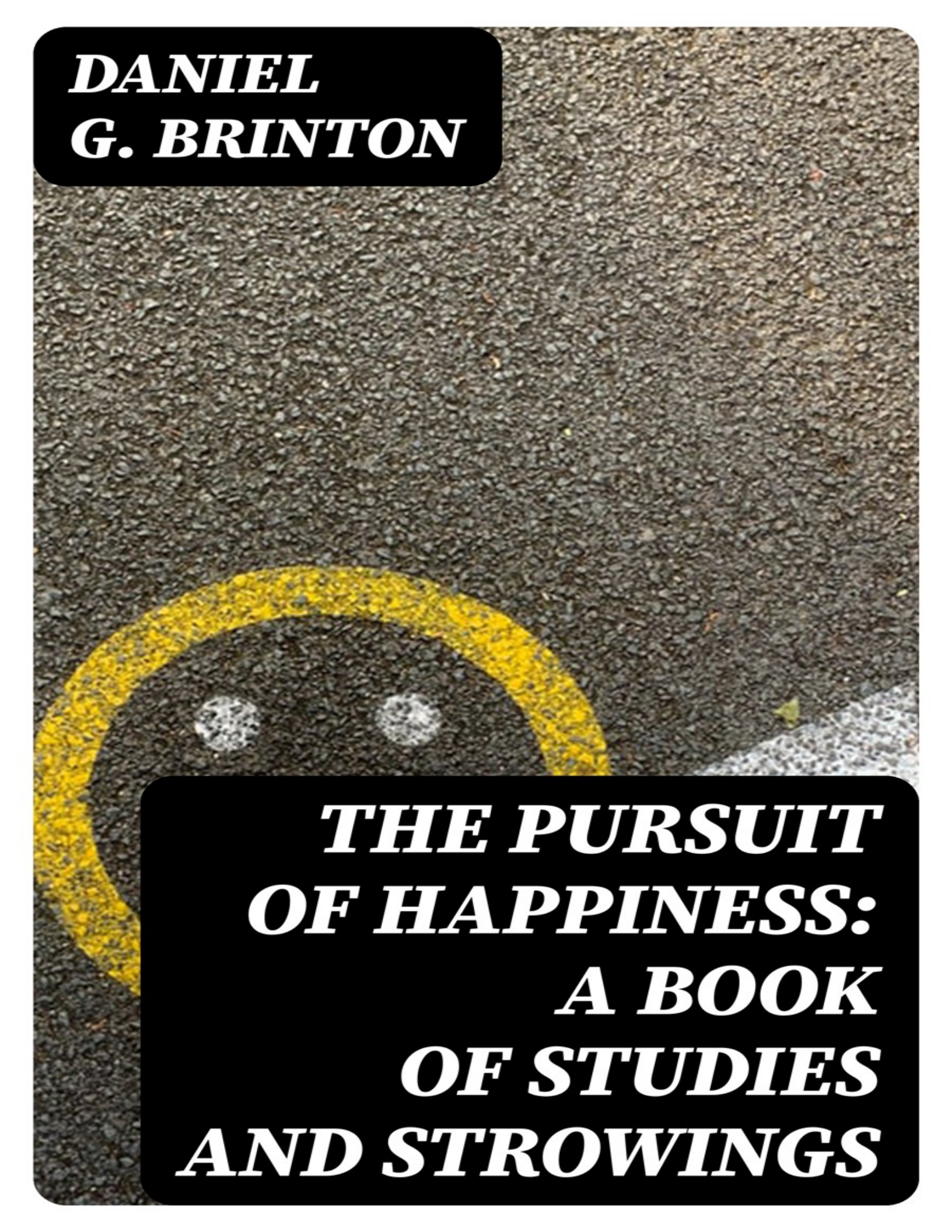




***DANIEL
G. BRINTON***

***THE PURSUIT
OF HAPPINESS:
A BOOK
OF STUDIES
AND STROWINGS***

Daniel G. Brinton

The Pursuit of Happiness: A Book of Studies and Strowings

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The pursuit of happiness,—the pursuit of one's own happiness,—is it a vain quest? and, if not vain, is it a worthy object of life?

There have been plenty to condemn it on both grounds. They have said that the endeavor is hopeless; that to study the art of being happy is like studying the art of making gold, which is the only art by which gold can never be made. Nothing, they add, is so unpropitious to happiness as the very effort to attain it.

They go farther. "Let life," they proclaim, "have a larger purpose than enjoyment." They quote the mighty Plato, when he demands that the right aim of living shall stand apart, and out of all relation to pleasure or pain. They declare that the theory of happiness as an end is the most dangerous of all in modern sociology—the tap-root of the worst weeds in the political theories of the day, for the reason that the individual pursuit of enjoyment is necessarily destructive of that of society at large. Moreover, they

urge, who dares write of it? For he who has not enjoyed it, cannot speak wisely of it; and in him who has attained it, 'twere insolence to boast of it.

Over against these stands another school, not, by any means, solely a modern school. If that boasts Plato as its leader, this can claim Aristotle as its master. It is with the single aim to become happier, said that wise teacher, that we deliberately perform any act of our lives. This is the final end of every conscious action of man. That alone is the true purpose of existence, which, by itself, and not as a means to something else, makes life worth living and desirable for its own sake; and happiness—happiness alone—fulfills this requirement.

Through the ages this conflict has continued. We find the thoughtful Pascal declaring that every free act of the will has, and can have, no other end in view than the increase of the individual happiness, be it so seemingly inconsistent as drowning or hanging oneself; while the distinctively modern school of social philosophers, without any exception, pin to their banners the maxim of their master, Jeremy Bentham, “The common end of every person’s efforts is happiness;” and they love to confound the ascetics by proclaiming, with Spencer, that “Without pleasure there is no good in life;” or asserting, with Ward, that the sole aim of a right sociology is the organization of happiness. Nay, they have gone so far as to project a series of sciences by which the human race is to reach a condition of entire enjoyment. They

give us “Eudæmonics,” or the art of the attainment of well-being; “Hedonism,” or the theory of the securing of pleasure; and even the “Hedonical Calculus,” by which we can to a nicety calculate how much any object, if secured, will add to our felicity.

These excellent authorities have therefore answered the inquiry whether the pursuit of happiness is a possible occupation, by showing that in fact we cannot of our own wills do anything else; and though we often pursue it blindly and by false routes, we can, by taking thought and learning of others, follow it up successfully. So also taught Aristotle, who tells us in his *Ethics*, “It is possible for every man by certain studies and appropriate care to reach a condition of happiness.”

Since the aim of enjoyment is thus natural, even thus necessary, to man, since it is the motive of his every action, how important that it should be guided by the dictates of wisdom, and not condemned and discarded as evil! Have not those who declared it criminal smothered the germ which they should have nursed?

Away with the cold and cruel doctrines which for ages have darkened the lives of men by teaching them that enjoyment is folly and pleasure a sin! If the reasoned pursuit of happiness conflicts with current morality, so much the worse for that morality. Away with it, and in the light of a younger day seek a better one. What is right is reasonable, and what is reasonable is right. Enjoy yourself; it is the highest

wisdom. Diffuse enjoyment; it is the loftiest virtue. Not only are the two compatible; they are inseparable; as the sage Rasselas said to the Princess: "It is our business to consider what beings like us may perform; each laboring for his own happiness by promoting within his circle, however narrow, the happiness of others."

All agree that we should strive for the happiness of others; it has even been said that this is the only moral justification of any act of our lives. But the cup which we are to proffer to all, we are, forsooth, forbidden to taste ourselves! What is good for everybody else is bad for oneself!

There is something radically wrong here, both in fact and logic. Mental moods are contagious, and the man who enjoys little will prove a kill-joy to others. Who are more disagreeable than those Philistines and Pharisees who insist on making you happy against your will, and contrary to your inclinations? I have noticed that the usual pretext for annoying people is solicitude about their welfare. But, as a rule, people are not happy whose pleasures are assigned them by others. Nobody's vegetables are so sweet as those from my own garden, and if the whole world set to work to please me, I am sure I should be discontented. These moralists put the cart before the horse. Before we are qualified to make others happy we must compass happiness in some degree for ourselves; and our success with others will be just to that degree and no more. The quality and intensity of

enjoyment which we ourselves have is alone that which we are able to impart to others. To assert, therefore, that we should make no effort to obtain or increase this, is as illogical as can be.

Here some one may think I am caught in my own trap. For if people cannot assign pleasures to others, is it not an impertinence to offer instruction on the subject? Can anybody tell me better than myself what I like and what I desire?

True, but the difference is wide between telling me what things should please me, and telling me how I can best please myself; and the latter is the aim of right instruction in this matter. That it is badly needed, one who runs may read. Most people pursue unhappiness more steadily than happiness. Only fools find life an easy thing; to the wise it is a perpetual surprise that they get along at all. To them, life is a lesson to be learned, and happiness is a science the first axiom in which is to seek knowledge. To be happy one must work for it, and not merely have the wish and possess the requisites; as Aristotle so prettily expresses it, "As at the Olympic games, it is not the strongest or handsomest who gain the crown, but only those who join in the combat."

There is boundless need for a clear statement of the true theory of personal happiness. It has been neglected, misconceived, and decried long enough, and countless lives have been darkened in consequence. Such a theory, to be true, must be

applicable to all men, of all sorts and conditions, because the desire of happiness is the common motive of all. Has it yet been discovered? That is the object of the present inquiry—for it is little more than an inquiry; but be sure that when it is discovered and set forth, it will come not as something new or strange, but like some half-forgotten, long familiar truth.

Not only, therefore, is it desirable, it is the bounden duty of every man to consider his own highest happiness, to learn what that is, and to go to work to secure it. It is his duty to his neighbors as well as to himself; more than that, it is his first duty to his kind. It is incumbent on every generation to transmit an increased store of social and personal felicity to posterity. This is the only good reason for the continuance of the race. But a generation does nothing except through its individual members; hence, it all comes back to the personal effort for happiness.

But the moralist will object, Is not this doctrine one of absolute egotism, of stark selfishness?

This objection is what has nullified and cast into disfavor every essay ever written, from the Nichomachean Ethics downward, which attempted a reasoned and practical art of increasing personal happiness. They have all been frowned down as selfish and, therefore, immoral.

It is time for this opposition to cease. It rests on a misunderstanding of terms, on a confusion of

different sensations, on the bad books of some writers, but mostly on ancient prejudice and an ignorance of facts. Let the subject be approached with a mind free from bias; let the false beacons hung out by some schools be disregarded; above all, let a clear understanding of what happiness consists in be gained; and this potent objection will be dismissed from the case.

Let us turn, then, to the definition of happiness.

II. The Definition of Happiness.

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In science a definition is not a resting-place, but a stepping-stone. It is needless, therefore, to call the catalogue of obsolete and obscure definitions of happiness. Some, indeed, say that the definition, like the thing itself, is still unfound.

I do not think this is so. Between the physiologists and the psychologists, I believe we are in a position to explain what happiness is; and if in parts the explanation is a trifle subtle, it is not really obscure.

Happiness is not the same as pleasure, but it is generally built upon or grows out of pleasurable feelings. We must begin, therefore, our analysis with these, and with their opposites—the painful feelings.

Pleasure and pain are both ultimate and undefinable experiences of the mind. We cannot resolve them further; but we can note certain unfailing relations they bear to the organism, which explain their significance. Pleasure characterizes the normal and unimpeded exercise of physiological functions of all kinds. There are as many elementary pleasures as there are sensations. Pain is present only in the reverse conditions. Modern physiologists have established, therefore, the fundamental law, that pleasure connects itself with vital energy, pain with its opposite; in which they have not gone

beyond, even if they have caught up to, the maxim of Spinoza: "Pleasure is an affection whereby the mind passes to a greater perfection; pain is an affection whereby it passes to a lesser perfection."

Such is the meaning of pleasure or of pleasurable feelings; and there is no lack of writers, and weighty ones, too, who maintain that happiness is merely the excess of pleasure over pain; or the utmost pleasure we are capable of; or the aggregate of continued pleasurable feelings. All such phrases are wide of the mark. They confound distinct things, and ignore the boundaries between the different realms of mental action.

We must leave the physiologists and turn to profound analysts of purely mental action, such as Hume and Kant, for the right understanding of the meaning of happiness. For these, its inseparable factors, are the Will and Self-consciousness. As Kant expresses it,—“The Desire of Happiness is the general title for all subjective motives of the Will.” Desire is really stimulated, not by the image of past pleasure, as Locke and his followers teach, but by the conception of Self. The satisfaction of desire is not merely such, but is the satisfaction of the Self, in thus reaching a greater perfection, to use Spinoza’s phrase. Only by discriminating the object from the Self can the pleasure of the subject become an end in itself. Hence the real aim of the pleasure-seeker, though he is rarely intellectually conscious of it, is to feel his own Self, his own being, more keenly.

Aristotle expressed this when he wrote,—“Pleasure is the feeling which accompanies Self-realization.”

To the extent, therefore, that pleasure develops the sense of Self-consciousness it partakes of a higher nature than mere sensation, which man shares in common with the brutes; and to that extent it can claim the name of Happiness, a feeling inseparable from free will and conscious individuality. In man a true pleasure must always be a pleasure in something else than the pleasure itself; that is, it must heighten the sense of personal existence.

It is only the conception of Self as a permanent subject to be pleased, that stimulates man to fresh endeavors, that makes him seek knowledge and freedom, that lifts him above the beast, contented with the satisfaction of its appetites. This is what Fichte meant when he said that the consciousness of Self alone enables us to understand life and enjoy it. Nothing is truer than the motto, “*Être heureux, c’est vivre*,”—to be happy is to live.

Here, again, some uneasy moralist will point the finger and raise the cry of “selfishness.” It is time to have done with this purblind, this high-gravel-blind moralist, who refuses to distinguish between self-feeling and self-seeking. There are two self-loves. The one is inseparable from personal existence, the necessary point of departure of every conscious action, whose activity and whose end are alike in the object outside of the self; the other is that egoism

which directs both the action and its end toward itself. The former is fecund, ennobling, inspiring; the latter is sterile and enfeebling. Rightly understood, nothing is so admirable as self-love; but love yourself, not for what you are, but for what you may be. The wisest of teachers set no higher mark for duty than, "Love thy neighbor *as thyself*." It was a modern and unphilosophical derogation which substituted for it, "*Vivre pour autrui*." In living the best for ourselves, we live the best for others.

The conclusion which we have now arrived at, that happiness is the increasing consciousness of Self, leads us to reflect whether this mental state is brought about solely by what is generally known as "pleasures," or whether some other feeling, not usually classed as such, may not have the same effect. Man can enjoy only through action, and all his happiness depends on action; but there may be a great deal and very intense activity in spheres of experience to which the terms pleasure and pain, in their physiological sense, do not apply. Indeed, such activities may be present along with physical pain and mental suffering, and yet the law hold good: that if these are of a nature to exalt the consciousness of self, they may be a well-spring of happiness under circumstances the most unfavorable. This explains a passage of Epictetus which I thought over a long time before I mastered its significance,—"*Happiness is an equivalent for all troublesome things*;" not that it excludes or abolishes them, but that it is a

compensation for them. This puts the whole art of happiness in a different light. It may teach us to avoid some pains and troubles, and this is well; but the best of it will ever be to give us an *equivalent* for the many that remain. Any text-book of felicity which leaves this out of account may as well be burned by Monsieur de Paris.

Now we can understand what Plato meant when he said that the right aim of living should stand out of relation to pleasure or pain. He had in mind these other activities which give in some natures an intenser sense to self-consciousness than any mere nerve reaction. The ancient ideal was the greatness of the individual, the richness of his imagination, the reach of his intellect, the strength of his will, the firmness of his friendship, the devotion of his patriotism, the singleness of his life and purpose in some noble aim. This it was that floated before the intellectual vision of Plato and led him to scorn the pleasures of the sense and the charms of tranquillity.

Let us applaud him; for we moderns are not ignorant of the luxury of toil and the joy of strong endeavor; we too, like Othello, “do agnize an alacrity for hardness;” with Seneca we can say, “*Res severa est verum gaudium.*” But we hold it needless and unwise to leave any sunny field uncultured on whose soil may be trained to bloom the fragrant flower of pleasure.

The yearning for joy is a cry of nature which can never be stifled. Give heed to it and obey it. It calls

you to wider horizons, to warmer sympathies, to a fuller growth, to a completer development. It holds the secret of Evolution. It is the incessant prompter to a higher form of existence. Biologists have discovered that the avoidance of painful and the search for pleasurable sensations are the first principles of organic animal life, and are those which have developed the amoeba into the man. In him, this general consciousness has blossomed into Self-consciousness, and to this he owes all the growth of his higher nature, his essentially human powers. To the extent that this is brought into harmony with the sum of his faculties and with his surroundings, he wins that something greater than pleasure which we call happiness. From the culture of this, if from any source, he must look for the advent of those new spirit-powers which more fortunate generations in the hereafter may enjoy. Who knows but those, our dear children of after days, may gain a still higher form of consciousness, one through which they will be brought into harmony with the perfect working of the Cosmos, and the ancient fable be realized, of men who walked the earth as gods?

III. The Relative Value of Pleasures.

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The learned have established what they call “a hierarchy of the sciences,” a scheme which shows the relative value and scope of the various departments of knowledge, and how the one rises upon the other. So in the Science of Happiness there is a series of degrees, a *gradus ad gaudium*, which measures the relative value of human enjoyments and the dependence of the higher upon the lower.

The ignorance or the disregard of this fact has led to the ruin of more individual lives, and to more fatal misfortunes to the race, than any other error whatsoever. The poison of all false religions and philosophies lies either in condemning pleasure or in commending low forms of it; and the one is as hurtful as the other. The religion which to-day numbers more believers than any other, Buddhism, aims its loftiest aspirations to the extinction of all desire and the abolition of all enjoyment. These are the words of Buddha himself:—

“Let no man look for what is pleasant; for not to find it is pain.

“Let no man love anything; for the loss of the beloved is sorrow.

“After pleasure follows grief, and from affection comes fear.

“I have run through many births, and painful it is to be born again and again; but now, O Thou Builder of this house, Thou hast been seen, and not again shalt Thou rebuild it. The mind has attained to the extinction of all desire.”

This is the ideal of happiness that four hundred millions of human beings hold before their minds to-day. If there is any truth in the modern philosophy which teaches that pleasure lies in functional activity, no more pernicious message could be commended to mankind than that which Buddha brought.

He is far from the only preacher of such a gospel. “To rest in peace,” “to sleep in the Lord,”—is not this the religious hope and aspiration of millions of Christians? It is not a whit higher than the Nirvana of the Buddhist.

The avoidance of pain is the lowest form of happiness; more correctly, it is its mere negative, and scarcely deserves to rank as one of its grades. Yet, alas! to how many millions is it the highest form imagined! To how many is the only escape from unhappiness to forget themselves! This is the cause of that thirst for intoxicants and narcotics which undermines and infects modern society. Dr. Johnson would still find the multitude agree with him in his opinion, that a man is never happy except when he is drunk!

Those Quietists who preach tranquillity and contentment as the goal which all should seek are but one step higher. Indifference to pleasure, or a reduction of the number of pleasures, is a sign of weakening of the reason and of a retrogression in development. No man has a right to be happy because he is contented; though he may well be contented because he is happy. To be “void of strong desire,” set free from hope and fear, snugly harbored from all storms of feeling, so far from being the condition of the sage, is the aspiration of the fool. Keen sensations awaken the sentiments, emotions fertilize the intellect, passions educate the reason. The brute goes through life without a smile or a tear; man’s proud privilege is to weep and to laugh.

The ancients taught that philosophical happiness is to want little, and that it is the error of the vulgar to want much and to enjoy many things. The truer doctrine is that happiness is expansion and growth, the enriching of our natures by manifold experiences, and the securing this by the multiplication of our desires. The avoidance of pain and the limitation of our hopes to our powers are sometimes valuable preliminaries to the pursuit of happiness, but are not always essential to it, and in many instances an over-solicitude about them destroys all chance for a higher felicity. Happiness does not come of itself. It has to be worked for, fought for; and courage and endurance are as necessary in this as in any other struggle. In the path of every pilgrim to the Celestial

City stand from time to time the giant figures of Death and Pain, and shake their spears, saying, "Wilt thou dare?"

The sources of pleasure should, therefore, be multiplied to the utmost, and they should be classified, so that undue value should not be assigned any one class. Theoretically, there is nothing troublesome about this; practically, it is often an insurmountable difficulty. The pleasures of the senses are inferior to those of the emotions, and these in turn are ranked by the enjoyments which pertain to the exercise of the intellectual powers. No one of these can wholly exclude the others. They are all inseparably united in the individual entity; but the individual can enjoy only with the faculties he possesses, and in proportion to their relative strength. It is as absurd to ask more of him, as it were to invite the gouty to a foot race, or the blind to admire the colors in a painting.

It is well to establish and to recognize this hierarchy of enjoyments, beginning with those of the sensations common to animal life everywhere and culminating in those of pure reason, whose crowning felicity is the pursuit of truth; it has been done, and well done, by many writers; but what has been generally overlooked is that this scheme can have small practical application to the conduct of life if it is not fully recognized that no one of these roads to happiness can be successfully pursued while the

others are neglected, or branded with the sign, "Entrance forbidden."

This is where Asceticism has committed its fatal blunder, and for thousands of years has made miserable the lives of millions. Instead of self-control, it has demanded self-abnegation; instead of the due and proportioned exercise of all the powers, it has ordered the absolute disuse of some of them; quite as often of the highest as of the lowest, of reason as often as lust. Under this baleful doctrine nations have become misshapen in mind, atrophied in culture, distorted from honest nature's rule, mean, miserable, and inefficient. Yet this same doctrine is preached to-day from thousands of pulpits in lands of highest civilization. Is it not time for the common sense of most to rise in protest against such a survival from the Dark Ages of the life of the race? Reason blushes only for pleasures which she cannot explain, and he who acquaints himself with the whole nature of man knows that all his powers and faculties have their appropriate use. The ascetic may claim a happiness all his own; but so do the extravagant and the vicious; both stand condemned before the results of their own successes.

The intellect has no right to chide the enjoyments of the senses. Pleasures differ in degree and permanence, but not in kind. *As pleasures* they are on a par, whether derived from objects of sense, from the emotions, or from the understanding. Such analysts of mind as Kant and Epictetus agree that