WILLIAM GODWIN

THOUGHTS ON MAN, HIS NATURE, PRODUCTIONS AND DISCOVERIES

William Godwin

Thoughts on Man, His Nature, Productions and Discoveries

Interspersed with Some Particulars Respecting the Author

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PREFACE

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In the ensuing volume I have attempted to give a defined and permanent form to a variety of thoughts, which have occurred to my mind in the course of thirty-four years, it being so long since I published a volume, entitled, the Enquirer—thoughts, which, if they have presented themselves to other men, have, at least so far as I am aware, never been given to the public through the medium of the press. During a part of this period I had remained to a considerable degree unoccupied in my character of an author, and had delivered little to the press that bore my name.—And I beg the reader to believe, that, since I entered in 1791 upon that which may be considered as my vocation in life, I have scarcely in any instance contributed a page to any periodical miscellany.

My mind has been constitutionally meditative, and I should not have felt satisfied, if I had not set in order for publication these special fruits of my meditations. I had entered upon a certain career; and I held it for my duty not to abandon it.

One thing further I feel prompted to say. I have always regarded it as my office to address myself to plain men, and in clear and unambiguous terms. It has been my lot to have occasional intercourse with some of those who consider themselves as profound, who deliver their oracles in obscure phraseology, and who make it their boast that few men can understand them, and those few only through a process of abstract reflection, and by means of unwearied application.

To this class of the oracular I certainly did not belong. I felt that I had nothing to say, that it should be very difficult to

understand. I resolved, if I could help it, not to "darken counsel by words without knowledge." This was my principle in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice. And I had my reward. I had a numerous audience of all classes, of every age, and of either sex. The young and the fair did not feel deterred from consulting my pages.

It may be that that book was published in a propitious season. I am told that nothing coming from the press will now be welcomed, unless it presents itself in the express form of amusement. He who shall propose to himself for his principal end, to draw aside in one particular or another the veil from the majesty of intellectual or moral truth, must lay his account in being received with little attention.

I have not been willing to believe this: and I publish my speculations accordingly. I have aimed at a popular, and (if I could reach it) an interesting style; and, if I am thrust aside and disregarded, I shall console myself with believing that I have not neglected what it was in my power to achieve.

One characteristic of the present publication will not fail to offer itself to the most superficial reader. I know many men who are misanthropes, and profess to look down with disdain on their species. My creed is of an opposite character. All that we observe that is best and most excellent in the intellectual world, is man: and it is easy to perceive in many cases, that the believer in mysteries does little more, than dress up his deity in the choicest of human attributes and qualifications. I have lived among, and I feel an ardent interest in and love for, my brethren of mankind. This sentiment, which I regard with complacency in my own breast, I would gladly cherish in others. In such a cause I am well pleased to enrol myself a missionary.

February 15, 1831.

The particulars respecting the author, referred to in the title-page, will be found principally in Essays VII, IX, XIV, and XVIII.

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ESSAY I. OF BODY AND MIND.

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THE PROLOGUE.

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There is no subject that more frequently occupies the attention of the contemplative than man: yet there are many circumstances concerning him that we shall hardly admit to have been sufficiently considered.

Familiarity breeds contempt. That which we see every day and every hour, it is difficult for us to regard with admiration. To almost every one of our stronger emotions novelty is a necessary ingredient. The simple appetites of our nature may perhaps form an exception. The appetite for food is perpetually renewed in a healthy subject with scarcely any diminution and love, even the most refined, being combined with one of our original impulses, will sometimes for that reason withstand a thousand trials, and perpetuate itself for years. In all other cases it is required, that a fresh impulse should be given, that attention should anew be excited, or we cannot admire. Things often seen pass feebly before our senses, and scarcely awake the languid soul.

"Man is the most excellent and noble creature of the world, the principal and mighty work of God, the wonder of nature, the marvel of marvels(1)."

(1) Anatomy of Melancholy, p. 1.

Let us have regard to his corporeal structure. There is a simplicity in it, that at first perhaps we slightly consider. But how exactly is it fashioned for strength and agility! It is in no

way incumbered. It is like the marble when it comes out of the hand of the consummate sculptor; every thing unnecessary is carefully chiseled away; and the joints, the muscles, the articulations, and the veins come out, clean and finished. It has long ago been observed, that beauty, as well as virtue, is the middle between all extremes: that nose which is neither specially long, nor short, nor thick, nor thin, is the perfect nose; and so of the rest. In like manner, when I speak of man generally, I do not regard any aberrations of form, obesity, a thick calf, a thin calf; I take the middle between all extremes; and this is emphatically man.

Man cannot keep pace with a starting horse: but he can persevere, and beats him in the end.

What an infinite variety of works is man by his corporeal form enabled to accomplish! In this respect he casts the whole creation behind him.

What a machine is the human hand! When we analyse its parts and its uses, it appears to be the most consummate of our members. And yet there are other parts, that may maintain no mean rivalship against it.

What a sublimity is to be attributed to his upright form! He is not fashioned, veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri obedientia finxit. He is made coeli convexa tueri. The looks that are given him in his original structure, are "looks commercing with the skies."

How surpassingly beautiful are the features of his countenance; the eyes, the nose, the mouth! How noble do they appear in a state of repose! With what never-ending variety and emphasis do they express the emotions of his mind! In the visage of man, uncorrupted and undebased, we read the frankness and ingenuousness of his soul, the clearness of his reflections, the penetration of his spirit. What a volume of understanding is unrolled in his broad, expanded, lofty brow! In his countenance we see expressed

at one time sedate confidence and awful intrepidity, and at another godlike condescension and the most melting tenderness. Who can behold the human eye, suddenly suffused with moisture, or gushing with tears unbid, and the quivering lip, without unspeakable emotion? Shakespear talks of an eye, "whose bend could awe the world."

What a miraculous thing is the human complexion! We are sent into the world naked, that all the variations of the blood might be made visible. However trite, I cannot avoid quoting here the lines of the most deep-thinking and philosophical of our poets:

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We understood
Her by her sight: her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
That one might almost say her body thought.
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What a curious phenomenon is that of blushing! It is impossible to witness this phenomenon without interest and sympathy. It comes at once, unanticipated by the person in whom we behold it. It comes from the soul, and expresses with equal certainty shame, modesty, and vivid, uncontrollable affection. It spreads, as it were in so many stages, over the cheeks, the brow, and the neck, of him or her in whom the sentiment that gives birth to it is working.

Thus far I have not mentioned speech, not perhaps the most inestimable of human gifts, but, if it is not that, it is at least the endowment, which makes man social, by which principally we impart our sentiments to each other, and which changes us from solitary individuals, and bestows on us a duplicate and multipliable existence. Beside which it incalculably increases the perfection of one. The man who does not speak, is an unfledged thinker; and the man that does not write, is but half an investigator.

Not to enter into all the mysteries of articulate speech and the irresistible power of eloquence, whether addressed to a single hearer, or instilled into the ears of many—a topic that belongs perhaps less to the chapter of body than mind—let

us for a moment fix our thoughts steadily upon that little implement, the human voice. Of what unnumbered modulations is it susceptible! What terror may it inspire! How may it electrify the soul, and suspend all its functions! How infinite is its melody! How instantly it subdues the hearer to pity or to love! How does the listener hang upon every note praying that it may last for ever,

——that even silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
Deny her nature, and be never more,
Still to be so displaced.

It is here especially that we are presented with the triumphs of civilisation. How immeasurable is the distance between the voice of the clown, who never thought of the power that dwells in this faculty, who delivers himself in a rude, discordant and unmodulated accent, and is accustomed to confer with his fellow at the distance of two fields, and the man who understands his instrument as Handel understood the organ, and who, whether he thinks of it or no, sways those that hear him as implicitly as Orpheus is said to have subdued the brute creation!

From the countenance of man let us proceed to his figure. Every limb is capable of speaking, and telling its own tale. What can equal the magnificence of the neck, the column upon which the head reposes! The ample chest may denote an almost infinite strength and power. Let us call to mind the Apollo Belvidere, and the Venus de Medicis, whose very "bends are adornings." What loftiness and awe have I seen expressed in the step of an actress, not yet deceased, when first she advanced, and came down towards the audience! I was ravished, and with difficulty kept my seat! Pass we to the mazes of the dance, the inimitable charms and picturesque beauty that may be given to the figure while still unmoved, and the ravishing grace that dwells in it during its endless changes and evolutions.

The upright figure of man produces, incidentally as it were, and by the bye, another memorable effect. Hence we derive the power of meeting in halls, and congregations, and crowded assemblies. We are found "at large, though without number," at solemn commemorations and on festive occasions. We touch each other, as the members of a gay party are accustomed to do, when they wait the stroke of an electrical machine, and the spark spreads along from man to man. It is thus that we have our feelings in common at a theatrical representation and at a public dinner, that indignation is communicated, and patriotism become irrepressible.

One man can convey his sentiments in articulate speech to a thousand; and this is the nursing mother of oratory, of public morality, of public religion, and the drama. The privilege we thus possess, we are indeed too apt to abuse; but man is scarcely ever so magnificent and so awful, as when hundreds of human heads are assembled together, hundreds of faces lifted up to contemplate one object, and hundreds of voices uttered in the expression of one common sentiment.

But, notwithstanding the infinite beauty, the magazine of excellencies and perfections, that appertains to the human body, the mind claims, and justly claims, an undoubted superiority. I am not going into an enumeration of the various faculties and endowments of the mind of man, as I have done of his body. The latter was necessary for my purpose. Before I proceeded to consider the ascendancy of mind, the dominion and loftiness it is accustomed to assert, it appeared but just to recollect what was the nature and value of its subject and its slave.

By the mind we understand that within us which feels and thinks, the seat of sensation and reason. Where it resides we cannot tell, nor can authoritatively pronounce, as the apostle says, relatively to a particular phenomenon,

"whether it is in the body, or out of the body." Be it however where or what it may, it is this which constitutes the great essence of, and gives value to, our existence; and all the wonders of our microcosm would without it be a form only, destined immediately to perish, and of no greater account than as a clod of the valley.

It was an important remark, suggested to me many years ago by an eminent physiologer and anatomist, that, when I find my attention called to any particular part or member of my body, I may be morally sure that there is something amiss in the processes of that part or member. As long as the whole economy of the frame goes on well and without interruption, our attention is not called to it. The intellectual man is like a disembodied spirit.

He is almost in the state of the dervise in the Arabian Nights, who had the power of darting his soul into the unanimated body of another, human or brute, while he left his own body in the condition of an insensible carcase, till it should be revivified by the same or some other spirit. When I am, as it is vulgarly understood, in a state of motion, I use my limbs as the implements of my will. When, in a quiescent state of the body, I continue to think, to reflect and to reason, I use, it may be, the substance of the brain as the implement of my thinking, reflecting and reasoning; though of this in fact we know nothing.

We have every reason to believe that the mind cannot subsist without the body; at least we must be very different creatures from what we are at present, when that shall take place. For a man to think, agreeably and with serenity, he must be in some degree of health. The corpus sanum is no less indispensible than the mens sana. We must eat, and drink, and sleep. We must have a reasonably good appetite and digestion, and a fitting temperature, neither too hot nor cold. It is desirable that we should have air and exercise. But this is instrumental merely. All these things are

negatives, conditions without which we cannot think to the best purpose, but which lend no active assistance to our thinking.

Man is a godlike being. We launch ourselves in conceit into illimitable space, and take up our rest beyond the fixed stars. We proceed without impediment from country to country, and from century to century, through all the ages of the past, and through the vast creation of the imaginable future. We spurn at the bounds of time and space; nor would the thought be less futile that imagines to imprison the mind within the limits of the body, than the attempt of the booby clown who is said within a thick hedge to have plotted to shut in the flight of an eagle.

We never find our attention called to any particular part or member of the body, except when there is somewhat amiss in that part or member. And, in like manner as we do not think of any one part or member in particular, so neither do we consider our entire microcosm and frame. The body is apprehended as no more important and of intimate connection to a man engaged in a train of reflections, than the house or apartment in which he dwells. The mind may aptly be described under the denomination of the "stranger at home." On set occasions and at appropriate times we examine our stores, and ascertain the various commodities we have, laid up in our presses and our coffers. Like the governor of a fort in time of peace, which was erected to keep out a foreign assailant, we occasionally visit our armoury, and take account of the muskets, the swords, and other implements of war it contains, but for the most part are engaged in the occupations of peace, and do not call the means of warfare in any sort to our recollection.

The mind may aptly be described under the denomination of the "stranger at home." With their bodies most men are little acquainted. We are "like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, who beholdeth himself, and goeth

his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he is." In the ruminations of the inner man, and the dissecting our thoughts and desires, we employ our intellectual arithmetic, we add, and subtract, and multiply, and divide, without asking the aid, without adverting to the existence, of our joints and members. Even as to the more corporeal part of our avocations, we behold the external world, and proceed straight to the object of our desires, without almost ever thinking of this medium, our own material frame, unaided by which none of these things could be accomplished. In this sense we may properly be said to be spiritual existences, however imperfect may be the idea we are enabled to affix to the term spirit.

Hence arises the notion, which has been entertained ever since the birth of reflection and logical discourse in the world, and which in some faint and confused degree exists probably even among savages, that the body is the prison of the mind. It is in this sense that Waller, after completing fourscore years of age, expresses himself in these affecting and interesting couplets.

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When we for age could neither read nor write,
The subject made us able to indite.
The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light by chinks that time hath made:
Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become,
As they draw near to their eternal home.
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Thus it is common with persons of elevated soul to talk of neglecting, overlooking, and taking small account of the body. It is in this spirit that the story is recorded of Anaxarchus, who, we are told, was ordered by Nicocreon, tyrant of Salamis, to be pounded in a mortar, and who, in contempt of his mortal sufferings, exclaimed, "Beat on, tyrant! thou dost but strike upon the case of Anaxarchus; thou canst not touch the man himself." And it is in something of the same light that we must regard what is related of the North American savages. Beings, who scoff at

their tortures, must have an idea of something that lies beyond the reach of their assailants.

It is just however to observe, that some of the particulars here related, belong not less to the brute creation than to man. If men are imperfectly acquainted with their external figure and appearance, this may well be conceived to be still more predicable of the inferior animals. It is true that all of them seem to be aware of the part in their structure, where lie their main strength and means of hostility. Thus the bull attacks with his horns, and the horse with his heels, the beast of prey with his claws, the bird with his beak, and insects and other venomous creatures with their sting. We know not by what impulse they are prompted to the use of the various means which are so intimately connected with their preservation and welfare; and we call it instinct. We may be certain it does not arise from a careful survey of their parts and members, and a methodised selection of the means which shall be found most effectual for the accomplishment of their ends. There is no premeditation; and, without anatomical knowledge, or any distinct acquaintance with their image and likeness, they proceed straight to their purpose.

Hence, even as men, they are more familiar with the figures and appearance of their fellows, their allies, or their enemies, than with their own.

Man is a creature of mingled substance. I am many times a day compelled to acknowledge what a low, mean and contemptible being I am. Philip of Macedon had no need to give it in charge to a page, to repair to him every morning, and repeat, "Remember, sir, you are a man." A variety of circumstances occur to us, while we eat, and drink, and submit to the humiliating necessities of nature, that may well inculcate into us this salutary lesson. The wonder rather is, that man, who has so many things to put him in mind to be humble and despise himself, should ever have been

susceptible of pride and disdain. Nebuchadnezzar must indeed have been the most besotted of mortals, if it were necessary that he should be driven from among men, and made to eat grass like an ox, to convince him that he was not the equal of the power that made him.

But fortunately, as I have said, man is a "stranger at home." Were it not for this, how incomprehensible would be

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The ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
The monarch's crown, and the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, and the judge's robe!
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How ludicrous would be the long procession and the caparisoned horse, the gilded chariot and the flowing train, the colours flying, the drums beating, and the sound of trumpets rending the air, which after all only introduce to us an ordinary man, no otherwise perhaps distinguished from the vilest of the ragged spectators, than by the accident of his birth!

But what is of more importance in the temporary oblivion we are enabled to throw over the refuse of the body, it is thus we arrive at the majesty of man. That sublimity of conception which renders the poet, and the man of great literary and original endowments "in apprehension like a God," we could not have, if we were not privileged occasionally to cast away the slough and exuviae of the body from incumbering and dishonouring us, even as Ulysses passed over his threshold, stripped of the rags that had obscured him, while Minerva enlarged his frame, and gave loftiness to his stature, added a youthful beauty and grace to his motions, and caused his eyes to flash with more than mortal fire. With what disdain, when I have been rapt in the loftiest moods of mind, do I look down upon my limbs, the house of clay that contains me, the gross flesh and blood of which my frame is composed, and wonder at a lodging, poorly fitted to entertain so divine a guest!

A still more important chapter in the history of the human mind has its origin in these considerations. Hence it is that

unenlightened man, in almost all ages and countries, has been induced, independently of divine revelation, to regard death, the most awful event to which we are subject, as not being the termination of his existence. We see the body of our friend become insensible, and remain without motion, or any external indication of what we call life. We can shut it up in an apartment, and visit it from day to day. If we had perseverance enough, and could so far conquer the repugnance and humiliating feeling with which the experiment would be attended, we might follow step by step the process of decomposition and putrefaction, and observe by what degrees the "dust returned unto earth as it was." But, in spite of this demonstration of the senses, man still believes that there is something in him that lives after death. The mind is so infinitely superior in character to this case of flesh that incloses it, that he cannot persuade himself that it and the body perish together.

There are two considerations, the force of which made man a religious animal. The first is, his proneness to ascribe hostility or benevolent intention to every thing of a memorable sort that occurs to him in the order of nature. The second is that of which I have just treated, the superior dignity of mind over body. This, we persuade ourselves, shall subsist uninjured by the mutations of our corporeal frame, and undestroyed by the wreck of the material universe.

ESSAY II. OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF TALENTS.

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{Greek—omitted} Thucydides, Lib.I, cap. 84.

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SECTION I.

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PRESUMED DEARTH OF INTELLECTUAL POWER.—SCHOOLS FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUTH CONSIDERED.—THE BOY AND THE MAN COMPARED.

One of the earliest judgments that is usually made by those whose attention is turned to the characters of men in the social state, is of the great inequality with which the gifts of the understanding are distributed among us.

Go into a miscellaneous society; sit down at table with ten or twelve men; repair to a club where as many are assembled in an evening to relax from the toils of the day—it is almost proverbial, that one or two of these persons will perhaps be brilliant, and the rest "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable."

Go into a numerous school—the case will be still more striking. I have been present where two men of superior endowments endeavoured to enter into a calculation on the subject; and they agreed that there was not above one boy in a hundred, who would be found to possess a penetrating understanding, and to be able to strike into a path of intellect that was truly his own. How common is it to hear the master of such a school say, "Aye, I am proud of that lad; I have been a schoolmaster these thirty years, and have never had such another!"

The society above referred to, the dinner-party, or the club, was to a considerable degree select, brought together by a certain supposed congeniality between the individuals thus assembled. Were they taken indiscriminately, as boys are when consigned to the care of a schoolmaster, the

proportion of the brilliant would not be a whit greater than in the latter case.

A main criterion of the superiority of the schoolboy will be found in his mode of answering a casual question proposed by the master. The majority will be wholly at fault, will shew that they do not understand the question, and will return an answer altogether from the purpose. One in a hundred perhaps, perhaps in a still less proportion, will reply in a laudable manner, and convey his ideas in perspicuous and spirited language.

It does not certainly go altogether so ill, with men grown up to years of maturity. They do not for the most part answer a plain question in a manner to make you wonder at their fatuity.

A main cause of the disadvantageous appearance exhibited by the ordinary schoolboy, lies in what we denominate sheepishness. He is at a loss, and in the first place stares at you, instead of giving an answer. He does not make by many degrees so poor a figure among his equals, as when he is addressed by his seniors.

One of the reasons of the latter phenomenon consists in the torpedo effect of what we may call, under the circumstances, the difference of ranks. The schoolmaster is a despot to his scholar; for every man is a despot, who delivers his judgment from the single impulse of his own will. The boy answers his questioner, as Dolon answers Ulysses in the Iliad, at the point of the sword. It is to a certain degree the same thing, when the boy is questioned merely by his senior. He fears he knows not what—a reprimand, a look of lofty contempt, a gesture of summary disdain. He does not think it worth his while under these circumstances, to "gird up the loins of his mind." He cannot return a free and intrepid answer but to the person whom he regards as his equal. There is nothing that has so disqualifying an effect upon him who is to answer, as the

consideration that he who questions is universally acknowledged to be a being of a higher sphere, or, as between the boy and the man, that he is the superior in conventional and corporal strength.

Nor is it simple terror that restrains the boy from answering his senior with the same freedom and spirit, as he would answer his equal. He does not think it worth his while to enter the lists. He despairs of doing the thing in the way that shall gain approbation, and therefore will not try. He is like a boxer, who, though skilful, will not fight with one hand tied behind him. He would return you the answer, if it occurred without his giving himself trouble; but he will not rouse his soul, and task his strength to give it. He is careless; and prefers trusting to whatever construction you may put upon him, and whatever treatment you may think proper to bestow upon him. It is the most difficult thing in the world, for the schoolmaster to inspire into his pupil the desire to do his best.

Among full-grown men the case is different. The schoolboy, whether under his domestic roof, or in the gymnasium, is in a situation similar to that of the Christian slaves in Algiers, as described by Cervantes in his History of the Captive. "They were shut up together in a species of bagnio, from whence they were brought out from time to time to perform certain tasks in common: they might also engage in pranks, and get into scrapes, as they pleased; but the master would hang up one, impale another, and cut off the ears of a third, for little occasion, or even wholly without it." Such indeed is the condition of the child almost from the hour of birth. The severities practised upon him are not so great as those resorted to by the proprietor of slaves in Algiers; but they are equally arbitrary and without appeal. He is free to a certain extent, even as the captives described by Cervantes; but his freedom is upon sufferance, and is brought to an end at any time at the pleasure of his

seniors. The child therefore feels his way, and ascertains by repeated experiments how far he may proceed with impunity. He is like the slaves of the Romans on the days of the Saturnalia. He may do what he pleases, and command tasks to his masters, but with this difference—the Roman slave knew when the days of his licence would be over, and comported himself accordingly; but the child cannot foresee at any moment when the bell will be struck, and the scene reversed. It is commonly enough incident to this situation, that the being who is at the mercy of another, will practise, what Tacitus calls, a "vernacular urbanity," make his bold jests, and give utterance to his saucy innuendoes, with as much freedom as the best; but he will do it with a wary eye, not knowing how soon he may feel his chain plucked! and himself compulsorily reduced into the established order. His more usual refuge therefore is, to do nothing, and to wrap himself up in that neutrality towards his seniors, that may best protect him from their reprimand and their despotism.

The condition of the full-grown man is different from that of the child, and he conducts himself accordingly. He is always to a certain degree under the control of the political society of which he is a member. He is also exposed to the chance of personal insult and injury from those who are stronger than he, or who may render their strength more considerable by combination and numbers. The political institutions which control him in certain respects, protect him also to a given degree from the robber and assassin, or from the man who, were it not for penalties and statutes, would perpetrate against him all the mischiefs which malignity might suggest. Civil policy however subjects him to a variety of evils, which wealth or corruption are accustomed to inflict under the forms of justice; at the same time that it can never wholly defend him from those violences to which he would be every moment exposed in what is called the state of nature.

The full-grown man in the mean time is well pleased when he escapes from the ergastulum where he had previously dwelt, and in which he had experienced corporal infliction and corporal restraint. At first, in the newness of his freedom, he breaks out into idle sallies and escapes, and is like the full-fed steed that manifests his wantonness in a thousand antics and ruades. But this is a temporary extravagance. He presently becomes as wise and calculating, as the schoolboy was before him.

The human being then, that has attained a certain stature, watches and poises his situation, and considers what he may do with impunity. He ventures at first with no small diffidence, and pretends to be twice as assured as he really is. He accumulates experiment after experiment, till they amount to a considerable volume. It is not till he has passed successive lustres, that he attains that firm step, and temperate and settled accent, which characterise the man complete. He then no longer doubts, but is ranged on the full level of the ripened members of the community.

There is therefore little room for wonder, if we find the same individual, whom we once knew a sheepish and irresolute schoolboy, that hung his head, that replied with inarticulated monotony, and stammered out his meaning, metamorphosed into a thoroughly manly character, who may take his place on the bench with senators, and deliver a grave and matured opinion as well as the best. It appears then that the trial and review of full-grown men is not altogether so disadvantageous to the reckoning of our common nature, as that of boys at school.

It is not however, that the full-grown man is not liable to be checked, reprimanded and rebuked, even as the schoolboy is. He has his wife to read him lectures, and rap his knuckles; he has his master, his landlord, or the mayor of his village, to tell him of his duty in an imperious style, and in measured sentences; if he is a member of a

legislature, even there he receives his lessons, and is told, either in phrases of well-conceived irony, or by the exhibition of facts and reasonings which take him by surprise, that he is not altogether the person he deemed himself to be. But he does not mind it. Like Iago in the play, he "knows his price, and, by the faith of man, that he is worth no worse a place" than that which he occupies. He finds out the value of the check he receives, and lets it "pass by him like the idle wind"—a mastery, which the schoolboy, however he may affect it, never thoroughly attains to.

But it unfortunately happens, that, before he has arrived at that degree of independence, the fate of the individual is too often decided for ever. How are the majority of men trampled in the mire, made "hewers of wood, and drawers of water," long, very long, before there was an opportunity of ascertaining what it was of which they were capable! Thus almost every one is put in the place which by nature he was least fit for: and, while perhaps a sufficient quantity of talent is extant in each successive generation, yet, for want of each man's being duly estimated, and assigned his appropriate duty, the very reverse may appear to be the case. By the time that they have attained to that sober self-confidence that might enable them to assert themselves, they are already chained to a fate, or thrust down to a condition, from which no internal energies they possess can ever empower them to escape.

SECTION II.

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EQUALITY OF MAN WITH MAN.—TALENTS EXTENSIVELY DISTRIBUTED.—WAY IN WHICH THIS DISTRIBUTION IS COUNTERACTED.—THE APTITUDE OF CHILDREN FOR DIFFERENT PURSUITS SHOULD BE EARLY SOUGHT OUT.—HINTS FOR A BETTER SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.—AMBITION AN UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE.

The reflections thus put down, may assist us in answering the question as to the way in which talents are distributed among men by the hand of nature.

All things upon the earth and under the earth, and especially all organised bodies of the animal or vegetable kingdom, fall into classes. It is by this means, that the child no sooner learns the terms, man, horse, tree, flower, than, if an object of any of these kinds which he has never seen before, is exhibited to him, he pronounces without hesitation, This is a man, a horse, a tree, a flower.

All organised bodies of the animal or vegetable kingdom are cast in a mould of given dimension and feature belonging to a certain number of individuals, though distinguished by inexhaustible varieties. It is by means of those features that the class of each individual is determined.

To confine ourselves to man.

All men, the monster and the lusus naturae excepted, have a certain form, a certain complement of limbs, a certain internal structure, and organs of sense—may we not add further, certain powers of intellect?

Hence it seems to follow, that man is more like and more equal to man, deformities of body and abortions of intellect

excepted, than the disdainful and fastidious censors of our common nature are willing to admit.

I am inclined to believe, that, putting idiots and extraordinary cases out of the question, every human creature is endowed with talents, which, if rightly directed, would shew him to be apt, adroit, intelligent and acute, in the walk for which his organisation especially fitted him.

But the practices and modes of civilised life prompt us to take the inexhaustible varieties of man, as he is given into our guardianship by the bountiful hand of nature, and train him in one uniform exercise, as the raw recruit is treated when he is brought under the direction of his drill-serjeant.

The son of the nobleman, of the country-gentleman, and of those parents who from vanity or whatever other motive are desirous that their offspring should be devoted to some liberal profession, is in nearly all instances sent to the grammar-school. It is in this scene principally, that the judgment is formed that not above one boy in a hundred possesses an acute understanding, or will be able to strike into a path of intellect that shall be truly his own.

I do not object to this destination, if temperately pursued. It is fit that as many children as possible should have their chance of figuring in future life in what are called the higher departments of intellect. A certain familiar acquaintance with language and the shades of language as a lesson, will be beneficial to all. The youth who has expended only six months in acquiring the rudiments of the Latin tongue, will probably be more or less the better for it in all his future life.

But seven years are usually spent at the grammar-school by those who are sent to it. I do not in many cases object to this. The learned languages are assuredly of slow acquisition. In the education of those who are destined to what are called the higher departments of intellect, a long period may advantageously be spent in the study of words,

while the progress they make in theory and dogmatical knowledge is too generally a store of learning laid up, to be unlearned again when they reach the period of real investigation and independent judgment. There is small danger of this in the acquisition of words.

But this method, indiscriminately pursued as it is now, is productive of the worst consequences. Very soon a judgment may be formed by the impartial observer, whether the pupil is at home in the study of the learned languages, and is likely to make an adequate progress. But parents are not impartial. There are also two reasons why the schoolmaster is not the proper person to pronounce: first, because, if he pronounces in the negative, he will have reason to fear that the parent will be offended; and secondly, because he does not like to lose his scholar. But the very moment that it can be ascertained, that the pupil is not at home in the study of the learned languages, and is unlikely to make an adequate progress, at that moment he should be taken from it.

The most palpable deficiency that is to be found in relation to the education of children, is a sound judgment to be formed as to the vocation or employment in which each is most fitted to excel.

As, according to the institutions of Lycurgus, as soon as a boy was born, he was visited by the elders of the ward, who were to decide whether he was to be reared, and would be made an efficient member of the commonwealth, so it were to be desired that, as early as a clear discrimination on the subject might be practicable, a competent decision should be given as to the future occupation and destiny of a child.

But this is a question attended with no common degree of difficulty. To the resolving such a question with sufficient evidence, a very considerable series of observations would become necessary. The child should be introduced into a variety of scenes, and a magazine, so to speak, of those

things about which human industry and skill may be employed, should be successively set before him. The censor who is to decide on the result of the whole, should be a person of great sagacity, and capable of pronouncing upon a given amount of the most imperfect and incidental indications. He should be clear-sighted, and vigilant to observe the involuntary turns of an eye, expressions of a lip, and demonstrations of a limb.

The declarations of the child himself are often of very small use in the case. He may be directed by an impulse, which occurs in the morning, and vanishes in the evening. His preferences change as rapidly as the shapes we sometimes observe in the evening clouds, and are governed by whim or fantasy, and not by any of those indications which are parcel of his individual constitution. He desires in many instances to be devoted to a particular occupation, because his playfellow has been assigned to it before him.

The parent is not qualified to judge in this fundamental question, because he is under the dominion of partiality, and wishes that his child may become a lord chancellor, an archbishop, or any thing else, the possessor of which condition shall be enabled to make a splendid figure in the world. He is not qualified, because he is an interested party, and, either from an exaggerated estimate of his child's merits, or from a selfish shrinking from the cost it might require to mature them, is anxious to arrive at a conclusion not founded upon the intrinsic claims of the case to be considered.

Even supposing it to be sufficiently ascertained in what calling it is that the child will be most beneficially engaged, a thousand extrinsical circumstances will often prevent that from being the calling chosen. Nature distributes her gifts without any reference to the distinctions of artificial society. The genius that demanded the most careful and assiduous cultivation, that it might hereafter form the boast and