; but, blindly guided by the rules and precepts which first led him to perceive and feel its beauties, he will judge of every work within the province of taste by a fictitious standard, and applaud or censure as the object under examination corresponds with or falls short of that standard.

We may be permitted to doubt, whether the satisfaction derived from beholding the rules of art exemplified, can, however great, be with propriety termed an emotion of taste, unless connected with ideas of sympathy and affection; and never in the mind of one whose attention has been solely occupied in examining the correspondence between the object and the rule, will this connexion take place.

To the connoisseur in the fine arts, whose taste has thus been formed, the festive

scene of the marriage at Cana, and the massacre of the innocents, the raising of Lazarus, and the flaying of St Bartholomew, are not only viewed with equal satisfaction, but with feelings exactly similar. He beholds, with equal rapture, the representation of scenes exemplifying the wild excess of human cruelty, and the most heart-touching proofs of divine benevolence; for his attention being occupied in comparing the productions of the artist's pencil with the rules of the art, no emotions corresponding with the scenes portrayed are excited in his mind. It is from thus exclusively directing the attention towards those qualities in a picture which are associated with the ideas of excellence, conceived from certain models, that the representation of subjects from which the imagination recoils with horror, is not only tolerated, but approved, by the connoisseur, who piques himself on his superior taste.

Hence, scenes that are naturally associated with ideas of the most painful or unpleasant nature, and are calculated to excite emotions of disgust, or sorrow, or indignation, are placed before our eyes, in apartments dedicated to the enjoyment of the social pleasures. Hence, also, even in the houses of persons who are acknowledged candidates for those abodes where nothing immodest or impure shall enter, pictures are exhibited, which it would be in vain to reconcile with any notions of that mental purity, of which all, nevertheless, pretend to estimate the value. In every such instance we behold the proofs of that deficiency of taste, which is the certain consequence of habitually confining our attention to certain qualities in such objects as are calculated to excite the emotions of taste, without taking into consideration other qualities in the same objects, that may tend to excite emotions of a very opposite description. But the person whose taste is entirely formed on certain rules and examples, will

not easily be convinced that his taste has not been strictly cultivated.

If architecture be the subject on which his critical taste is to be displayed, we shall find, that no ideas connected with the human beings for whom the fabric is to be reared, influence his judgment. Utility, convenience, and comfort, may, in minds whose sensibility has been awakened by attention to human feelings, excite emotions of beauty, but his ideas of beauty have been derived from other sources. It is to the forms exhibited in the architectural monuments of Grecian taste and genius, and to the rules prescribed by those who have made the remains of ancient magnificence their peculiar study, that he refers ; denying the character of beauty to whatever differs from that only form, which, on great authority, he deems beautiful.

The same observations are in some measure applicable to the literary critic, who,

having stored his mind with ideas of the sublime and beautiful from the choice works of ancient and modern authors, experiences a certain emotion of taste, as often as he meets in any work he peruses, passages that correspond with those preconceived notions. They are the standard by which he measures the sublimity or beauty of whatever is imagined or described; and his attention being solely directed to the discovery of qualities that have some analogy or resemblance to those which are comprised within his rule of excellence, all that are without that rule must necessarily escape his observation. If poetry has for such a person any charms, it is because the subjects of poetry having been in all ages nearly similar, and the material world the store-house from which all have borrowed the imagery that serves the double purpose of illustration and ornament, it is hardly possible to read any poem, without finding in it ideas that have occurred to the great masters of the art, however varied by new combinations.

The poet, therefore, who expresses his admiration of rural objects in general, or even descends to the minute description of any particular scene, provided he describes in terms sanctioned by classical authority, may, on classical authority, be not only tolerated but admired. Should he, however, venture to look at nature with his own eyes, and to describe the emotions which he truly feels; if these emotions are produced by qualities that have escaped the observation of the critic, their connexion with the natural sympathies of the human heart will be of no avail to save the work in which they are described from condemnation.

To the secluded poet, who has resigned himself to the contemplation of nature in her sequestered scenes, the first daisy which opens its bosom to the spring, the first bird which denotes the influence of the genial season by its warblings, the first murmurs of the streamlet on being freed from its icy

shackles, are objects that excite vivid and rapturous emotion; for to him they are images of tenderness, and hope, and joy. But what are daisies, and singing birds, and rivulets, to the town-bred critic? If associated in his mind with what he may have conceived or experienced of the dull and tiresome monotony of a country life, solitude, silence, rusticity, ignorance, &c. how can he possibly discover any analogy between such objects, and qualities that excite sympathetic affection? What can the critic in such circumstances do, but refer to the authority of some Greek, or Latin, or Italian poet, an acknowledged master of the art? He does so. He compares the work of the modern with that of the ancient, and, if it deviates from the standard, he piques himself on the discovery of the deviation, and imagines, that by condemning it *in toto*, he gives an undoubted proof of his superior taste. But if, in minds more intimately acquainted with the varied aspects of nature, the

description produces emotions similar to those experienced by the poet, it is evident the critic's verdict ought to be set aside as partial or erroneous.

Nor is it only with respect to the associations from which descriptive poetry derives its power to charm, that the critic, who has his attention fixed on any given model, will pronounce false and mistaken judgment.

Of all the infinite variety of ways in which each of the human passions may operate, as they are affected by peculiarities in the character or situation of the individual, he imagines, that none can in description excite sympathetic emotion, unless accompanied with all the circumstances that have been connected with it in those productions of genius from which he has derived his notions of excellence. While all avenues to the heart, save one alone, are thus ren-

dered inaccessible, it can indeed be only seldom that it will happen to be reached.

But though the sensibility of such a mind can be but rarely, and with difficulty, awakened, it may nevertheless occasionally be strongly excited; and will be thus excited, whenever that particular key is struck, which produces the same trains of thought that have been produced in contemplating the models to which his attention has been confined. Nor ought we to be astonished at the enthusiasm with which he may, on such occasions, express his feelings; nor ought we, from a recollection of his former insensibility, to charge him with inconsistency or affectation; since he may certainly have been in both instances alike sincere. For as, to the person who has paid no attention to the combinations in music that are productive of harmony, the finest musical composition appears only a tiresome repetition of unmeaning sounds; so, to the person who

has paid no attention to the nature of those qualities, which, by assimilating with the affections of the heart, produce the emotions of sublimity or beauty, descriptions that are sublime or beautiful may seem unnatural or absurd. And, as in the former case, the man who has no perception of beauty in any of the musical productions of the German or Italian schools, may, at the same time, experience much delight in listening to the simple melodies with which he associates the pleasing ideas of his infant joys or youthful loves; so, in the latter, may he who has no perception of beauty in general, as depending on associations that have an universal influence, be susceptible of tender emotion from beauties of some particular class: And I am thoroughly persuaded, that, were the truth to be known, we should perceive this to be no rare occurrence. But, is the person whose taste is thus defective, conscious of the defect? From observation I should sup-

pose; that the question may in general be answered in the negative; for who is there, among the numbers that pretend to criticism, that does not deem himself qualified to decide upon the merits of every work that falls within the province of taste?

Hence we may conclude, that the same blindness to our own deficiencies, which we observe to take place in respect to the defects in the faculties of perception, judgment, &c. likewise takes place with regard to the defects in taste. And as, while we remain unconscious of the defect in either instance, we will never make exertions for removing it, it is of great importance to our improvement, that we on all occasions carefully reflect on what passes in our minds, when we applaud or condemn any of the productions of genius; ever remembering, that in as far as our notions of beauty or deformity are influenced by associations that are arbitrary, or casual, or peculiar to ourselves, or to any class or

description of persons, in so far they are not worthy of being intruded upon others. This caution deserves attention from those who are desirous of improving their taste ; for such, alas ! is the infirmity of human nature, that when we have once permitted ourselves to speak in a decided tone of approbation or dislike, we must be possessed of no ordinary candour, if pride and self-love does not bribe our judgment to affirm the decree ! It is also advisable, that, as often as we hear various and opposite opinions pronounced by persons whose intellectual endowments are equally respectable, we should, instead of implicitly adopting the sentiments of either party, endeavour to penetrate into their several minds so far as to discover, by what associations each is influenced. Where bare assertion alone is offered, no respect for the asserter's talents ought, in matters of taste, so far to influence our judgment, as to make us believe that there are no beauties where he sees none, or no defects where he pro-

nounces all to be perfection. Where opinion is supported by argument, it is our right, it is our duty, to examine the strength and cogency of the arguments offered in its support. Should these, upon examination, seem calculated merely to strengthen the force of objections to certain trivial and subordinate parts, while thousands of beauties are permitted to pass unnoticed, or, at most, obtain a faint and reluctant applause; we may assure ourselves, that the critic is destitute of the feelings, or incapable of the perceptions, essential to taste. If his want of taste proceed from want of feeling, he is, with regard to the objects of taste, as a man born blind; if from habitual inattention to those qualities that are associated with ideas of affection, he is in the state of one whose eyes are covered with a film, that may, by time, and care, and persevering attention, be removed; but, in either instance, he is not qualified to act as a guide in the region of taste.

It may farther be observed, that as the person whose notions of sublimity and beauty have been formed on any given rule, or confined to any particular model, can but rarely find, in any of the objects of taste, his own peculiar notions exemplified, he can be but rarely pleased or gratified. He will, however, be prompt to perceive every departure from his rule, and equally prompt in pronouncing it a blemish. The more limited his field of observation, and the more contracted his notions of excellence, the more assured and arrogant will be the tone in which his censures are pronounced. Nor will this appear surprising, when we consider, that as judgment is incapable of operating beyond the limits to which attention has been habitually confined, these must appear to him as the *ne plus ultra* of its operations. And as it moreover requires a much greater effort of discrimination to discover, in any of the creations of genius, ideas or qualities, which, from association, are productive of

the emotions of beauty, than it does to perceive when they fall short of the pre-conceived standard, we may naturally expect, that, under such circumstances, the attention should be chiefly directed to the discovery of faults.

When we take into consideration, that the number of acquirements essentially and indispensably requisite, as a preparation for the exercise of critical taste, can only be attained by extensive observation, and an intimate acquaintance, not only with the works of genius, but with the nature of those associations by which the sympathies and affections of the heart are influenced in the perception of beauty, —we may conclude, that critical taste is rarely to be attained by the young, and never by the ignorant. Yet who so apt as the young and ignorant to point out the petty blemish in any work of taste or imagination, whose merits they unfortunately happen to discuss? It may safely

be averred, that, from habits thus acquired, just and discriminating taste will never spring. The habit of indiscriminate admiration is to the young far less dangerous, as less destructive of sensibility. But the person who is bent on the improvement of taste, ought carefully to avoid all mental habits inimical to its cultivation. As the young are, however, very apt to conceive criticism and censure to be synonymous terms, it may be proper to observe to them, that the man whose sensibility has not been exercised at the expense of his judgment, will, from the exercise of judgment, frequently discover blemishes and imperfections in works of taste or imagination, destructive of the emotions of beauty. But if his attention has been directed generally to the qualities exciting those emotions, he will not circumscribe his notions of the sublime or beautiful, within the narrow limits of his own experience, or the experience of any other individual. He will perceive with pleasure,

that the sources of emotions so productive of enjoyment, are infinite and inexhaustible, and rejoice in every proof that offers, of the boundless variety of those associations, by which an infinite number of the objects that present themselves to the senses or to the imagination, may be so connected with the ideas of affection as to afford delight, various and extensive as the sources from which it springs. The person who has thus in his mind laid the foundation of a just and discriminating taste, will have his judgment improved rather than influenced, by his acquaintance with the writings of professed masters in the school of criticism. He will study them, not merely as authorities to which he may refer, but in order to reap from the study, the important advantage of opening a wider field for the exercise of his judgment, by awakening his attention to objects which might otherwise have escaped his observation. Whether poetry, or eloquence, or painting, or sculpture, has particularly attracted his atten-

tion, his intimate acquaintance with the most finished productions in any of these noble arts, will not induce him to consider all sublimity and beauty to be comprised in these patterns of excellence. But the more attention he has bestowed on what is in its kind most perfect, the more quickly will he perceive, and the more sensibly will he be affected on perceiving, excellencies of a similar description; for those will to him have a double charm, not only as exciting trains of ideas, which elevate the mind by their sublimity, or touch the heart by sympathetic tenderness, but from being associated with the ideas of the genius, penetration, sensibility, and wisdom, of those whose talents have been deemed the ornaments of human nature.

It is true, that where taste has thus been cultivated, the perception of circumstances that tend to weaken the impression, will destroy those feelings of admiration

with which the same object may be viewed by less discerning eyes. The judgment which he evinces, affords not, however, any support to the opinion so rashly adopted by the vain and ignorant, who seem to imagine, that a blindness to beauties, and a quick perception of blemishes, are infallible proofs of taste. We have, on the contrary, abundant reason to conclude, that when a perception of beauties, and a susceptibility of the consequent emotions, does not precede and accompany the perception of the circumstances which tend to weaken the impression, taste will never be cultivated or improved, or habitually exercised.

A tendency to find fault being one of the most formidable obstacles to that general cultivation of taste, for which every person capable of appreciating its moral influence must be anxious, it seems peculiarly incumbent on those who, from their acknowledged talents, obtain such influence over the public mind, as to have it in their power to direct

the current of thought throughout a nation, to employ the influence they have thus honourably acquired to noble purposes. It is theirs to lead the attention to the contemplation of what is beautiful and excellent; to direct admiration to its proper objects; and, by diffusing the principles of just and refined taste, to ameliorate the dispositions, increase the virtues, and augment the happiness of society.

To those just entering upon life, it is of great importance to have their notions concerning the principles of taste so far enlightened, as to prevent their falling into habits which are inimical to its cultivation. Let them then be assured, from authority to which they defer, that by habits of cavilling and censure the mind will be chained down to the contemplation of what is mean and grovelling. Incapable of a noble elevation of sentiment or feeling, it will derive no pleasure from literature or the arts, except as they afford the means of

exercising an ingenuity nearly connected with spleen and malice.

Far from depreciating the value of criticism, I am anxious to shew how vast is the importance, how extensive are the consequences resulting to society, from that cultivation of taste, which ought to be the object of the critic's labours. If the principles of taste be in reality such as they have been described, the state of mind indispensable to the enjoyment of the emotions of sublimity and beauty, must be highly salutary to our moral feelings; for as, according to these principles, the emotions of taste are not to be experienced from the exercise either of our intellectual or moral powers separately, but from the exercise of both united, the improvement of taste is the improvement, not only of certain faculties of the understanding, but of the best affections of the heart. A just and refined taste will consequently lead to just and elevated views and sentiments with regard to human

conduct. By enabling us to feel and to relish what is sublime and beautiful in the actions and sentiments of intelligent beings, it quickens our perception of excellence; and though it must at the same time increase our discernment of the reverse, while influenced by the dispositions essential to the exercise of taste, it will not be to the discovery of blemishes and imperfections that our attention will be chiefly directed.

In judging of the conduct of his neighbours, as in judging of the works of the painter or poet, the man of cultivated taste decides on principles that have an acknowledged and universal authority. The habits of his mind are not such as to induce him to set his own notions, or those that are peculiar to his friends or his party, as a standard of perfection. Where he perceives pious affections, virtuous intentions, and honourable feelings, to be prominent features in the character, it does not detract from his pleasure in contemplating it, to perceive, that

it is not an exact counterpart to characters which are likewise the objects of his admiration. Far less does he censure, as faults unpardonable, whatever is done or said in a manner foreign to that in which he has been accustomed to act and speak. It is only where false notions of taste and criticism have obtained an influence, that habits of detraction will ever become prevalent, and, wherever they prevail, they will infallibly render the heart insensible to the sympathetic emotions of virtue.

To the person whose taste has been *truly* cultivated,—“ whatever is lovely or beloved in the character of mind; whatever in the powers or dispositions of man can awaken admiration or excite sensibility; the loveliness of innocence, the charms of opening genius, the varied tenderness of domestic affection, the dignity of heroic, or the majesty of patriotic virtue,”*—all

* Essay on the Principles of Taste.

will awaken in his heart the correspondent emotion of sublimity or beauty.

When he looks on the material world, he receives from the forms and colouring of nature, ideas which, on comparison, he finds assimilate with ideas of affection. When he looks abroad into the moral world, he perceives, amid all the darkness and disorder which sin has introduced, qualities associated with the idea of that all-perfect Being, who is the object of his continual veneration. How justly then may we consider it as one of the proofs of infinite benignity in the Creator and Framers of our spirits, that he has rendered us capable of that peculiar exercise of the faculties and affections productive of the emotions of taste!

In contemplating these emotions in the light in which they have here been viewed, they seem to form, as it were, a connecting link, uniting two distinct principles of our

nature, and blending the intellectual and moral powers in one simultaneous operation. Hence arises new and powerful motives to the cultivation of taste;—motives, than which none more noble or more dignified can actuate the human heart: Originating in the desire of improving all the faculties by which man is distinguished from inferior natures, and all the affections by which he is elevated to the rank of a moral agent, they tend to direct his attention to whatever is beautiful or excellent in the universe which he inhabits; not merely as objects whereon to exercise his judgment, but as signs of qualities that expand the heart with emotions of sympathy, or elevate and purify the soul by the sublimer sentiments of piety and devotion.

ESSAY IV.

**ON THE
PROPENSITY TO MAGNIFY
THE IDEA OF
SELF.**

BRISTOL

PROFIT AND LOSS

1893

1893

ESSAY IV.

ON THE PROPENSITY TO MAGNIFY THE
IDEA OF SELF.

CHAPTER I.

Preliminary observations on the necessity of taking all the principles of the mind into consideration, in studying them with a view to self-improvement. Consequences of confining the attention to certain of the mental phenomena exemplified. Propensity to magnify the idea of self, to be distinguished from selfishness and from self-love.

FROM the view that has been given in the preceding Essays, of the effects resulting from a confined and partial exercise of attention, we may be led to infer, that if we would preserve our minds from prejudice and error, we must, on every subject

deserving our consideration, endeavour to obtain clear and distinct views of the whole; and where it is in its nature complex, be specially on our guard against forming an opinion of the whole, by that part which has accidentally engaged our first attention. "We are all," says Mr. Locke, "short-sighted, and very often see one side of a matter. Our views are not extended to all that has a connexion with it. We see but in part, and we know but in part; and therefore 'tis no wonder we conclude not right from our partial views. This might instruct the proudest esteemer of his own parts, how useful it is to talk and consult with others, even such as come short of him in capacity and penetration; for since no one sees all, and we generally have different prospects of the same thing, according to our different positions to it, it is not incongruous to think, nor beneath any man to try, whether another may not have notions of things that have escaped him, and which

his reason would make use of, if it came into his mind."

This observation particularly deserves attention from those who seek to obtain a knowledge of the constituent principles of the human mind, as a mean of self-improvement. It is of some consequence to be aware, that in order to render the knowledge we acquire on this important subject practically useful, we must extend our observations, and give an equal share of attention to the active principles, which it is our duty to regulate, as to the intellectual ones, which it is our duty to improve. If it be not in our power to devote the time and thought that would be requisite, in order to enable us minutely to investigate all the several operations of the several principles that enter into the frame and constitution of our nature, we ought to aim at obtaining such views of the whole, as may prevent us from exaggerating the relative importance of one or other of those

powers or principles, which, as they have all been implanted by divine wisdom, are all formed to answer purposes alike important.

That the evil which arises from the habit of contemplating human nature only in one particular respect, greatly overbalances all that is gained by the more accurate knowledge that is obtained of those powers or faculties whose operations have thus engrossed the attention, will, on examining any of the various theories to which such partial views of the nature of the human mind have given rise, be rendered extremely obvious.

By men of studious habits, whose attention has been chiefly, if not exclusively, occupied by the operations of intellect, man has sometimes been considered as a being purely intellectual; capable, solely by the exertion of his reason, of obtaining that ascendancy over all the inferior princi-

ples of his nature, as must put it in his power to become completely virtuous. This is, indeed, the almost inevitable conclusion in which we shall be apt to rest, if we select the powers of the understanding as objects of exclusive attention. For, when we contemplate the glorious nature of the intellectual faculties, and take into consideration the provision that has been made in the agency of attention for increasing their strength and facilitating their operations, we find it impossible to set limits to the degree to which they may be cultivated; and if we fail to take into the account, the nature and strength of those active principles by which the attention is impelled to other objects than those which exercise and improve the intellectual powers, we shall perceive no obstacle to the attainment of perfection.

It is in such partial views of the nature of mind, that many false or hypothetical speculations, concerning the past and future

destiny of the human race, have originated; and only by a more enlarged and accurate observation, that juster notions are to be obtained. As a farther illustration of this point, it may be observed, that where men, in studying human nature, have exclusively dwelt on those malevolent and depraved affections which are a fruitful source of human misery, the effect upon their own minds has generally been deplorable; the attention, thus habitually directed, having seldom failed to promote the operations of those evil passions and propensities, whose influence in the breast it is our bounden duty to lessen and controul. Even where the consequences of these false, because confined, views of the human mind, are not injurious as to the individual, they are, like all that is false, pernicious in their tendency, as may be clearly seen from the descriptions of human nature, given by persons whose attention has been completely absorbed in the contemplation of certain of its active principles. In speaking of those

intellectual faculties, which it is impossible to contemplate without perceiving in them the most conspicuous proofs of the wisdom and goodness of the divine Creator, we find them constantly endeavouring to depreciate their utility, and to deny their excellence : And this without perceiving the incongruity of imagining, that they do homage to God by vilifying and degrading the noblest of his works. The benevolent affections share the same fate, and are represented as altogether vile and useless. So effectually does the ideas imbibed from a partial consideration of certain principles in the mind of man, exclude from their view all the provision that our Creator has made for counteracting them, as to overspread the whole with uniform darkness.

By directing the attention, on the other hand, solely to the nature and operations of the benevolent affections, though we may thereby learn to appreciate and applaud them, we at the same time learn to think

of ourselves, and of our nature; "more highly than we ought to think," and thus become the ready prey of passions, against whose assaults we are not prepared to guard. Perpetually fixing our eyes on the bright side of human character, and discerning neither spot nor blemish, we are apt to conclude, that none in reality exist, and that we have only to follow the amiable impulses of our own hearts, in order to walk securely in the path that leads to glory and immortality. This species of self-delusion is indeed never practised by any but amiable minds; and as it is necessarily accompanied by feelings of benevolence, may appear no proper object of censure. But to say nothing of the frequent mortifications and disappointments to which we must, from such false views of human nature, be inevitably exposed; such notions, when seriously entertained, cannot fail to prove inimical to our improvement in wisdom and virtue, by leading us to neglect the means assigned by Providence

for accomplishing the great ends of our being.

If such are the consequences of limiting our observations to one particular branch of the mental phenomena, it does not seem necessary to apologize for the attempt I am about to make, to draw the attention of my readers to some of the peculiar operations of one of the most active principles of our nature, though these appear to me in a light somewhat different from that in which they have been usually represented.

From observing what passes in the minds of children, before they have acquired the art of concealing the motives by which they are actuated, we are in a manner compelled to infer, that besides the appetites which direct to the preservation of life, there are certain desires or propensities interwoven in the frame of our nature, which operate spontaneously, and arrive at mature strength, long before the intellec-

tual faculties have been sufficiently exercised to be capable of more than a limited and occasional exertion. The same restless desire, termed by Solomon, "the folly that is bound up in the heart of a child," continues through every period of life to exert its influence in the human breast: It occasionally blends with all the operations of intellect, and, in most of those pursuits in which the life of man is spent, will be found, on examination, to have been the primary motive to exertion. Yet, strange to tell, this active principle is still without a name. Being wholly ignorant of any term by which it might with propriety be designated, I take the liberty of describing it from its operations, as *a propensity to magnify the idea of self*; thus distinguishing it from selfishness, and from self-love, with one or other of which it has been usually, though, as I conceive, improperly confounded.

In order to give a clear view of the notions I have formed of the appropriate meaning of those several terms, it is necessary to state, that I consider *self-love* as implying simply *the desire of happiness*; a desire which we may observe to be regulated and controlled by the intellectual powers, and consequently, as to the nature of its operations, dependant on the direction given to the power of attention. In the minds of those whose attention has been exclusively occupied by mean, or trifling, or unworthy objects, the desire of happiness will impel to gratifications of the same description: Where nobler objects have engaged the attention, the same principle of self-love will, to the mind thus enlightened, prove a powerful incentive to the steady acquisition of knowledge and the practice of virtue.

Selfishness, on the other hand, I consider as an inordinate desire of self-gratification, not dependant on the operation of the in-

tellectual faculties for the character it assumes, but originating in associations that connect the idea of happiness with appropriating the objects that appear desirable to the heart, and thus obtaining enjoyments in which none can participate, and in which none can sympathize. But, according to this definition, selfishness appears in some measure dependant on attention; the association above described being evidently formed by habitual attention to our own feelings and sensations, and habitual inattention to the feelings and sensations of others. In this it is radically different from the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, which depends not on any peculiar direction of attention for its development: and this is the characteristic by which I consider it to be manifestly distinguished from all the desires and affections of the human mind.

From causes which, though probably connected with peculiarities in the orga-

nization of individuals, are placed beyond the reach of our investigation, one man may be more disposed to pride, another to vanity, another to jealousy, or envy, or resentment; but the growth of the passion, in all these instances, perceptibly depends on attention to such objects as afford to the passion a certain degree of exercise. The passions are, indeed, inherent, but it is by attention to certain objects that they are called forth; and by habitual attention to such objects, that the exercise of them becomes habitual. We are frequently able to trace the course of a passion, from its birth to its maturity, and by a faithful representation of the circumstances which tended to accelerate its progress, or increase its influence, hold forth a lesson against directing the attention to certain objects. But the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, is too strong and powerful to be dependant on the operation of any peculiar circumstances for its development. Whatever be the tendency

of the disposition, whatever be the frame of temper, it renders the passion that predominates subservient to its gratification, and is seen to act with equal energy in the wise and the ignorant, the timid and the bold. By the slightest opposition to its operations the vindictive passions are called forth; and indeed so intimately are they connected with this propensity, that I believe they might, without impropriety, be termed its offspring.

As we are in general more capable of tracing the operation of any powerful principle in the conduct of others, than of reflecting on the motives which govern our own, I shall endeavour to illustrate, by familiar examples, what I have ventured to advance; proposing to shew, that in every instance in which we behold the most striking proofs of the predominating influence of pride, vanity, ambition, revenge, &c. we shall, in whatever manner this ruling passion operates, on examination, perceive the

propensity to enlarge the idea of self, the prime mover in all its operations; and be convinced, that every object from which the ruling passion derives, or expects to derive, gratification, is identified with the idea of self in the mind of the individual.

Nor is it only where the passions of pride avarice, &c. predominate, that the propensity to magnify the idea of self is plainly discernible. There is not one of the operations of the human mind in which it may not occasionally mingle; not one, that is not liable to be rendered subservient to its gratification. In actions that are generally deemed indifferent in their nature, we may frequently detect its operations; and even among the notions which we deem completely virtuous, it may sometimes be found to have insinuated itself. The marks by which it is to be discovered, are too obvious to be mistaken. In whatever direction the propensity to expand the idea of self operates, whatever opposes or thwarts

its operation, whatever tends to repress or diminish that notion of self, which the principle in question prompts us to endeavour to enlarge, tends immediately to produce in us one or other of the malevolent affections.

Thus, if the applause of our fellow-creatures be the means resorted to for procuring an enlargement of the idea of self, whatever seems to threaten us with disappointment excites in us the feelings of jealousy or envy; or, if our aim be actually frustrated, produces our resentment and aversion. If it be to objects of ambition that we are urged, by the propensity to magnify the idea of self, to direct our views, the passions excited by opposition act with still greater force and certainty. But in whatever way this propensity operates, as it seldom in any instance fails to meet with opposition, its operations seldom fail to be productive of passions or feelings allied to malevolence.

It might be expected, *a priori*, from the proofs of divine benignity so evidently displayed in all the works of God, that some provision should have been made, in the constitution of the human mind, for counteracting and diminishing the influence of a propensity so pernicious to human happiness; and that such provision has actually been made by the great Creator, I hope to be able satisfactorily to prove. But the subject must be reserved for a future Essay. In the mean time I shall pursue the inquiry with regard to the operations of that propensity to enlarge the idea of self, which, as it appears to me, is the most active of all the principles inherent in the mind of man.

CHAPTER II.

Manner in which the vain man connects the idea of self with the objects he describes. Statement of the operation of the propensity to magnify the idea of self, in the love of dress;—in seeking acquaintance with the great, or distinguished. And in a variety of other instances.

IN the remarks I propose to make on the propensity to magnify the idea of self, I shall begin by examining its operations in the minds of persons confessedly influenced by vanity. In these, indeed, it is most conspicuous; for where the desire of admiration is extreme, little pains are taken to conceal how entirely the person identifies himself with the objects on which his claim to admiration rests, or by which it is, as he conceives, substantiated.

Observe how invariably the vain man endeavours to direct your attention to objects with which he connects the idea of self; giving, at the same time, to every object with which he identifies himself, an imaginary value; and plainly intimating, that from his connexion with it he derives an extraordinary importance. According as the objects are of a nature that can admit of being in idea appropriated, as being peculiar to himself, or at least out of the reach of those to whom he addresses his conversation, the idea of self expands; for he believes, that it is in your mind magnified to the dimensions in which he is desirous of appearing to you.

Hence the disposition so observable in the vain, of making themselves the heroes of their own stories. It is not sufficient simply to state a fact, or to relate an event with all its circumstances; for with every fact and every event they mention, it is to them necessary to be some way or other

identified. Rather than lose an opportunity of thus extending the idea of self, a vain man will claim affinity with persons who have derived notoriety from infamy; and acknowledge his having been privy to transactions which reflected disgrace on all concerned.

It is amusing to observe what slender ties suffice to form those imaginary connections by which the idea of self is enlarged. Many seem to have travelled with no other object in view, than to have it in their power to say, that it was *they* who saw such and such things: The idea of self extending to every thing they saw, is intermingled in the narration with all that was worthy of admiration in the objects they beheld. Nay, we find such persons piquing themselves on having seen what is admired by others, though they themselves are incapable of admiring them. In their eager desire to establish an ideal connexion with whatever is conspicuous or eminent,

they expose to our view the strength of the propensity by which they are actuated. It is to the universality of its operations, that persons who have obtained celebrity are indebted for the greater part of their *soi-disant* friends and admirers : to this propensity, more than to any opinion of their superior skill, that the first lawyers, and first physicians of their day, owe half their practice; and I may add, that to it also, more than to any respect for their talents, are authors of distinguished reputation indebted for the attention they receive from many, to whom neither worth nor talents would, without celebrity, have recommended them.

In all these instances we may distinctly perceive, that with the idea of the glory accruing from the fame, honour, and applause, enjoyed by these distinguished characters, the idea of self is connected in the mind of him who makes a boast of

having seen, conversed with, or consulted them.

But as rank and fortune are objects held in still more general estimation than genius or virtue, it is to such a connexion with persons of rank and fortune as may enable him to identify himself with them, that the vain man will commonly be found most sedulously to aspire. Hence the eagerness with which the great are courted by those who have not the most distant expectation of reaping any other advantage from their acquaintance, besides that it affords this species of gratification.— That this gratification does not arise merely from sympathy with the opinions of others, is evident from observing, how far it exceeds and outruns that sympathy: No one thinking that any other person of his own rank has a right to be as much elated, on account of the same degree of intimacy with great personages, as he finds himself to be elated. The same desire which im-

pels him to identify himself with those whose situation attracts the public attention, and which he perceives to be the object of deference and respect, impels him likewise to appropriate to himself all the glory that accrues from such connections: and far from considering, that the same degree of intimacy with persons of rank confers on others the same distinction that it confers upon himself, their pretension on account of it is the object of his ridicule and censure. This circumstance has not escaped the penetrating eye of Shakespeare. Falstaff, though he was himself not deficient in vanity, instantly detects the folly of Justice Shallow, in talking of the feats of his youth, and his intimacy with John of Gaunt, which, with characteristic acuteness, he describes to have been, what the egotisms of vanity usually are—*Every third word a lie.*

The propensity to magnify the idea of self, does indeed, in the minds of the vain,

present such temptations to falsehood as are generally found irresistible. To a vain woman, for example, dress is a principal means of gratifying self-importance; but, among persons of equal fortune, all who set their hearts upon it may obtain similar articles of finery. What then is to be done, in order to give to these articles that imaginary value necessary to gratify the selfish principle in the mind of the wearer? The devices that are resorted to in these circumstances are truly ingenious. Sometimes, it is the very *first* thing of the kind that was ever seen! That produces superlative happiness: and next to it, perhaps, in degree, is the satisfaction of knowing, that it is the *last* of the kind that has been imported; or that, from the death of the maker, can possibly be procured! If, unfortunately, neither of these circumstances can be gloried in, the things may be astonishingly cheap, or wonderfully dear: They may be the very counterpart of what is worn by a fashionable beauty, or celebrated

courtezan ; or they may have been made up by the milliner or artisan who are most famous for the enormity of their charges ! Can any of these pretensions be substantiated,—we need only observe the effects produced, to be convinced that the owner is, in her own mind, identified with the objects in which she glories, and that she imagines herself to be so in yours.

For obvious reasons, it is from my own sex that I chiefly select examples of this nature ; but from what I have heard of the stories related by young men, concerning the wonderful feats of their dogs and horses, all tending to magnify themselves in the opinion of the hearer, by magnifying the qualities of the animals with which they connected the idea of self, I think we may conclude, that the propensity is, in either sex, equally strong and equally operative. Of whatever nature the object of admiration may be, as the idea of self expands by a connexion with it, it is not sur-

prising that, in the eagerness to substantiate that connexion, veracity should be frequently sacrificed. A very few illustrations may yet be added to justify the truth of this remark.

As an instance in point, we may observe, that the praise of excelling in any of the fine arts affords not a sufficient gratification to the selfish principle,* unless such praise can, by some particular circumstance, be appropriated. It is not enough that we acknowledge the merit of the performance, or that we express our warmest admiration of the genius or skill of the accomplished person who has produced it. In order to render our admiration the exclusive property of the fair artist, we are compelled

* The reader is requested to notice, that the term *selfish principle*, wherever it occurs in this Essay, is meant to denote the propensity to enlarge the idea of self; an operation of the mind totally distinct from selfishness, and also different from self-love, as has been explained at length in the preceding Chapter.

to take into consideration circumstances which peculiarly *belong to her*, and to which no other person can lay claim. No matter whether it be extreme youth, or extreme age; extraordinary rapidity of execution, or extraordinary slowness; whether she had difficulties to struggle with, or more than common advantages to boast; so that it be something wonderful, the mention of it will not fail to answer the purpose of enhancing the value of our admiration, by rendering it appropriate. Every person of common observation must have proofs of this in recollection; and we may be assured, that while education is so conducted as to render the desire of admiration the ruling impulse of the heart, the fine arts, as far as they are cultivated, will inevitably be rendered subservient to the gratification of that subtle principle, whose operations are most fatal to human virtue. Under the influence of this propensity, the direction given to attention must be highly unfavourable to the cultivation of taste;

and accordingly we shall find, that real taste and great personal vanity are seldom, if ever, united.

In viewing the full dress of a lady of fashion, a person who connects no idea of self with such objects, admires simply the beauty of the jewels, the taste and ingenuity of the artisan, displayed in the manner in which they are cut, and grouped; the skill of the manufacturer, exhibited in the delicate fabric of the drapery; and the fancy of the dress-maker, who has arranged the mass of materials to the best advantage. But, by the owner, the skill of the artisan, the ingenuity of the manufacturer, the taste of the dress-maker, are considered in connexion with the idea of self. She glories in them as her own; nor is she conscious either of incongruity or meanness, in thus resting her claims to distinction on the qualifications and endowments of persons, whom she at the same time regards with utter contempt!

Though so helpless as to be incapable of putting on her clothes without assistance, instead of being humbled by the consciousness of her own weakness, she attaches the idea of *self* to the strength and abilities of those she hires to attend her; and the more she can multiply these attendants, the more does the idea of self expand. Her personal weakness, so far from begetting sentiments of humility, is her boast; for she is strong in the strength of others; and whatever strength she can afford to purchase, constitutes, in her mind, a part of the complex idea of self; and by every contrivance of luxury is this idea enlarged.

It is impossible to increase, in any considerable degree, the weight or size of the corporeal frame: But many are the contrivances devised by the selfish principle to increase *the idea* of its weight and dimensions. It is this which raises the lofty ceiling to three times the height of the human figure, and enlarges the spacious

apartments so much beyond all proportion to the number and size of the inhabitants. The puny master can inhabit but a corner of the spacious mansion ; but, in idea, it is *he* that fills it. Identifying himself not only with the servants who compose his retinue, but with the very guests who feed at his table, it is for him that, in idea, the flocks and herds are slaughtered ; for him, that the south pours forth the produce of the vintage ; for him, that the luxuries of the east and west are imported ; and, little as his single stomach can digest, it is, in idea, by his individual self that all he pays for is consumed. He boasts of the great consumption as a proof of greatness, and is in his own mind the bigger for it. With such propriety is the word *greatness* on this occasion used.

The idea of increased weight keeps pace with that of increased dimensions. One horse cannot be supposed capable of drawing so immense a load ! It requires the

strength of a pair, or of four, or of six, according as the fortune or rank of the individual, which is to be displayed by this indication of an increase of person, renders it convenient.

It would be extremely curious to trace the progress of this sentiment in the manners of different ages and nations. While we in modern Europe are content with testifying the idea we entertain of the increased ponderance of our persons, by multiplying the animal strength necessary to transport us from place to place, the Asiatics endeavour to realize the idea, by using every means to swell the size of their persons to something like an equality with their fortune. Corpulency, among the oriental nations, is deemed an essential concomitant of exalted station. A great man thinks he gains in respectability what he loses in activity ; and, consequently, increases in pride as he increases in fat. Many allusions to this circumstance are

met with in the Psalms of David, and other parts of the old Testament; and which, to those who are unacquainted with the manners of the eastern nations, must be wholly unintelligible.

It might perhaps be clearly proved, that in order to form a judgment of the degree of refinement, and of mental cultivation, that subsisted at any given period, we need only observe in what mode the propensity to enlarge the idea of self sought its gratification. I imagine we should find, that in proportion as the value of intellectual endowments is understood, it is by things that denote the exertion of intellect, that the idea of self is expanded; and that it is only when intellect but feebly operates, that it is strictly and inseparably connected with the external frame.

In this point of view, the various devices employed by men in the savage state to increase in appearance their bodily dimen-

sions, admit of easy explanation. Instead of affording a proof of sagacity, as the result of a studied plan to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies, they afford a proof, that the device of enlarging the idea of self, is, from mental imbecility, confined in its operations to what is strictly personal. By the strength of this propensity they are impelled to wage war with nature, and to mar her works. Not satisfied with the dimensions she has given to the human ear, they, by slitting it, contrive to stretch it to an enormous size ; and in the same manner exert their ingenuity in altering the proportions, and changing the colour of the human form. But in the most savage tribes, it is the chiefs of the nation only that dare aspire to this painful pre-eminence. Women and slaves are doomed to remain as nature formed them. To them, no means of enlarging the idea of self is accessible, but that of connecting it with the idea of the chief to whom they of right belong. No notion of their individuality seems indeed

to be entertained: They are merely viewed as living clods permitted to breathe during the pleasure of the owner, and are consequently supposed to have no right to live after he has paid the debt of nature. According to the accounts of the Spanish writers, the practice of immolating the wives and slaves of a deceased warrior, at the performance of the funeral rites, was common to all the American tribes; the number of the victims bearing a proportion to the rank and power of the chief whose obsequies were thus cruelly celebrated: And if (as we are assured from good authority) the sacrifice was frequently on the part of the victims voluntary, and even courted as an honour, it affords a very striking proof how completely they had identified the idea of their own glory with the idea of their master's glory.

But perhaps there is not in the history of man any circumstance so completely demonstrative of the power of the propen-

sity of which I treat, as the practice of infanticide, peculiar to some of the Hindoo tribes; and cherished, and gloried in, as distinguishing them from tribes of inferior antiquity.

It is a fact established beyond all dispute, that the Jarejahs, in particular, have for many hundred years made it an invariable rule to murder every female infant born to them, and that the numbers annually destroyed among them amount to little less than 20,000. The mothers of these infants are of course descended from other tribes. They have been born and educated where no such inhuman practice prevails: Their hearts have not been hardened in their tender years, by witnessing barbarity; nor have they been familiarized to the thoughts of murder. What, then, should prevent in their breasts the yearnings of maternal love? What should arrest the flow of maternal affection? Though pride or policy may sear the feelings of the bru-

tal father, one should imagine that instinct alone would have sufficient power to overcome all these motives in the mother's breast; and that by nothing short of force could she be compelled to resign to destruction the helpless babe, whose feeble cry sounded in her ear, as imploring her protection.*

* In the interesting account of the negotiations carried on by Colonel Walker, for effecting the abolition of this horrid practice, the motives of the parents are very clearly exhibited. After a long resistance, the Jarejah chief, expressing his confidence that Colonel Walker did not mean to dishonour him by the proposal, hints at the possibility of a compromise; and though, *as the Jarejahs had from ancient times killed their daughters*, he did not think himself justified in breaking through the long established custom, hints, that if a certain fortress were to be put into his hands, as the price of the concession, he would, on that consideration, be willing to preserve his female offspring. His mother, however, was more tenacious of the honour of the Jarejah race: She stoutly contended for the ancient privileges of the cast, concluding by this unanswerable argument, *viz. The Jarejahs have never reared their daughters, nor can it now be the case.* See MOOR'S Hindoo Infanticide.

But, no ; a propensity stronger than instinct, more powerful than maternal love, steels her heart, and guides her impious hand to destroy the innocent being to which she has just given birth. Identifying herself with the powerful tribe of which she has by marriage become a member, the peculiar customs of that tribe are objects in which she glories, as constituting a part of its glory. Considering it for the honour of the Jarejah, to continue a practice which has for so many ages prevailed among them, she deems her honour concerned in continuing it. When she adds one to the millions of sacrifices that have thus been made, she connects the idea of self with all those millions ; and by thus connecting it, expands that idea, and dwells with complacency on the means of its extension. Hence the indifference with which she views the horrid deed of murder, even the murder of her own offspring ! Hence the difficulty of persuading the Jarejah race to relinquish the horrid practice

of infanticide!—a difficulty which would have been pronounced insuperable by any person of less heroic firmness, or less determined perseverance, than distinguished the gentleman, who, to his everlasting honour, at length succeeded in accomplishing the abolition of a practice so disgraceful to humanity. It is not possible to contemplate the insensibility of the Hindoo mothers, without an emotion of horror and detestation. But in the gratification of the propensity which has rendered her heart thus callous, she enjoys the only species of happiness, that, educated as she is educated, and circumstanced as she is circumstanced, it is possible for her to taste. Her affections and her understanding being alike uncultivated, it is only by the propensities which spring spontaneously that she is capable of being influenced. Wherever polygamy prevails, it is by the selfish principle alone that the conjugal bond is cemented, as it is in that principle also that polygamy originates.

It has been already remarked, that in the earlier stages of society, while it is in physical strength that man depends for obtaining superiority, he is impelled, by the governing propensity of his nature, to give the appearance of extended dimension to his person. The next step in the progress is to enlarge the idea of self, by multiplying into it all the human beings whom he has brought into complete subjection to his authority, or who are in any wise subject to his controul. The female sex, from its inferiority in regard to physical strength, is in such circumstances invariably enslaved. The gratification which polygamy affords to the selfish principle is obvious. To be the husband of so many wives, is to be in idea multiplied according to the individuals of whom he is the husband: The persons, the wills, nay, the very thoughts of the multitudes whom he thus appropriates, are considered by him as part of self; nor is there

any part of his property secured or guarded with equal vigilance.

In the region of the east, even to the present day, an extensive haram is deemed an essential insignia of rank, and the utter seclusion of its inhabitants from every eye insisted on, not as matter of prudence, but as a point of honour.

How miserable would be the lot of the innumerable beings thus immured, and doomed to the horrors of perpetual imprisonment, were it not for the operation of the same propensity to which they owe, what we consider, the wretchedness of their condition! But of that condition they are so far from complaining, that they consider it a subject of glory. It is a certain mark of the greatness, the riches, and the power of him with whom they connect the idea of self; and thus affords to their minds a species of gratification,

for which they would deem all the delights of liberty an incompetent recompense.

Perhaps we might, on a close survey, find reason to conclude, that even in Christian and civilized nations, the propensity to enlarge the idea of self has had a similar operation. The same propensity which incited the barbarian to resolve into his will the wills, and to connect with his life the lives of all his bosom slaves, may be observed to have operated in the spirit of almost all our ancient laws, as far as they concern the sex. From these it is evident, that women have, by the legislators of Europe, been generally contemplated, as having no other existence than that which they derived from being identified with their husbands, fathers, brothers, or kinsmen: In some instances deprived of the rights of inheritance; in others, permitted to enjoy it, but under circumstances no less humiliating, than the most abject servitude. For ages an heiress was considered in no

other light than as a sort of promissory note, stampt with the value of certain lands, tenements, and hereditaments, and disposable at the will of the sovereign, to whomsoever he thought worthy of the prize. The marriage ceremony put the husband in complete possession of all those goods of which the heiress had only been the representative, and annihilated her legal existence, which at that moment merged in his. The sentiments and associations to which such laws and usages gave strength and permanence, may perhaps be found, in some instances, still to retain an influence, affording to either sex a gratification of the selfish principle, alike inimical to the interests of both. Hence arises that jealousy with which men may be sometimes observed to regard the advancement of the other sex in knowledge, which they have considered as their own appropriate privilege, and with which they have been accustomed to connect the idea of self. And when, from the universal diffusion of light, it becomes

impossible to retain the female mind in utter darkness, hence proceeds the eagerness to set bounds to the cultivation of its faculties, by prescribing to it certain limits which it must on no account exceed.— When such sentiments prevail, women, readily adopting the notions of those with whom they wish to appear identified, continue to glory in ignorance, and devote their attention, not to the improvement of their minds, but to objects whose pernicious influence on the imagination has, in the preceding Essay, been fully described.

CHAPTER III.

Propensity to enlarge the idea of self, how gratified in humble life. Examples of its operation in the meanest circumstances. Family pride examined: Examples. Influence of the desire of magnifying the idea of self, in carrying our views into futurity. Posthumous honours. Posthumous deeds. Love of fame, &c.

IF, in the mind of the rich man, the idea of self is expanded by connecting it with all the personal and mental qualities of the human beings subject to his controul, or whose labour he can purchase, we shall find, that those who labour for him, or attend his person, or supply his wants, fail not to identify themselves with him. His greatness becomes their greatness: Their

personal consequence keeps pace with his. In the menial tribe, the less they have to do, the more is the price at which they purchase this enlargement of the idea of self, kept out of sight. If completely idle, the price is almost forgotten; and, consequently, the more useless they are, the more does the selfish principle triumph. This is a great source of evil in the servile state, and one that does not attach to any of the modes of industry. The tradesman or artificer, if proud of his success, is proud of something to which he has himself contributed. He extends the idea of self to his inventions and his labours, and glories in his skill and industry, independently of the pecuniary advantages derived from them. But if his employment ministers to the luxuries, not the necessities of life, his customers will be chiefly of a certain rank; and on their rank we shall find him valuing himself so evidently, as to afford a convincing proof, that he connects the idea of self with all the princes or nobles who happen

to employ him. This species of vanity is extremely amusing, from the contrast between the actual situation of the person and the opinion he entertains of his own importance; and has afforded some fine strokes of satire to the most eminent of our dramatic poets. It is, however, upon the whole, consolatory to observe, that the same propensity which produces so many of the crimes and miseries of human life, affords a support to the spirits under every variety of adverse fortune. Were, indeed, the opinion which we cherish of our own importance to be governed by sympathy with the opinion of others, misery and despair would be the portion of the greater part of mankind.

Except in those rare instances where the mind has been so much elevated by the sentiments of pure religion, as to regard with indifference all that interferes not with the favour of God, life would become utterly insupportable to the poor and the

despised. But even where religion has failed to produce this degree of fortitude, we find that, in situations the most wretched, life is not only clung to from an abhorrence of death, but from a sense of enjoyment. In many instances this can only be accounted for, by a consideration of the activity of that principle whose operations I have been endeavouring to describe.

There are few situations so abject as not to afford a something wherewith to connect the idea of self, and to expand that idea: Few who have passed through life, without having been noticed or employed by their superiors: Few who have not, at some period, found themselves necessary or useful to others; or who have not had sufficient power of doing injury to make themselves feared; or who have not had some bond of connexion with persons possessed of that power. Even when these circumstances no longer exist, the recollection of them will suffice to give such a

degree of self-consequence as illumines the dark abode of misery. It is happy for society where pains has been taken to attach this idea of self to character; but, in some respects, happy for the individual, that it can be attached to circumstances with which he is so slightly connected, that the connexion escapes all observation but his own.

What great struggles have we seen made by poor women, sinking under the burden of age, sickness, and poverty, in order to preserve the wretched remnants of furniture which still enabled them to have a place to creep into which they could call their own! The idea of independence they could not cherish, for without assistance they must have perished; but with the idea of these little articles of property the idea of self is so strongly associated, that rather than part with them in order to be received into their parish work-house, they would submit to deprivations, of which none but

those who are intimately acquainted with the situation of the poor in great cities can form any adequate notion.*

We can scarcely forbear smiling, when we observe the slight foundations on which vanity, in such instances, erects its fabric, in the midst of poverty and contempt; but let us examine the foundation on which it builds, in circumstances which we are apt to deem more favourable, and I fear we shall find that they are sometimes equally unsolid.

* It is to be regretted, that these feelings of the poor, though originating in a principle of our common nature, have so seldom entered into the calculations of those who prescribe laws for compelling the public to relieve their wants. The *Edinburgh House of Industry* is, as far as I know, the only asylum where such aid is given to the poor and industrious of a certain class, as enables them to retain to themselves the comfort of a home, to which they attach ideas of respectability, not easy to be conceived by those who have not turned their attention to such subjects. The continuance of this Institution is however precarious, as it rests solely on voluntary subscription.

According to the law of nature, our term of mortal life is bounded to a span. At our entrance into the world, feeble and helpless, unconscious of all but the objects by which we are immediately surrounded, we know not whence we spring; and when, debilitated by age, we are compelled to leave it, we should, were it not for the light of revelation, leave it profoundly ignorant with regard to the future, as on our entrance we were ignorant of the past. Yet, even under these circumstances, our desire of extending the idea of self finds means to operate, in extending the notion of our existence, by connecting it in imagination with past and future events.

Has not that poor shivering wretch who sweeps the pavement in the streets had as many ancestors as the proud peer, who boasts his pedigree as if, of all mankind, he alone had a father? Observe the complacency with which he pronounces the names of the ancient barbarians, who, hav-

ing assisted in driving out by rapine and bloodshed the former inhabitants, took possession of the very lands he now inherits ! Can we doubt, that by connecting the idea of self with each in the long succession of savage and civilized progenitors, he in idea lengthens the period of his own existence, and actually persuades himself that he began to live when his remote ancestor first obtained a name ? Even though the members of his ancient house should only have been remarkable for vice, or folly, their follies and their vices form no impediment to the operation of the selfish principle. They rather facilitate its operations ; for by carrying the mind back to a period remote from the present, they enable it to extend the idea of self to that period with greater certainty.

And here we may remark, that though we so far identify ourselves with our ancestors, as to glory in all the glory they achieved, and all the grandeur they enjoyed, as

if it were truly our own; we do not in the same way identify ourselves with their follies, or their crimes; but, on the contrary, think it great injustice to have these imputed to us as disgrace. We can on such occasions think and talk most rationally concerning our individual character, as the only thing by which we ought to be judged or appreciated: For here the selfish principle does not interfere to pervert our reasonings or blind our judgment, as it does when the circumstances of those with whom we are connected are such as to gratify the passions which spring from that principle.

Among persons most remarkable for family pride, we shall find many who can only boast of illustrious descent on one side of the house; and in such instances may observe, that it signifies little whether it be from father or mother that they derive the claim. If it be from the paternal side, the relations by the mother are

scarcely reckoned in the least a-kin: Nay, if the passion greatly predominates, it is a thousand to one that the mother herself does not escape the contempt of her high-born children; who, while they identify themselves with every relation of their father to the twentieth cousin, consider their maternal aunts and cousins as persons with whom they have no natural connexion. But if it be by the blood of the mother that their self-consequence is to be augmented, how infinitely is the connexion between mother and child increased! It is to her relations exclusively that they then belong; to her forefathers that they are exclusively indebted for their existence; and, while they extend the idea of self to the most remote of their maternal ancestors, consider not that their father's father had a being! He is to them a mere nonentity; for with him vanity permits not the idea of self to be connected. And so readily do we sympathize in this feeling, that we should no more think of mentioning, in the

presence of a person of fashion, the name of an honest tradesman from whom he happened to be descended, than we should think of insulting him by the mention of any personal defects.

In countries which nature has rendered sterile or inaccessible, the revolutions of property are so rare, that estates continue in possession of the same families for many generations; a circumstance extremely favourable to the operation of the selfish principle. It presents to every remote descendent of the family a palpable object, with which the idea of self can be connected through a period extending beyond calculation; and produces a proportional degree of self-consequence in the bosom of every distant cousin, however sunk in poverty or ignorance.

But it is not only by looking to the past that we seek to extend, in idea, our span of existence; we are, by the same

propensity, led to connect the idea of self with events that are to take place on the stage of life, after we have made our eternal exit. Mistaken notions concerning the motives by which we are on such occasions actuated, are, I believe, not unfrequently entertained: They are generally denominated *wholesome* prejudices. But as neither true religion, nor sound philosophy, acknowledge any prejudice as wholesome, we may proceed to examine them without incurring the imputation of presumption.

The funeral rites of every nation afford convincing evidence,

“That none to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being ere resign'd:”—

Those who passed through life unnoticed and unknown, not unfrequently evincing such anxiety concerning the honours to be paid to their remains in the funeral obsequies, as plainly denotes how much the

idea of self predominates; but how far it extends, the monumental pyramid, formed in the vain hope of bidding defiance to the power of time, and the simple memorial of painted wood, or rudely graven headstone, erected in the country church-yard, alike bear witness. In either instance, when erected by the party whose name they were destined to perpetuate, they were means by which the idea of self was extended, in his mind, to a period beyond the bounds of life; and it is plain, that in that imaginary extension the notion of self was enlarged. The same motive is perhaps still more obviously displayed, when monuments to the dead are erected by the vanity of the living,—not to record the virtues that really shone forth in the character of the deceased, as models for imitation; but to proclaim, that the dust on which we tread was once decorated with insignias of wealth, or power, or glory; and that with the ideas of such glory, power, or wealth, such and such persons are by right entitled

to connect the idea of self. It is to gratify this propensity that custom has introduced the ostentatious display of splendour, at a period when the contrast between the actual state of the loathsome object, thus vainly decorated, and the magnificence of the trappings that adorn it, is particularly striking. Yet, from sympathy with the feelings and propensities which we believe to have existed in the mind of the deceased, and to exist in the survivors, we acquiesce in the propriety of substituting the display of wealth for the display of sorrow; and, while the show is before our eyes, are impressed by involuntary respect for the object of it. The impression is however only momentary; for if totally unconnected with the deceased, as there is no room for the operation of the selfish principle, our respect for his memory will never exceed what is due to his conduct and character. And, alas! even the memorials of these, how quickly do they perish! Is it not true, that we should in general be exceedingly mortified, to be con-

vinced that we were as soon to be forgotten, as we are conscious of forgetting the friends and acquaintances who have gone before us?

To those who consider the termination of a life of trial here, as the commencement of a life of glory in another and a better world, we should, at first view, imagine it to be most natural to carry the idea of self into that superior state; and that, instead of endeavouring to prolong the idea of existence here, their minds should be absorbed in the contemplation of that state to which they with assured faith look forward. But, alas! even in the minds of the faithful, the selfish principle (the root or source of all those temptations which render this life a life of trial and probation) continues to exert its influence, until all connexion with the world be broken.

Hence, though perhaps unconscious of the principle from which it springs, those who entertain the strongest and best grounded hopes of eternal happiness, evince the same propensity to cling to the terrestrial objects that afford means of extending the idea of self, as those do who utterly disclaim the hopes of salvation. We never think of calling a man's religious belief in question, because of his having settled his estate by entail on his posterity. Yet, in doing so, he is evidently impelled by a desire of prolonging in idea his terrestrial existence, and procuring an enlargement of the idea of self, by an act which enables him to restrict and govern the wills of his successors, through an indefinite number of generations.

All the successive inheritors of his property he considers as beings dependant on his will. He identifies himself with them to the latest age, and glories in the idea of

thus exercising power and authority over thousands that are yet unborn.

The absurd use that is sometimes made of the right of disposing of property by testamentary deeds, affords a still more striking proof of the activity of the selfish principle. Wills, seemingly dictated by the most strange and unaccountable caprice, are only ill-directed efforts to prolong an ideal existence, by continuing to excite that surprise and admiration, by which, in the mind of the vain man, the idea of self is habitually enlarged.

In the sordid and avaricious the same principle has a different operation. It is with the wealth in his possession that his ideas of self have been exclusively associated; and as he cannot dispose of that wealth without in some measure breaking the association, he shrinks from the odious task; and, rather than contemplate for a moment an idea which is to him equivalent

to that of annihilation, he dies without leaving a token of affection to any human being.

This naturally leads to considerations that are in their nature serious and important, and on which I should not presume to enter, but from a deep conviction of the futility and impropriety, and even danger, of resting our hopes of immortality on any other grounds than those that are pointed out in the gospel. It is there alone that our faith and hope finds anchorage "sure and steadfast;" and he that believes in the divine mission, and death, and resurrection of the Saviour of the world, need be little solicitous concerning the fate of those arguments for the soul's immortality, which have been elicited from a consideration of the nature of the human mind.

The propensity to extend our views into futurity, and thus to prolong, in idea, our existence, though it has, by many learned

and pious men, been mentioned as a collateral evidence in proof of a future state, affords such slender support to that glorious doctrine, that its services may safely be dispensed with. "Life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel;" and those who will not believe God's word, are little likely to be convinced of an hereafter by assertions less authoritative.

I shall, therefore, not scruple to make the inference, to which, 'on comparing the different operations of the propensity in question, we are naturally led, viz. that it is one and the same principle which impels us to seek for means of extending the idea of self, by connecting that idea with persons and events that preceded our birth, and which impels us to connect with the idea of self events and circumstances that are to take place after we have, as to this world, ceased to be. It does not appear that we have any more right to infer our future existence

from the operation of this propensity in the latter instance, than to infer our pre-existence from its operation in the former. In either instance we perceive only the effects of an effort to enlarge the idea of self, by stretching it beyond the natural span of life. But in neither instance does our obedience to this impulse afford more convincing proof of extended existence, than the propensity to enlarge the idea of our own dimensions affords proof, that we were by nature intended to grow to such a size as should require the strength of six horses to draw the load.*

Whether the love of fame has been productive of a greater share of good or evil

* On examining the arguments for immortality which are to be found in the writings of the most celebrated heathen philosophers, I apprehend we should find them, in general, founded on those operations of the selfish principle in which vanity is a prime auxiliary. They were not for vulgar use; and perhaps were, *and are*, recommended by this very circumstance; for where the

to society, it may perhaps be difficult to determine. But whatever be the nature of its effects, we perceive, in all its operations, evident marks of that propensity to enlarge the idea of self, which forms a prominent feature of human character.

Renown is placed on high as the reward of heroes; and happily for kings and conquerors that it is so highly valued, as to be sought for

“ Ev'n in the cannon's mouth.”

Under the influence of the same propensity, men are often led to the performance of great, and sometimes to the performance

propensity to enlarge the idea of self, by connecting it with objects and circumstances that serve as marks of superiority, conferring distinction in the erring eyes of the admiring multitude, has become a primary passion, it must require a wonderful change of heart to accept, in good earnest, the doctrines of the gospel. Elysium is the abode of heroes, and consequently a much genteeler place than heaven, which is the abode of saints.

of noble and useful actions, in whose minds neither the principles of duty, nor the feelings of benevolence, had sufficient strength to afford a motive to exertion. In this manner, by the over-ruling dispensations of Providence, evil is rendered productive of good; but the nature of evil is not thereby changed. The good that is done from the motive of obtaining glory to one's self, may be as beneficial to the objects of it as if it had proceeded from purer motives. The persons benefited will connect the idea of the actor with the action; and this association will continue as long as the action is held in remembrance. The honour which crowns the name of the benefactor, will ensure to it what, in the language of the world, is called *immortality*; that is to say, it will, for a certain number of years, perhaps only of months, or weeks, or days, be remembered, that the person who performed such or such an action, was called by such a name. This is all the impression that it makes on the minds of others. But

in the mind of him who expects his name to be thus honoured, the honour is identified with the notions of his own existence. While the action continues to be mentioned, he, in idea, continues to live. In whatever region it is known, thither does the idea of self extend.

I have thought proper to illustrate the operation of the selfish principle, by exemplifying it in actions which, had they proceeded from proper motives, would have been really praise-worthy; because, by the splendour of such actions, the individual who performs them is liable to be so much dazzled, as to be blind to the principle from which they proceed. Through whatever channel we seek for fame, whether by the exertion of our intellectual faculties, the cultivation of our natural endowments, or by seeking opportunities to exhibit proofs of strength, valour, skill, or policy, in so far as we are actuated by the desire of fame, we are actuated by the propensity to en-

large and extend the idea of self. Nor is the nature of the propensity altered by the complexion of the action; for if the action be truly laudable and truly virtuous, and prove in its consequences beneficial to mankind, and if these considerations had any weight in impelling us to the undertaking, —it follows, that the desire of fame was not the only motive, nor perhaps the predominant one. By mingling with others of a purer nature, its own nature is not altered, though its pernicious tendency must doubtless be thereby counteracted and diminished; like certain gases, which, when inhaled in a pure state, prove fatal to life, but which, when mingled with ethereal fluids of another description, become not only harmless but salutary.

It is from believing that the love of fame is the passion only of great minds, that it excites so much sympathy and admiration; but where it both originates in, and is governed by the selfish principle, it

appears not to have any greater right to esteem or approbation, than vanity, or avarice, or any other modification of the same principle.

“ Who, smiling, sees not with what various strife
 Man blindly runs the giddy span of life?
 To the same end still different means employs,
 This builds a church, a temple that destroys;
 Both anxious to secure a deathless name,
 Yet erring both, mistake report for fame.”*

The propensity to enlarge the idea of self seeks its gratification in the mind of the avaricious miser, by increasing hoards of treasure of which he is never to make farther use. But while, with every farthing, every shilling, and every guinea in the buried heap, he can connect the idea of self, the treasure is to him not useless. By every minute addition to his wealth the

* Will it be deemed impertinent to express a suspicion, that the poet has, in the last of these lines, made a distinction without a difference?

idea of self is expanded; and, with conscious satisfaction, he thinks of lands which his wealth has purchased, though they are never to meet his view, and of stores of grain heaped in his garners, though destined there to rot until unfit for the use of man or beast. As he cannot part with that with which he has identified himself, without experiencing the pang of separation, he, rather than part with it, foregoes pecuniary advantage, and thus is frequently observed to act with seeming inconsistency. But in fact the miser is consistent throughout, and obeys in every instance the impulse of the propensity by which he is completely governed.

Of all the operations of the selfish principle, that of hoarding may be accounted the most independent; but it is likewise the most dissocial, and, on that account, meets not the same indulgence, nor excites the same sympathy, as the love of fame.

CHAPTER IV.

Operation of the propensity to magnify the idea of self productive of the malevolent affections. Examples of its tendency to produce envy, uncharitableness, detraction, &c.

BEFORE we proceed to the remarks which it is proposed to make on ambition, party-spirit, bigotry, &c. I shall beg leave to point out a few of the many facts that may be adduced in evidence to prove, that, in whatever mode the selfish principle operates, the production of one or other of the malevolent passions is the consequence of its indulgence. The subject is of great importance to ingenuous minds, bent on the acquirement of self-knowledge, and, if duly considered, may, by rendering the boundaries of vice and virtue more obvious, ren-

der an essential service to those who resolve to "keep the heart with all diligence." Even by such minds vanity is often deemed a harmless and inoffensive passion; but on examining its operations we shall be convinced, that whatever be the nature of the objects which, in order to enlarge the idea of self, we connect with that idea, we feel every attempt to break this connexion as an injury; and a certain feeling of resentment consequently rises in our hearts. This feeling will be more or less malignant, accompanied by a greater or lesser degree of hatred and revenge, according to the degree in which it is counteracted or controlled by acquired sentiments and principles.

In a former section I have endeavoured to show in what manner a vain woman enlarges the idea of self, by connecting it with objects that are, in her mind, most worthy of admiration. It is according to the degree in which she inspires admira-

tion, that her soul expands. She is elevated or depressed, in exact proportion as she thinks herself admired or otherwise: But as we are extremely prone to give to the dreams of imagination a sort of ideal existence, she seldom fails to think that she is actually admired, and speaks and acts according to this belief. Flattery, administered in sufficient quantity to confirm this belief, renders her the happiest of the happy. Her mind is then in a state of complacency: Her spirits, elevated beyond the usual tone, give the charm of vivacity to all she utters; and those who listen with delight to her conversation, begin indeed to think her the angel that she thinks herself. This, however, only happens when the claims of vanity are supported by beauty; for beauty being naturally the object of admiration, and youth (the season of its reign) the object of tenderness, we readily sympathize in the self-complacency which it inspires in the breast of the possessor, so

that the flattering homage paid to beauty is usually sincere.

But whether it be personal or adventitious advantages in which she who thirsts for admiration has placed her glory, let a rival appear to share that glory, and then, according to the degree in which the idea of self has been expanded, will she feel envy and resentment against her by whom she has been robbed of a portion of that admiration which had essentially contributed to its expansion. Where now the smile of complacency? Where

“The soul’s calm sunshine, and the heartfelt joy?”

The smile of complacency may indeed return, to illumine her bright eyes, and dimple her fair cheeks;—but it is only brought back by some happy discovery of defects in her hated rival. In proclaiming these she feels a triumph; for thus the idea of self is again permitted to expand:

But where happiness is built on such foundation, never will the sunshine of contentment beam long upon the heart.

The same observations will be found to apply with equal force to every species of vanity, where that passion has been rendered subservient to the gratification of the selfish principle. On whatever circumstance the claim to admiration is founded, as there will still be others who rest their pretensions on a similar basis, and who seek to enlarge the idea of self, by connecting it with the same objects, the triumph of vanity must be generally transient, and subject to perpetual fluctuations.

As the vain man ardently desires to have the high opinion which he forms of himself ratified and confirmed by the opinion of those around him, he bends his unwearyed efforts to render himself the prime and only object of their praise and admiration. By the praise bestowed on others,

he consequently feels his aim to be frustrated, and experiences from this idea the pain of mortification. The dispraise or censure of others affords him, on the other hand, unspeakable relief; at once gratifying his notions of comparative superiority, and conveying the pleasing assurance, that the mind of the detractor is in a state of sympathy with his own.

When the selfish principle operates through the medium of vanity, it is almost impossible that the apostle's injunction to "love the things that are excellent," can be followed: For under the influence of that principle, no excellence of any kind is the object of love or admiration, with which the idea of self cannot in some way be connected. Hence the vain man is naturally more inclined to hate than to love persons whose approved excellence obtains the meed of praise. This operation of the selfish principle, when it becomes very conspicuous, is denominated envy.

When thus conspicuous, it is universally acknowledged to be hateful: But I am afraid its secret workings, though not less hateful, meet with no unfavourable reception from the generality of mankind. It is only where the selfish principle has been entirely subdued, that the heart is willing to do justice to every species of merit; for till then, the sense of inferiority which comes from the contemplation of qualities and attainments superior to our own, is inevitably painful.

Hence the universal reluctance to acknowledge the superior worth or talents of our contemporaries: Hence the avidity with which every tale of slander is swallowed: Hence the eagerness with which we seize on every opportunity of pursuing eminent characters into the recesses of retirement, in hopes of finding in the history of their unguarded moments, somewhat that may bring them down to a level with ourselves.

Admirably has this been illustrated by Shakspeare in the character of Cassius, whose hatred to Cæsar originated not in any feelings of patriotism, but was solely the offspring of envy. In disburdening his heart to Brutus, he does not dwell on those circumstances which afforded a just cause of indignation against the tyrant who had triumphed over the liberties of his country, but on those which reduced him to an equality with himself.

“ I was born free as Cæsar, so were you ;
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter’s cold as well as he.
He had a fever when he was in Spain,
And, when the fit was on him, I did mark
How he did shake : ’tis true, this god did shake ;
His coward lips did from their colour fly,
And that same eye, whose bend doth awe the world,
Did lose its lustre. I did hear him groan ;
Aye, and that tongue of his, that bade the Romans
Mark him, and write his speeches in their books,
Alas ! it cried, “ Give me some drink, Titinius,”
Like a sick girl. Ye gods ! It doth amaze me,

A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world,
And bear the palm alone!"

It is impossible to display the effects of envy in more lively colours. How completely must it have blinded the judgment of the man who could lay hold on such circumstances as aggravating Cæsar's guilt, or as detracting from his heroism! Yet from our own observation on what passes in society, we may be fully convinced, that under the influence of envy the conduct of individuals is, in every instance, nearly similar; and that, in speaking of the person whose praise has become hateful, food for detraction is found in circumstances which have no connexion with the qualities that have excited the admiration, on account of which he is to the detractor odious. Thus, the personal defects of persons of distinguished talents are mentioned with contempt; as if having a long nose, or a crooked leg, or an aukward

figure, did, in reality, lessen the value of the mental qualities, which it is nevertheless the object of the detractor to depreciate. But, in pointing out these defects, the detractor directs your attention to circumstances in which he feels himself superior to him whose talents have obtained applause. The idea of self expands on the comparison; and thus he obtains amends for that temporary diminution of it, which, in listening to the praises of an equal and contemporary, he had painfully experienced.

There is no species of excellence, however unobtrusive, that does not seem to give offence to those, who, being incapable of making efforts to identify themselves with what is great or splendid, and thus procuring an enlargement of the idea of self, are, while under the dominion of that principle, necessarily compelled to hate the merit which obtains the approbation to which they do not even aspire to make pretension. Those who are eminent for piety, for cha-

rity, for zeal in the cause of virtue, are consequently all exposed to detraction; and as it is impossible, in some instances, to detract from the merit of their actions, their actions are by the detractor kept out of sight, while he bends his endeavours to bring forward to your view the personal defects or accidental circumstances, to which he hopes you will attach ideas of contempt. Why should the idea of excellence be painful to him, but because he cannot contemplate the impression it makes on you, and compare it with that made by his own character, without feeling the idea of self repressed and diminished! Hence his anxiety to lessen your opinion of the merit you admire and approve.

When with the object of admiration the idea of self can be by any means connected, what a different line of conduct is immediately pursued! As the patron of genius, the vain man, taking to himself the merit of all the genius that he condescends to

honour with his patronage, connects the idea of self with all the admiration it receives ; and therefore extols without mercy, and without discrimination, productions exactly similar to those which, in other circumstances, he would without discrimination and without mercy have condemned. Hence the extreme inconsistency so frequently to be remarked in the judgment of professed critics ; an inconsistency that may, doubtless, be in some instances with propriety ascribed to an amiable partiality for whatever proceeds from those to whom we are attached by the ties of friendship and affection, but often bears indelible marks of an origin less pure. Affection may lead us to dwell upon the merits of a friend's productions, and, by directing our attention exclusively to its beauties, we shall certainly permit its faults to escape our notice. But minds that are prone to this species of partiality, are habitually influenced by the benevolent affections ; and therefore, though, when not

blinded by love or friendship, they may evince that they have penetration to discover, and taste to reject whatever is faulty in the compositions that fall under their notice, their censure will have no tincture of spleen or malignity; nor in such minds will the vindictive passions be called forth by opposition to their opinions, either with regard to the objects of praise or censure. Examples of this amiable candour and moderation must be in the recollection of every reader. But unfortunately, while we are under the dominion of the selfish principle, the candour born of benevolence appears to us contemptible, and is scorned as the offspring of cowardice and imbecility. Thus are we induced to reject the arguments addressed to the judgment, unless when they support the opinions that are either by birth or adoption *ours*, and with which we consequently connect the idea of *self*. In this, the cultivated and uncultivated, the profound and the superficial, act alike; the selfish principle producing effects ex-

actly similar, let the understanding be of what description it may.

Let us look into those immense and mouldy volumes which contain the controversies carried on between men of vast erudition, and talents, and penetration, on points where their opinions happened to differ: How soon shall we discover the degree in which each identified himself with the opinion for which he combated, and with all who had embraced it! How plainly do we behold, in the acrimony of personal rancour, clear proofs that the controversy was to him a personal concern, and that, in triumphing over his adversary, he obtained an extension of the idea of self!

When it is works of taste and imagination that have thus become subjects of debate, we generally find the malignity attendant on vanity (when in league with the selfish principle) rendered still more

sharp and poignant; for in such instances it is aggravated by a conviction, that in spite of the censures so liberally bestowed, the work in question is still admired and praised by those who find it deserving of praise and admiration. Hence the virulence of abuse thrown on Pope, and the other wits and poets of his age; and had the great poets of other ages embalmed the memory of their adversaries, as he has done in the *Dunciad*, we should have opportunities of observing many similar instances of malignity, produced by that lessening of the idea of self experienced by the critic, from the success of those with whose glory no idea of his own glory was connected.

But even for this malignity, however reprehensible, we are usually disposed to make greater allowance than we should find it possible to make, did we believe that the endeavour to injure was made through venal and sordid motives, and that the critic, in his bitterest invectives, had

no other view but to gratify the spleen of others. Why do we feel thus differently, but because we are sensible, that, in the former instance, the critic may be, and probably is, unconscious of the motives by which he has been impelled; while, in the latter instance, he must be perfectly conscious of them. This offers to our view an evident distinction between the operation of the propensity to magnify the idea of self, and the operation of selfishness. Our motives, when impelled by the former, may be so disguised as to be concealed from our own hearts; whereas in the latter we are thoroughly aware of their nature, and the acts proceeding from them are consequently acts of choice. Before we dismiss the subject of literary criticism, it may be useful to observe, that were we, as often as the vituperations of the critic produce in us a sensible emotion of pain or pleasure, carefully and conscientiously to examine our own hearts, we should sometimes find reason to conclude, that his severity

was agreeable to us, or otherwise, not as it accorded with justice, but as it affected persons or opinions with which we connected the idea of self.

As books are the chief, and in some cases the only medium, through which we derive the knowledge that enlightens the understanding, and the sentiments that rectify and improve the heart, it is of great importance that we should be guided in our choice of books by clear and acknowledged principles. By blindly adopting the prejudices of those who loudly applaud, or vehemently condemn, without producing reasonable grounds of applause or condemnation, we do injustice to our own minds and hearts. When we pin our faith on the judgment of any man, or set of men, their opinions become in reality ours; they form a part of self, and as such we defend them against all by whom they are attacked or called in question. But it is not only the opinions we adopt from others that we

thus defend : the opinions which we have even by chance, or in sportiveness, delivered, are no sooner opposed or controverted, than we identify them with ourselves, and resent the attack made on them as made on our property.

In conversational circles the truth of these observations may be frequently found exemplified. Let us listen to the opinions delivered on works of taste and imagination ; we shall not only find, that the vain man has erected his own taste, his own fancy, his own feelings, into an infallible standard, but that he resents the rejection of this standard as an injury. In proportion as others applaud what he has been pleased to condemn, his condemnation becomes more severe, and pointed, and extensive ; till it at length degenerates to undisguised malignity. The censure of what he approves produces similar effects ; his approbation rising in its tone, in order to justify the accusation he brings against

his opponent, of want of taste, and perverse and wilful blindness.

Those who are incapable of such an exercise of judgment as is requisite towards even a tolerable degree of accuracy, and who have neither sense to comprehend, nor taste to discriminate the merits or defects of any species of literary composition, may be sometimes observed to decide most presumptuously on the merits or demerits of new publications. Their decisions, it is true, are always pronounced in general terms, but the tone and spirit will commonly be found to correspond with that, which, in the society in which they move, and in which it is their ambition to shine, happens to be most prevalent. It is with the leaders of the circle, with those who are most distinguished, that they wish to be identified, and it is their tone and spirit that they consequently adopt. When that happens to be sarcastic and severe, the idea of self expands by every sneer and sarcasm to

which they give utterance. When, on the contrary, an excess of refinement has rendered severity, even when called forth by moral indignation, odious, and made praise the order of the day, it is by rapturous expressions of admiration, that the propensity to enlarge the idea of self seeks its gratification. It is not more gratified in the former instance, by giving proofs of extreme fastidiousness in the liberal use of the terms heavy, dull, tedious, stupid, vulgar, low, &c. than it is in the latter, by the indiscriminate application of the epithets, sweet, charming, elegant, beautiful, and interesting!

That it is not merely from sympathy with the sentiments of those with whom we converse, and whom we admire or approve, that we are led thus to adopt their tone and manner, is rendered apparent from the degree of consequence we assume, in giving this evidence of our identification with such persons. Whether the tone we

adopt be that of censure or panegyric, we are equally bent on exalting ourselves by adopting it; and by giving proof of our identity with those who are admired, or feared, or celebrated, expect to share in the admiration or homage they receive.

As we cannot be too anxiously on our guard against the operations of a principle so active and insidious, it may be proper to take a slight view of the circumstances which prevent even the vain from taking alarm at the voice of praise.

We admit those who have been admired in former ages to have been worthy of all the admiration they received, for our knowledge of the deeds they have performed, or of the talents they have displayed in their works, of whatever kind, is an acquirement in which we glory. That knowledge is a part of self, and serves to exalt us, in imagination, above those who are destitute of the same species of knowledge. Homer

and Virgil, Cicero and Demosthenes, belong not to Greece and Rome, they belong to us; they are objects with which we identify ourselves, as we do with the school or college in which we have been educated. Milton and Shakspeare are now removed to a sufficient distance from our age, to become in the same manner a part of our peculiar property. Far from being disposed to dispute their claims to admiration, our intimate acquaintance with their merits is eagerly exhibited, as proof of our connexion with these illustrious persons.

Every celebrated name that has done honour to our country, in a former age, we honour and extol, not merely in consideration of their peculiar excellence, but because, *as our countrymen*, we connect their glory with our own. We listen with pleasure to their praises; for, as we listen, the recollection of the connexion that subsists between us, causes the idea of self to

dilate. The same connexion, the same tie of common origin, forms not the same bond of union between us and our contemporaries; for we cannot admit the validity of their claim to admiration, without acknowledging that they are in some respects superior to ourselves; and thus the idea of self would be diminished instead of being enlarged.

Were envy only to be called into action by eminent superiority, great and distinguished characters would alone be subject to detraction. But, alas! the propensity to enlarge the idea of self renders the operation of vanity, and its concomitant passions, equally conspicuous and equally fatal in every sphere of life, and in society of every description.

It is observed by a writer of no common penetration, to whose superior genius an illustrious rank will be assigned by future generations, that "every person not defi-

cient in intellect is more or less occupied in tracing, amongst the individuals he converses with, the varieties of understanding and temper which constitute the characters of men; and receives great pleasure from every stroke of nature that points out to him those varieties. This," she adds, "is, much more than we are aware of, the occupation of children, and of grown people also, whose penetration is but lightly esteemed; and that conversation which degenerates with them into trivial and mischievous tattling, takes its rise not unfrequently from *the same source that supplies the rich vein of the satirist and the wit.*"* This source the author, consulting the benevolence of her own heart, describes as no other than sympathy, which renders the mind of man "an object of curiosity to man."

* Introductory Discourse to the Plays on the Passions, by Miss JOANNA BAILLIE.

But why should the gratification of this curiosity produce mischievous tattling? In our eagerness to investigate the springs of human conduct, why do we not evince an equal desire of discovering the hidden worth as the hidden blemish? Were it not for the degree in which the selfish principle operates, sympathy with our fellow-creatures would naturally excite in us a desire to discover and proclaim the virtues which have escaped the notice of the world. I am, indeed, afraid, that “the same source too often supplies the rich vein of the satirist and the wit;” and “that the eagerness so universally shewn for the conversation of the latter, plainly enough indicates how many people have been occupied in the same way with ourselves.” That is to say, occupied in endeavouring to find out some defect or incongruity, that may justify us to ourselves for withholding the respect, or love, or approbation, which it is abhorrent to the selfish principle to pay.

In the following passage, the amiable writer from whom I have taken the liberty to quote, makes a very ingenious apology for the frivolous nature of common discourse.

“ I will readily allow, that the dress and manners of men, rather than their characters and dispositions, are the subjects of our common conversation, and seem chiefly to occupy the multitude. But let it be remembered, that it is much easier to express our observations upon these: It is easier to communicate to another, how a man wears his wig and cane, what kind of house he inhabits, and what kind of table he keeps, than from what slight traits in his words and actions we have been led to conceive certain impressions of his character; traits that will often escape the memory, when the opinions that were founded on them remain. Besides, in communicating our ideas of the characters of others, we are often called upon to support them

with more expense of reasoning than we can well afford; but our observations on the dress and appearance of men seldom involve us in such difficulties.”

To all this I willingly subscribe. That the attention of the multitude is chiefly engaged by objects of perception, and that it is on these objects that the imagination of the uncultivated chiefly dwells, is extremely obvious; but it remains to be shewn, why, in communicating our remarks on the dress, manners, and domestic arrangements of others, we should delight to find in these somewhat to censure, to ridicule, or to condemn. Whence does it proceed, that an exact conformity to our own peculiar ways, and modes, and habits, is the only passport to our approbation? Whence happens it, that when two or three are gathered together, who, from similarity of temper, or circumstances, or situation, have acquired in some respects a sympathy in opinions, habits, and pursuits, that agree-

ment should so often be converted into an offensive league ; according to the very spirit and letter of which, no mercy is to be shewn to any, who, in their modes of dress, or manner of spending their time or fortune, happen to differ from the present party ?

Where is the small society to be found, that is not divided and sub-divided into leagues of this kind, more or less exclusive, and more or less inveterate in their antipathies, according as they are cemented by the spirit of party. But even where no opposition in political or religious opinions whets animosity, the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, when it seeks its gratification in lessening and degrading the characters of others, is never at a loss for cause of censure and reproach. The same selfish principle which impels the woman of fashion to boast of waking while the vulgar sleep, and of going to rest when the morning sun calls the busy world into

action, impels the rigid observer of early hours to attach ideas of moral depravity to every departure from that precise rule with regard to the time of rising and of going to bed. Who has not observed the effect of this tendency to set up some peculiar notion, peculiar custom, or peculiar habit, as a perfect rule of right and standard of perfection? Who has not heard the conduct of such as departed from such rules animadverted on with as much severity as could have been called forth by the breach of all the ten commandments? I have lived long enough to remember, when, in a small circle, the good ladies who ventured to shew their gentility by protracting the hour of drinking tea to six o'clock, afforded matter of censure and reprobation to those who still continued to assemble at the hour of five: And as human nature remains unchanged, though the objects of censure may no longer be the same, I make no doubt we should still find, among those who move in a contracted

sphere, the same disposition to observe and blame whatever did not correspond exactly with their own practice. Who can doubt, that in every such species of censure the mind enjoys a species of triumph derived from an enlargement of the idea of self? The proneness to attach ideas of evil to whatever is done by those who are placed without that circle, within which alone we find objects wherewith to identify ourselves, though it produces similar effects in societies of every description, is perhaps never displayed in a more conspicuous light than in situations which might naturally be supposed most favourable to the cultivation of the sympathetic affections. How erroneous then is the notion so commonly entertained, with respect to that exemption from temptation, which is represented as the peculiar privilege of those who live at a distance from the busy scenes of life!

May we not rather infer, that as, to the man of taste, nature, in all her various as-

pects, presents materials, which, when associated with ideas of affection, produce the emotions of sublimity or beauty; so, to the man in whose heart the selfish principle predominates, every situation will present means to gratify his propensity to enlarge the idea of self, and likewise present objects, which, by opposing that gratification, will excite and afford exercise to his malevolent affections.

It must be confessed, that the operations of the selfish principle to which I have now alluded, produce only petty evils; and that the species of malignity described, neither injures the persons, nor fortunes, nor, in any material degree, the characters of our neighbours. Neither, as we may frequently observe, does it so utterly corrupt the heart, as to destroy the benevolent affections. It only lessens the sphere of their influence, and interrupts the constancy of their operations. It renders that good-will, which ought to be the habitual

temper of our minds, a stranger, or at most but an occasional inmate, whose visits are dependent on circumstances. But let these circumstances occur; let our hearts be warmed to gratitude by some act of kindness, or melted to pity by the distress of the very persons whom it has been our delight to censure, and how differently shall we be immediately affected towards them! The very actions which we were of late so forward to condemn, will now appear to us as innocent, perhaps as praiseworthy; and, while viewed through the medium of benevolence, will no longer be regarded as specks and blemishes, nor the discovery of them be considered as matter of self-gratification. A plain proof of how completely the operation of the selfish propensity is counteracted and controlled by the exercise of the benevolent affections; and that, on the other hand, while the selfish principle operates, the benevolent affections are necessarily silenced, and

may at length be finally banished from our hearts.

It is then evidently a matter of no small importance, to be on our guard against the activity of a principle, which is in its nature so insidious, that in the cherishing it we may easily be led to persuade ourselves we are cherishing a virtue. Those actions for which we most applaud ourselves, may thus be converted into snares and temptations. Even our retirement from the world, if in retiring from it we identify ourselves with all who hold certain opinions on the subject of retirement, will afford gratification to that propensity, which may be considered as the primary source of human depravity.

Hence it appears how much those moralists have been mistaken, who, in their zeal for piety and virtue, have thought it proper to prescribe rules with regard to things that are in their nature indifferent; and to

lay down the right and wrong with regard to actions that are in themselves neither right nor wrong, but derive their character solely from the dispositions with which they are performed. By thus descending to particulars, writers who have obtained popularity afford materials on which the selfish propensity seldom fails to operate. Among the many examples that might be given of this, I shall select one which has occasioned much unnecessary dispute : It is with regard to the unlawfulness of every species of public amusement. There certainly is no harm in refraining from them. But if, in abstaining from amusements that are in their nature innocent, we identify ourselves with the sect or party that has proscribed them, we may assure ourselves, that the enlargement of the idea of self which we by this means secure, is fraught with temptations more fatal than any which either play or opera would have presented. When our abstinence from all the amusements and recreations to which

others in similar circumstances resort, serves as a mark of distinction, and is considered as reflecting honour on our superior wisdom, or as entitling us to share in all the fame, and honour, and glory, of any distinguished party, we soon betray the dispositions that result from magnifying the idea of self, by the severity with which we censure such of our neighbours as condescend to be amused in a manner which we affect to condemn. Thus we may have seen instances of very young persons, who, at an age when the want of knowledge and experience usually begets diffidence, on becoming converts to the doctrines of a party, exalting themselves to the rank of censors, and looking with pity and contempt on the parents whom God and nature commands to honour; and avowing a consciousness of superiority to those who were as much their superiors in wisdom as in years. Can it be questioned, whether such indulgence of the selfish principle does not produce effects that are more at vari-

ance with the spirit of the gospel, than any which could be produced by a temperate use of any of those means of recreation which are calculated to enliven the spirits and invigorate the fancy? To beings so prone to err, as all must be who are heirs to human infirmity, there appears to be no safe course but in governing our conduct by fixed and general principles; it being impossible with these so far to identify ourselves, as to afford that enlargement of the idea of self, which, as we have seen, may be obtained by a conformity to any particular precept.

Thus, if we adopt it as a principle, that all amusements are unlawful which produce upon our minds effects of pernicious tendency, and unfit us for the due performance of our religious and social duties, we must, of consequence, conclude, that it is according to the degree in which they are productive of these fatal effects, that amusements are innocent or sinful.

The person, who, from peculiar temperament or peculiar associations, is unfortunately liable to have his spirits excited, and his imagination inflamed, by the spectacle of a crowded assembly, is, by this principle, bound to abstain from that species of amusement. He, on the other hand, whose mind is of that complexion as to experience from the sight of human happiness a glow of benevolence and pious gratitude; —he, who, in witnessing the innocent gaiety of youth, the sober cheerfulness of more advanced life, and the happy remains of vivacity irradiating like a winter sun the dim eye of age, feels his heart expand with tender sympathy and social affection, is evidently, in the enjoyment of such a scene, so far from transgressing the rule prescribed, that he strictly complies with it.

In either of these instances, the adherence to principle is conspicuous, and is equally meritorious in each, though it necessarily produces opposite lines of conduct;

and were it not for the operation of the selfish principle, each would acknowledge that the other did well and wisely, and acted in strict conformity with his duty. But, in order to magnify the idea of self, it is necessary to substitute, in lieu of the principle, the explanation of it, with which the idea of self is connected. Thus, the amusement that produces pernicious effects on *us*, must be described as necessarily injurious, though on others it produces effects that are highly salutary; and by thus erecting our own peculiar feelings, and notions, as a substitute for a general principle, we sanction to ourselves the practice of representing every departure from our rule, as a departure from principle. The greater our vanity, the more inordinate our desire of admiration, the greater will be the malignity produced in our hearts, by every attempt made to refute the arguments, or dissent from the opinions, with which the idea of self has been connected.

The same substitution of their own notions and practices for a general principle, will produce the same effects on the advocate for the innocence of those amusements, which are by the other deemed criminal. If salutary to him, he will then pronounce that they must necessarily be salutary to all. Identifying himself with this opinion, and with those who embrace it, he will contemn, and deride, and despise those, who, by abstaining from such amusements, act in opposition to his decree, and refuse to substitute his feelings and opinions for principles of higher authority. How fatal to the interests of that genuine piety, which always includes the exercise of pure benevolence, have such controversies invariably proved! After what has been advanced, I may, without danger of being mistaken, conclude by observing, that, in the nature of the fruits they have produced, their origin is conspicuous.

CHAPTER V.

Distinction between pride and vanity. Peculiar operation of the selfish principle in the mind of the proud. Illustrations.

IT will by the intelligent reader be observed, that in speaking of the operation of the selfish propensity in the vain, I have sometimes ascribed to it effects that are more usually attributed to pride than to vanity. Into this apparent inaccuracy I have been led, from an opinion, that these passions rarely exist in a solitary state, but are generally found combined in the same character, though, by the influence of the passion that predominates, the other is thrown into shade, and, until accidentally called forth, escapes our notice.

Vanity, when it exists distinct from pride, is rarely considered as offensive or

reprehensible. In this state it sometimes appears in the young, and is perhaps inevitably consequent on that expansion of the idea of self, that arises from the consciousness of a sudden increase of intellectual vigour, and of recently acquired knowledge. When it has been thus produced in young and generous minds, it seldom fails to be speedily corrected by a view of the obstacles that yet remain to be surmounted, and the acquirements that yet remain to be attained; and it is only when the mind rests satisfied in identifying itself with what it has already acquired, that the consequences become as injurious as they have been represented.

On pride the selfish principle has a peculiar operation, and one that is in some respects very different from that which it has on vanity. While the vain man seeks to enlarge the idea of self, by openly laying hold on every circumstance which he can by any means connect with that idea, the

proud man disdains to declare by what secret channels he has obtained that expanded notion of self with which he privately gluts his imagination. On examination we find, that the materials of which he makes use are of the very same texture, nay, that they are often identically the same as those made use of by the vain man, but that the very secrecy observed in obtaining them, has given them, in his eyes, an additional value. "The proud man is sincere, and in the bottom of his heart is convinced of his own superiority, though it may sometimes be difficult to guess upon what that conviction is founded. He wishes you to view him in no other light than that in which, when he places himself in your situation, he really views himself. He demands no more of you than he thinks justice. If you appear not to respect him as he respects himself, he is more offended than mortified, and feels the same indignant resentment as if he had suffered a real injury. He does not even then, how-

ever, deign to explain the grounds of his own pretensions. He disdains to court your esteem: He affects even to despise it, and endeavours to maintain his assumed station, not so much by making you sensible of his superiority, as of your own meanness.* It were folly to attempt improving the likeness presented in this admirable portrait, in which the characteristic features of pride are delineated by a master hand. From it we may perceive, that vanity and pride, when influenced by the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, resort to different means, and that it is in this respect chiefly that they are found to differ from each other. In the mind of the vain, the idea of self expands according to the degree in which he imagines he has succeeded in exalting himself in your opinion. He therefore “endeavours to bribe you into admiration, and flatters to be flattered.” In the mind of the proud

* SMITH'S *Theory of Moral Sentiment*, vol. ii. p. 144.

the idea of self expands spontaneously, and is neither enlarged nor diminished by your opinion.

Such are the characteristics of pride and vanity, when each of them acts according to its proper character. But, as has been justly observed by the profound philosopher so lately quoted, "the proud man is often vain, and the vain man is often proud." "Nothing," he adds, "can be more natural, than that the man who thinks much more highly of himself than he deserves, should wish that other people should think still more highly of him; or that the man who wishes that other people should think of him more highly than he thinks of himself, should at the same time think much more highly of himself than he deserves. Those two views being frequently blended in the same character, the characteristics of both are necessarily confounded; and we sometimes find the superficial and impertinent ostentation of vanity, joined to the

most malignant and derisive insolence of pride. We are sometimes, on that account, at a loss how to rank a particular character, or whether to place it among the proud or vain."

It may also be remarked, that where pride and vanity are thus united, the more active operation of the latter frequently serves to deceive us into a belief, that in that character pride has no existence. We are consequently thrown off our guard, and to our great surprise discover, that the man who lately seemed so studious to please, and to whom our good opinion seemed so necessary, that in order to court it he had made an ostentatious display of the qualities which he knew were held by us in highest estimation, had been all this while imposing on our credulity; and while he appeared solicitous for our good opinion, held both us and it in contempt. Our very admiration, as it must have been confined to particulars in which he really had

some claim to excellence, may, while it seemed to gratify his vanity, have offended his pride: For our admiration, in being limited, seemed to set limits to that extension of the idea of self which he had believed unlimitable. In such cases the proud man, however long he may in silence brood over the ideal injury, seldom fails at length to expose the malignity of the wound that has been rankling in his bosom. With astonishment we perceive, that a word, or look, of which we were nearly unconscious at the time, and which we have long since forgotten, had done this mighty mischief, and engendered this black flood of ever-during wrath and indignation. The wounds of mortified vanity may easily be healed, for by the concessions made to the vain man, the idea of self is increased to its wonted dimensions; but the wounds of offended pride are of such an irritable nature, that they cannot be touched by the most delicate hand without aggravating the malignant symptoms; because that

in the very attempt to heal them by concessions, we appear to the proud man as guilty of sounding the depth of pretensions that are unfathomable, and of thus circumscribing his idea of self within certain limits.

If the proud man cannot bear to have the foundations of that high opinion he entertains of himself examined by others, it is not to be supposed that he will impose upon himself the painful task of scrutinizing them. In such a state of mind it is impossible that he should ever submit to wear the yoke of the gospel. He cannot reduce the idea of self to those proper dimensions to which they must be reduced, in order to fit him for entering the strait gate; but he may, nevertheless, find means to add to his ideal proportions, by connecting with the idea of self, certain doctrines or opinions connected with religion, and thus obtain for his pride a deceitful and delusive sanction. Nor, perhaps, in all its shapes, does pride ever assume an aspect more injurious

to the individual, or more fatal to the interests of religion and the happiness of society.

A promptness to accuse of pride those who are placed in circumstances which would afford to us the means of extending the idea of self, is a certain proof of the operation of the same passion in our own hearts. Where, by narrow fortune, low birth, neglected education, or other unfavourable circumstances, the desire of enlarging the idea of self meets with a check in any given direction, those who are in that respect superior become to the proud the objects of secret, but vindictive malice. Hence the malignity which the proud and ignorant shew towards those, who, without being their superiors in rank, are their superiors in talents and knowledge. Hence the boast of ignorance, which frequently issues from the lips of silly women, as if they were eager to prove that ignorance has been no

obstacle to the growth of pride in their hearts. Hence the ill concealed contempt with which the vulgar great affect to speak of those who are illustrious in the walks of literature or science. Hence the similar affectation of contempt on the part of the proud scholar and philosopher, in speaking of those who are superior in rank and fortune. In all these, and many other instances which might be given, we may plainly observe the effects produced by any obstacle, of whatever nature, which impedes the operation of the selfish propensity in any direction, when pride is the medium through which it operates. Whenever the proud man is conscious of a defect in his title to superiority, he is prepared to hate his brother, though he only, in that one respect, rises above his own level; and as it is impossible for the proudest man to believe himself, in all respects, superior to all the world, his pride must necessarily be accompanied by malignity.

In the middling walks of life, and especially in its more busy scenes, a man is so often compelled to measure himself by the opinion of others, and to reduce the idea of self to something of a parity with that notion which he observes to be entertained of him by those around him, that pride is, in such situations, seldom indulged to excess. Where, indeed, it has been deeply rooted in early life, it will still retain an influence, and, as in other instances, will be accompanied by a certain portion of malignity; but, in this instance, more detrimental to the happiness of the individual than to that of any other person. Like the hypochondriac, who imagined himself placed in the centre of a globe of glass, whose preservation was essential to his existence, the proud man, whose idea of self is far extended, walks through the busy crowd in perpetual anxiety and apprehension, and receives thousands of imaginary wounds from those who are not aware of touching him. The great seem to press on him from

above, the vulgar from beneath, and his companions and equals on all sides threaten the imaginary circle with destruction. Hence he is embroiled in perpetual quarrels, or devoured by perpetual chagrin; having no toleration, but for the few who observe that respectful distance which interferes not with the limits to which the idea of self extends.

Such, in the middling walks of life, are frequently the effects of a home education ill conducted.

In the higher and lower classes the seeds of pride are fostered by circumstances that do not equally affect the middling classes. Far from attributing the pride that is sometimes exhibited in the former, to an early consciousness of that superiority which is conferred by rank and fortune, I am convinced, that in almost every instance in which we observe extreme pride to be the concomitant of greatness, we should find

that the idea of self has been permitted to expand in infancy, before any notions of the advantages derived from birth, or rank, or fortune, have been formed. It is the consciousness of being exalted above his fellows, while clouds and darkness rest on the circumstances by which he is exalted, that first implants the pride which an after knowledge of his circumstances feeds and cherishes. Where pains has been taken, in very early life, to explain the nature and value of that external homage paid to his rank, and to set against it the superior nature and higher value of that homage which is only paid to personal merit, we do not find that pride attaches to elevated rank; but are, on the contrary, frequently called to remark a striking contrast between the unfeigned humility, gentleness, and modesty, displayed by persons of exalted station, and the haughty arrogance and insolence assumed by persons in all respects their inferiors. Pride, like the toad, swells to an enormous size in darkness, and is

most effectually nourished by the food which it devours in secret.

By the vanity of parents this secret food is often conveyed to the infant mind. The idea of his own importance, which the child receives before he is capable of conceiving the nature of his superiority, gains additional strength from its being vague and undefined; and, as it increases, every attempt to diminish it becomes more and more painful, and is consequently resisted. The very reluctance which he feels to have the nature of his pretensions investigated, is sometimes mistaken by the fond parents for a proof of superior wisdom, as his choice of companions, who are inferior to himself, is in like manner mistaken for humility. The more accurate observer perceives, in both instances, the propensity to enlarge the idea of self operating in his breast. Instead of boasting of his birth, or fortune, or rank in life, or connexions, or education, he seems to look down on all these cir-

cumstances, and does in fact consider them as nothing in themselves, but as deriving all their importance from their connexion with him. But although he would resent as an indignity, the supposition that it was on any of these circumstances that his pretensions to superiority were founded, when you attempt to speak slightly of the advantages attending rank, or fortune, or family, &c. you then find, that with all these circumstances the idea of self is so completely interwoven, that, in touching them, you expose yourself to the same revenge as would have been excited by personal insult.

In the very lowest walks of life we may observe similar examples of pride nourished to excess, by vague notions of pretensions to superiority, of a nature incapable of being defined, but, like the former, imbibed in early life; and, like the former, as often as any circumstance with which the idea of self is connected happens to be ap-

proached, producing the malignant effects of hatred and revenge. When this vice is particularly prevalent in the lower orders, persons of superior station are naturally the objects of jealousy and aversion. A submission to the laws of subordination is a voluntary limitation of the idea of self, and, therefore, subordination will in such cases be hateful. The proud man in humble life is clad in secret armour, and bears in his bosom a poniard ever ready to revenge the imaginary insults he receives from those who are clothed with authority. As often as the extension of the idea of self is forcibly repelled, the spirit of revenge takes possession of his soul; and where no religious or moral principle counteracts its fury, fails not to exhibit itself in acts of vengeance, modified by the character and situation of the individual. But, whether offended pride avenges itself through the medium of sarcastic and abusive language, or by attempts at murdering the reputation of the offending party, or

proceeds to the acmè of human guilt, by imbruing the hands in blood, the spirit that leads to those crimes of different dye is the same. It is, in every instance, cruel and vindictive. We might, indeed, expect, from the nature of pride, that it should be attended by cruelty; for, as the idea of self is, in the proud man, enlarged, not by a participation in the glory, or honours, or renown, or rank, or wealth, of those with whom that idea is connected, but by certain undefined notions of superiority, while he actually appropriates to himself all that confers distinction on his country, his party, his family, or friends, he still considers their chief and only value to consist in being his. Far from considering himself as bound to them by equal ties, his pride rejects the notion of reciprocity. From those immediately connected with him he demands an absolute renouncement of the idea of self, a self-annihilation: They must identify their wills and inclinations with his, or they no longer help to

swell the idea of self in his mind. The moment that they are suspected of harbouring a design to resist his authority, and to think or act in any instance from the dictates of their own reason, or their own feelings, they become obnoxious to his resentment. In the expression of this resentment he is not restrained, like other men, by the idea of equal rights and reciprocal duties, for pride acknowledges not the force of either; and, consequently, when led by resentment to acts of cruelty, is without compunction, and unsusceptible of remorse.

If this description be agreeable to truth; if the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, operating through the medium of pride, renders the character thus completely odious; whence comes it that pride is often mentioned in terms that denote respect and approbation? As a national feeling it is always thus mentioned and gloried in, as denoting a high sense of national honour

and national dignity. And, in consequence of this false association, pride is considered as an honourable and distinguishing feature in the characters of those who bear arms in the service of their country, and as essentially connected with heroism and valour.

Agreeably to this notion, a code of morality has been established, which is, in every particular, directly opposite to the laws of God, and repugnant to the dictates of reason. Framed for the purpose of sanctioning the unbounded gratification of pride, it attaches the pains and penalties of disgrace to the forgiveness of injuries, and proposes fame and glory as the rewards of resentment and revenge. Let him who doubts the truth of this representation turn to the journals of the day, and he will seldom fail to find in them the account of some duel, which, on investigating the circumstances that occasioned it, will afford ample testimony of the nature of the laws

of honour, and prove them to be in reality the laws of pride. In almost every instance he will find, that the offence which, according to the code of honour, could only be expiated by the death of the offender, was merely an offence against pride. An attempt, or a supposed attempt, to derogate from that with which the idea of self was connected in the breast of him who has revenged the insult. It may be, he has spoken slightly of his dog, or horse, or wife, or mistress; or differed from him in opinion; or called in question the wisdom of some transaction in which his party was concerned: it makes no difference; the offence is in every case exactly of the same complexion, and in its essence consists in having repelled that extension of the idea of self, which pride desires that all should deem sacred and unlimitable. Rather than submit to the mortification of restraining this notion of self, he stakes his life against the life of the aggressor; neither fearing man, who can destroy the body, nor "God, who

has power to cast both soul and body into hell.”

In every state of society, pride may indeed be very properly represented as the *god of war*. In the infancy of nations, long before the mental powers have been sufficiently cultivated to systemize ambition, the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, connected with pride, inspires in man the desire of bringing his fellow-men into subjection. From all that is known of the history of savages it appears, that the very first use made of the glimmering light afforded by the dawn of intellect, is to attempt effecting, by combination, a more complete gratification of pride than any individual could by his single arm procure.

From what yet remains of the poetry of the barbarians of ancient Europe, we learn, that the savage, on returning from his war of pride, raised the song of triumph, in which he recapitulated with exultation all

the horrid deeds of cruelty perpetrated by his tribe in the pursuit of vengeance. He gloried in having devoured the flesh of his enemies, and in having converted their skulls into cups from which he quaffed their blood. This was then the pride of war!

As civilization advanced, war assumed a somewhat milder aspect; but still, through every period of the history of man we may perceive, that in proportion as pride operates in the contending parties, the miseries of war are augmented, and its crimes assume a deeper dye. As the pride of the governing party is always more offended by rebellion against its authority, than by the hostility of foreign states, civil wars are accompanied by more atrocious acts of indiscriminating cruelty, than wars with foreign nations. In foreign wars, the fortified places which bid defiance to the invading army, offend its pride by resistance; and how dearly they pay for that offence,

the mournful detail of the savage, and *worse than savage*, cruelties, committed by Christian armies in places taken by assault, can, alas, too amply testify ! The horrid outrages committed by the brutal fury of the conquerors, on the innocent and defenceless, give us a complete view of the nature of *the pride of war* ; that pride, of which we are accustomed to speak as constituting the soldier's glory !

I have been led to trespass too far on the reader's patience, in entering into these particulars ; but as I am persuaded that much moral evil has resulted from confounding the notions of pride with notions of magnanimity, dignity, and heroism, I have thought it of some importance to show, that pride has no alliance with any quality, or sentiment, or feeling, that is the object of esteem or moral approbation.

It is of some consequence that we learn carefully to distinguish between pride and

heroism, as our notions of right and wrong, of vice and virtue, can never, in any instance, be confounded, without sullyng the purity of our moral principles. And therefore, though to us, who are destined to tread the humble path of private life, the actions of those who are placed in a very different sphere, cannot properly be held up as affording either warning or example, the motives displayed in the course of these actions become the proper objects of our investigation.

In reading the history of the great achievements of princes and warriors of former times, we are presented with frequent opportunities of observing, not only the degree in which the selfish principle operated in their breasts, but the degree in which it operated in the historians by whom the account of their actions has been transmitted to posterity. In the triumphs obtained by the proud and powerful over the humble and defenceless, none

can sympathize, but in proportion as they identify themselves with the conqueror. No sooner does this identification take place, than his triumphs become theirs. However stained by cruelty, perfidy, or injustice, he is henceforth transformed into a hero, and dignified by all the epithets expressive of admiration. The reader, the young reader especially, is apt thus to be surprised into approbation of deeds, which, if stated in their native deformity, his soul would have abhorred. With his notions of heroism he thenceforth mingles notions of a pride that disdains all the restraints of religion and morality, and which exults in annihilating the happiness, and trampling on the rights, of all other mortals. But are we hence authorized to conclude, that the writer, by whose misjudging application of epithets our notions of heroism are in danger of being perverted, was himself as destitute of moral principle, as the conqueror whose character he so much extols? No: The applause he bestows, and the ad-

miration he expresses, are only to be considered as the consequences of having viewed the person whose deeds he celebrates, as in some manner identified with himself. In recording the triumphs of his hero, he feels an expansion of the idea of self; and, in consequence of this ideal connexion, is impelled, not, perhaps, to magnify his exploits, or to conceal his crimes, but to gild them with the name of virtues.

It is from a similar operation of the selfish principle, that biography in general, and with few exceptions, is written in the tone of panegyric: none but the few who possess sufficient strength and elevation to fix their view steadily on truth, being capable of preserving a uniform impartiality, with regard to any object, or character, that necessarily engages much of their attention.

Hence arises innumerable obstacles to the attainment of that knowledge of hu-

man character, to which we expect to find in biography a powerful assistant. In many instances, a variety of causes conspire to frustrate the expectation. But when neither motives of delicacy, nor friendship, nor affection, restrain the pen, and thus render the description imperfect, the connexion that subsists between the biographer and the subject of his work, is such, as naturally to produce in the mind of the former, an association, in which the idea of self, and of his subject, is firmly united. He thenceforth endeavours to procure for him that esteem and admiration, on which he sets the highest value; and though his integrity may not permit him to falsify the relation of facts, he ascribes to him, in general terms, virtues and perfections which are totally at variance with the facts disclosed in the course of the narrative. The consequences are extremely mischievous. From the regard to truth displayed in the relation of events, the unpractised reader is led to place implicit confidence in the

writer's judgment and veracity, and, adopting his opinions, approves and justifies, where reason and religion would have taught him to censure and condemn. If his imagination has been so much excited, as to produce a lively interest in the subject of the memoir; and should he afterwards be obliged to give up the defence of his character as untenable, it is not improbable that he may, as a security against being again imposed upon, become sceptical with regard to the existence of public or private virtue. A scepticism which acts as a deadly poison on the moral feelings, and annihilates all the generous sympathies of the heart.

This species of scepticism is frequently, and is indeed naturally, the concomitant of excessive pride. For as the proud man cherishes an internal assurance of his own independent and indefeasible superiority, he must necessarily be to himself the ultimate standard of perfection. He may, if placed in an elevated rank, perform the du-

ties of his station, and even display inflexible integrity, magnanimous fortitude, and fervent zeal, in the service of his country ; for these may correspond with his notions of what is due to his own dignity : But to acknowledge that any human being was ever inspired by higher motives, and that others perform from principles of duty, and from a pure love of their country and of mankind, greater and nobler actions, though of the same complexion as those he has performed from a regard to self, would be to confess his own inferiority. We cannot therefore be surprised to find him on this point completely sceptical.

In private life, the same causes produce the same effects. The man who is conscious that he never acts from any but mean and interested motives, and who is totally incapable of discerning any connexion between his own interests and the interests of the community, if his notions of self have been formed under the influ-

ence of pride, must naturally conclude, that all pretensions to public virtue is mere hypocrisy. Considering all as equally depraved, and equally unworthy of trust or confidence, he, as far as his influence extends, paralyzes the efforts, and extinguishes the spirit of patriotism. His conversation has the effects of a torpedo, in benumbing the generous feelings of the youthful bosom. Those who hear him are persuaded to disbelieve the testimony of their own hearts, and to doubt whether their love of virtue is not a delusion of imagination. If, unfortunately, their consciences bear witness against them, it is by doubts of the reality of virtue silenced for ever.

We may without scruple pronounce on the character of him, who asserts, that all are uniformly influenced by the same selfish and sordid motives, as evidently govern some individuals in every station. Such opinions can only be the result of

conscious depravity, or excessive pride. And though a disposition to believe ill of all, or a complete scepticism with regard to the existence of virtue, is generally considered as a proof of conscious unworthiness, as it may proceed from that aversion to contemplate, or to acknowledge superiority, which accompanies excessive pride, we may infer, that it most frequently originates in that source. To the same source may be traced that pertinacity in adhering to the opinions we have once avowed, which, like other operations of pride, has been sometimes extolled as a virtue. This erroneous notion of the glory of obstinacy is so extremely irrational, that we cannot account for its prevalence by supposing, that those by whom it is entertained are incapable of perceiving any essential difference between a persistence in opinions, and an adherence to principles. Every person of common understanding must be conscious, that upon almost every subject with which he is conversant, his opinions have, from

childhood to maturity, undergone many revolutions. As far as the opinions in which he professes to rest, have been formed by his own judgment, and not blindly adopted on the authority of others, they must, in every period of his life, have uniformly corresponded with the degree of knowledge he possessed; and, consequently, by every increase of knowledge, must have been considerably changed. On all propositions that admit not of demonstration, his opinions must have been formed on the evidence before him; and if the love of truth and knowledge has inspired his heart, he will have sought for evidence on every side, nor refused to listen to any without weighing its credibility.

At what period of life is the court of judgment to be shut, and all further testimony on subjects, concerning which the opinions have been already formed, to be excluded? If it be in youth that this determination is taken, the opinions conceiv-

ed on a hasty and partial examination of the first evidence that chance threw in the way, will be asserted as infallible truths to the latest period of life. Or, though it be not till we have arrived at mature age that we resolve to refuse admission to any further evidence, still the chance is, that we may have excluded the evidence most nearly allied to truth, and that our opinions must consequently be erroneous. What glory do we then derive from asserting, and from proving, that our opinion, once formed upon any subject of reasoning, is unalterable? The glory consists solely in that extension of the idea of self, which we procure in maintaining opinions with which, as our peculiar property, we have identified ourselves. The mortification which we, on the other hand, experience, in confessing that we have changed or relinquished them, arises from that sensible diminution of the idea of self, which is on such occasions inevitably produced.

We exult in inflicting this mortification on others, and gladly represent their change of opinion upon any important subject, as a degradation, an acknowledgment of inferiority to us; and this, though perhaps conscious that we have embraced the opinions we cherish, and to which they have come round, without any previous examination or conviction, but merely because they are the opinions of those by whom we have been educated, or with whom we are connected in society. The triumph is, in this instance, a triumph of the selfish principle in our own breasts; and will be more or less conspicuous, according as we are more or less capable of reasoning, or of reflecting upon the motives by which we are influenced. This will further be rendered evident from observing, how very differently we are affected, when a person, whose opinions have hitherto been avowedly the same as ours, professes to have changed them upon conviction. In vain does he lay before us the evidence by which he has

been convinced; in vain does he endeavour to obviate our indignation, by recapitulating the arguments by which he has been converted: To give credit to his professions of conviction, would be to cast disgrace on those opinions with which we have connected the idea of self; and therefore we must endeavour to account for the change, by ascribing it to folly, to caprice, to sordid views of interest, or to total dereliction of principle.

How far the dread of such censures may have retarded the progress of knowledge, and protracted the reign of prejudice and error, cannot easily be determined; but that it has, in numerous instances, proved injurious, and even fatal, to individual minds, no person of observation will deny. While the association which attaches an idea of glory to a pertinacious adherence to opinions that have once been openly avowed, continues to prevail, the road to truth will be strewed with thorns, and

pride will again be taught to glory in error and ignorance. And if this association have its origin in that propensity to magnify the idea of self, which it so obviously tends to gratify, it can only be broken by the aid of principles which, wherever they have due influence, subject the selfish propensity to their authority. Hence arises another and a cogent argument, for directing the attention of the young to truth, as the object to which they ought constantly to endeavour to approximate, but of which they ought never to consider themselves as having arrived to the possession, until they have approached it on every side, and viewed it in every possible aspect. This, they would soon learn, is not to be done in haste, nor on the very entrance on their studies; and, consequently, instead of considering the opinions then formed as infallible certainties, they would, from a consciousness of the scanty data on which their inferences were grounded, cherish, with regard to them, a becoming diffidence.

It is with the diffidence I am recommending, that I venture to express my doubts, whether the practice so much encouraged in some seminaries of education, of forming societies in which subjects of importance are to be debated by young students, be not, upon the whole, more dangerous than useful. When we take into consideration the strength of the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, and the eagerness with which we connect that idea with the opinions to which we have given utterance, we must admit, that the more openly our opinions are avowed and published, the more deeply do we become interested in maintaining them. The attention is thus directed by the selfish principle to a minute examination of every evidence that offers on one side of the question, but is forcibly withdrawn from the pursuit of evidence on the other. Glory is set before the champion as the reward of victory, and the victory is not less a victory for being gained by the arts of

eloquence or sophistry, in opposition to truth. Have we not reason to suspect, that the habits of mind thus produced must be fatal to that mental freedom, the preservation of which is so essentially necessary in every inquiry after truth. How can he be said to inquire with freedom, whose judgment has been early bribed to determine according to the tenor of those opinions, with which, from his public avowal of them, he is in his own mind identified? Nor is it on abstract propositions alone, that an early and vehement contention for opinions hastily adopted, is attended with consequences prejudicial to the individual, and to the progress of knowledge. It produces dogmatists in every branch of science, who set themselves in array against every new discovery or improvement, however useful or ingenious: dogmatists in literature, who, when they cannot answer an opponent by arguments, traduce his motives or attack his character; and dogmatists in conversation, who talk

long and loudly, but listen only to themselves.

Though observations on the love of one's country belong more strictly to the subsequent Essay, as all national prejudices originate in the selfish principle, a few remarks on these may here with propriety be introduced.

To the love of country, no heart in which the affections glow, can be insensible. It is the natural result of associations which have a powerful influence in every generous breast. It is an extension of the feelings of filial and fraternal love, and may be considered as giving to philanthropy "a local habitation and a name!" But, by the operation of the selfish principle, this noble, and generous, and useful sentiment, is perverted and debased; and instead of producing the fruits of benevolence, in augmenting the happiness of the object of af-

fection, produces only the blindness of prejudice, and the malice of bigotry.

As there is no object with which we can more easily identify ourselves, than with the land that gave us birth, there is no object with which we are more apt to connect the idea of self; and, consequently, if the selfish principle predominates in our hearts, our love of country will be only a modification of that principle. When the love of country has only this foundation, we may expect to find an extreme proneness to laud and magnify our nation, and all that belongs to it; and to assert its inherent superiority above all other nations; for, being that wherewith we are identified, its glory becomes ours. We may likewise expect an anxious desire to conceal from ourselves and others the faults that require correction, the defects that demand a remedy, and the circumstances which are susceptible of improvement; for the acknowledgment of these things would tend

to diminish the idea of self, by derogating from that notion of perfection by which it is magnified. . . . But it would be vain to expect from this species of nationality, any of the noble results of genuine patriotism.

It is, accordingly, not from minds in whom national prejudices are most conspicuous, that plans for national improvement have generally originated. When the desire of promoting national happiness, and of augmenting national prosperity, has prompted to active exertion, we may consider these exertions as an indubitable proof, that the *love of country* has, in that instance, been inspired and supported by those generous sympathies which are productive of, and afford perpetual exercise to the benevolent affections. In the latter instance, the attention is directed to the means of procuring additional good to the national family at large, and in this respect partakes of the nature of parental, as well as of filial love; but it is neither blind to

defects, nor anxious to defend them. It is not zealous to justify, but to improve; and, with affectionate solicitude, seeks to transplant the virtues of every region to its native soil.

When the love of country is grafted on the propensity to magnify the idea of self, we likewise may observe much of the ardour of zeal; but it operates in a quite opposite direction to that which has been just described. It seeks *not* to improve, but to justify. It repels with indignation the supposition, that improvement is in any instance possible; and loudly condemns and vilifies, as want of patriotism, the attempt to point out where improvement is necessary. As national bigotry begets national hatred to all countries with which the bigot is not identified, whatever advantages might result from adopting customs, or modes of living, or habits of industry, from other countries, the idea of introducing them is rejected with indigna-

tion, as implying a tacit acknowledgment, that in that instance the abhorred nation is superior:

These remarks might be illustrated by many examples. But as there are few persons of any observation, who have not in their recollection instances of national prejudice that are equally amusing and instructive, I forbear descending to particulars, and shall only generally observe, that it is perhaps impossible for real patriotism to be more beneficially manifested, than in exposing the evil consequences that have resulted from that spurious nationality, which, like every other operation of the selfish principle, is connected with envy, hatred, and malignity. Were it not for the barrier that is thus presented, how quickly would every useful improvement be disseminated throughout all parts of the realm? Were those of superior station but half as anxious to promote the welfare, as they are anxious to defend the usages of the

districts to which they happen to belong, how would the barren desert rejoice, and the wilderness be made to blossom as the rose! In our observations upon other nations, instead of earnestly directing our attention to the discovery of some imperfections, in order to justify our partiality for the defects subsisting in our own, it were nobler surely, anxiously to observe "whatsoever things are just, true, lovely, and of good report;" and if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, or any thing praise-worthy, to note these things as examples to be held up for imitation. In pursuing a contrary course, we may, by reflecting upon what passes in our own minds, obtain the sad, but salutary conviction, that it is not by the love of country we are inspired, but by the love of self that we are instigated.

There is scarcely one unamiable quality which will not be found, on investigation, to have originated in the propensity to magnify the idea of self. But

it is by reflecting on what passes within our own hearts, that this can alone be proved with any advantage to ourselves. After having with diligence and sincerity examined the motives by which we have on all occasions been actuated, we shall probably be disposed to make more allowance than we perhaps have been accustomed to make, for the operation of the selfish principle in the minds of others. For, though it may not in them operate exactly in the same manner as in ourselves,—“If we say that we,” in this respect, “have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

A farther exposition of the effects produced by the propensity to enlarge the idea of self, may therefore have its use; and the subject shall accordingly be pursued in the subsequent volume.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.



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