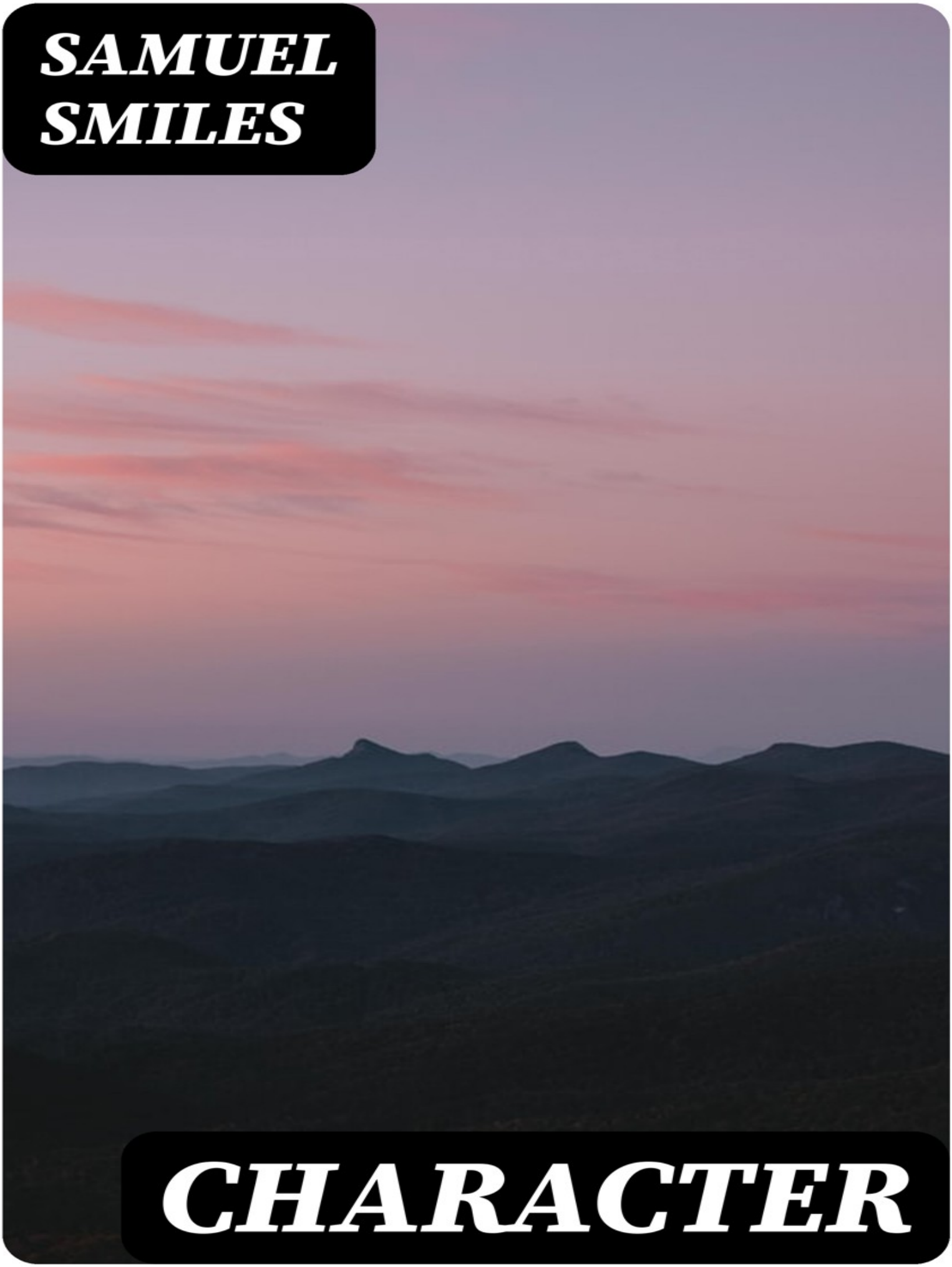
SAMUEL
SMILES
CHARACTER

Samuel Smiles

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EAN 8596547366218

DigiCat, 2022
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CHAPTER I.—INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER.

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"Unless above himself he can Erect himself, how poor a thing
is man"—DANIEL.

"Character is moral order seen through the medium, of an individual nature.... Men of character are the conscience of the society to which they belong."—EMERSON.

"The prosperity of a country depends, not on the abundance of its revenues, nor on the strength of its fortifications, nor on the beauty of its public buildings; but it consists in the number of its cultivated citizens, in its men of education, enlightenment, and character; here are to be found its true interest, its chief strength, its real power."—MARTIN LUTHER.

Character is one of the greatest motive powers in the world. In its noblest embodiments, it exemplifies human nature in its highest forms, for it exhibits man at his best.

Men of genuine excellence, in every station of life—men of industry, of integrity, of high principle, of sterling honesty of purpose—command the spontaneous homage of mankind. It is natural to believe in such men, to have confidence in them, and to imitate them. All that is good in the world is upheld by them, and without their presence in it the world would not be worth living in.

Although genius always commands admiration, character most secures respect. The former is more the product of brain-power, the latter of heart-power; and in the long run it

is the heart that rules in life. Men of genius stand to society in the relation of its intellect, as men of character of its conscience; and while the former are admired, the latter are followed.

Great men are always exceptional men; and greatness itself is but comparative. Indeed, the range of most men in life is so limited, that very few have the opportunity of being great. But each man can act his part honestly and honourably, and to the best of his ability. He can use his gifts, and not abuse them. He can strive to make the best of life. He can be true, just, honest, and faithful, even in small things. In a word, he can do his Duty in that sphere in which Providence has placed him.

Commonplace though it may appear, this doing of one's Duty embodies the highest ideal of life and character. There may be nothing heroic about it; but the common lot of men is not heroic. And though the abiding sense of Duty upholds man in his highest attitudes, it also equally sustains him in the transaction of the ordinary affairs of everyday existence. Man's life is "centred in the sphere of common duties." The most influential of all the virtues are those which are the most in request for daily use. They wear the best, and last the longest. Superfine virtues, which are above the standard of common men, may only be sources of temptation and danger. Burke has truly said that "the human system which rests for its basis on the heroic virtues is sure to have a superstructure of weakness or of profligacy."

When Dr. Abbot, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, drew the character of his deceased friend Thomas Sackville, [101] he did not dwell upon his merits as a statesman, or his

genius as a poet, but upon his virtues as a man in relation to the ordinary duties of life. "How many rare things were in him!" said he. "Who more loving unto his wife? Who more kind unto his children?—Who more fast unto his friend?—Who more moderate unto his enemy?—Who more true to his word?" Indeed, we can always better understand and appreciate a man's real character by the manner in which he conducts himself towards those who are the most nearly related to him, and by his transaction of the seemingly commonplace details of daily duty, than by his public exhibition of himself as an author, an orator, or a statesman.

At the same time, while Duty, for the most part, applies to the conduct of affairs in common life by the average of common men, it is also a sustaining power to men of the very highest standard of character. They may not have either money, or property, or learning, or power; and yet they may be strong in heart and rich in spirit—honest, truthful, dutiful. And whoever strives to do his duty faithfully is fulfilling the purpose for which he was created, and building up in himself the principles of a manly character. There are many persons of whom it may be said that they have no other possession in the world but their character, and yet they stand as firmly upon it as any crowned king.

Intellectual culture has no necessary relation to purity or excellence of character. In the New Testament, appeals are constantly made to the heart of man and to "the spirit we are of," whilst allusions to the intellect are of very rare occurrence. "A handful of good life," says George Herbert, "is worth a bushel of learning." Not that learning is to be

despised, but that it must be allied to goodness. Intellectual capacity is sometimes found associated with the meanest moral character with abject servility to those in high places, and arrogance to those of low estate. A man may be accomplished in art, literature, and science, and yet, in honesty, virtue, truthfulness, and the spirit of duty, be entitled to take rank after many a poor and illiterate peasant.

"You insist," wrote Perthes to a friend, "on respect for learned men. I say, Amen! But, at the same time, don't forget that largeness of mind, depth of thought, appreciation of the lofty, experience of the world, delicacy of manner, tact and energy in action, love of truth, honesty, and amiability—that all these may be wanting in a man who may yet be very learned." [102]

When some one, in Sir Walter Scott's hearing, made a remark as to the value of literary talents and accomplishments, as if they were above all things to be esteemed and honoured, he observed, "God help us! what a poor world this would be if that were the true doctrine! I have read books enough, and observed and conversed with enough of eminent and splendidly-cultured minds, too, in my time; but I assure you, I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor UNEDUCATED men and women, when exerting the spirit of severe yet gentle heroism under difficulties and afflictions, or speaking their simple thoughts as to circumstances in the lot of friends and neighbours, than I ever yet met with out of the Bible. We shall never learn to feel and respect our real calling and destiny, unless

we have taught ourselves to consider everything as moonshine, compared with the education of the heart." [103]

Still less has wealth any necessary connection with elevation of character. On the contrary, it is much more frequently the cause of its corruption and degradation. Wealth and corruption, luxury and vice, have very close affinities to each other. Wealth, in the hands of men of weak purpose, of deficient self-control, or of ill-regulated passions, is only a temptation and a snare—the source, it may be, of infinite mischief to themselves, and often to others.

On the contrary, a condition of comparative poverty is compatible with character in its highest form. A man may possess only his industry, his frugality, his integrity, and yet stand high in the rank of true manhood. The advice which Burns's father gave him was the best:

"He bade me act a manly part, though I had ne'er a farthing,
For without an honest manly heart no man was worth
regarding."

One of the purest and noblest characters the writer ever knew was a labouring man in a northern county, who brought up his family respectably on an income never amounting to more than ten shillings a week. Though possessed of only the rudiments of common education, obtained at an ordinary parish school, he was a man full of wisdom and thoughtfulness. His library consisted of the Bible, 'Flavel,' and 'Boston'—books which, excepting the first, probably few readers have ever heard of. This good man might have sat for the portrait of Wordsworth's well-known 'Wanderer.' When he had lived his modest life of work and worship, and finally went to his rest, he left behind him a reputation for practical wisdom, for genuine

goodness, and for helpfulness in every good work, which greater and richer men might have envied.

When Luther died, he left behind him, as set forth in his will, "no ready money, no treasure of coin of any description." He was so poor at one part of his life, that he was under the necessity of earning his bread by turning, gardening, and clockmaking. Yet, at the very time when he was thus working with his hands, he was moulding the character of his country; and he was morally stronger, and vastly more honoured and followed, than all the princes of Germany.

Character is property. It is the noblest of possessions. It is an estate in the general goodwill and respect of men; and they who invest in it—though they may not become rich in this world's goods—will find their reward in esteem and reputation fairly and honourably won. And it is right that in life good qualities should tell—that industry, virtue, and goodness should rank the highest—and that the really best men should be foremost.

Simple honesty of purpose in a man goes a long way in life, if founded on a just estimate of himself and a steady obedience to the rule he knows and feels to be right. It holds a man straight, gives him strength and sustenance, and forms a mainspring of vigorous action. "No man," once said Sir Benjamin Rudyard, "is bound to be rich or great,—no, nor to be wise; but every man is bound to be honest." 104

But the purpose, besides being honest, must be inspired by sound principles, and pursued with undeviating adherence to truth, integrity, and uprightness. Without

principles, a man is like a ship without rudder or compass, left to drift hither and thither with every wind that blows. He is as one without law, or rule, or order, or government. "Moral principles," says Hume, "are social and universal. They form, in a manner, the PARTY of humankind against vice and disorder, its common enemy."

Epictetus once received a visit from a certain magnificent orator going to Rome on a lawsuit, who wished to learn from the stoic something of his philosophy. Epictetus received his visitor coolly, not believing in his sincerity. "You will only criticise my style," said he; "not really wishing to learn principles."—"Well, but," said the orator, "if I attend to that sort of thing; I shall be a mere pauper, like you, with no plate, nor equipage, nor land."—"I don't WANT such things," replied Epictetus; "and besides, you are poorer than I am, after all. Patron or no patron, what care I? You DO care. I am richer than you. I don't care what Caesar thinks of me. I flatter no one. This is what I have, instead of your gold and silver plate. You have silver vessels, but earthenware reasons, principles, appetites. My mind to me a kingdom is, and it furnishes me with abundant and happy occupation in lieu of your restless idleness. All your possessions seem small to you; mine seem great to me. Your desire is insatiate—mine is satisfied." [105]

Talent is by no means rare in the world; nor is even genius. But can the talent be trusted?—can the genius? Not unless based on truthfulness—on veracity. It is this quality more than any other that commands the esteem and respect, and secures the confidence of others. Truthfulness is at the foundation of all personal excellence. It exhibits

itself in conduct. It is rectitude—truth in action, and shines through every word and deed. It means reliableness, and convinces other men that it can be trusted. And a man is already of consequence in the world when it is known that he can be relied on,—that when he says he knows a thing, he does know it,—that when he says he will do a thing, he can do, and does it. Thus reliableness becomes a passport to the general esteem and confidence of mankind.

In the affairs of life or of business, it is not intellect that tells so much as character,—not brains so much as heart,—not genius so much as self-control, patience, and discipline, regulated by judgment. Hence there is no better provision for the uses of either private or public life, than a fair share of ordinary good sense guided by rectitude. Good sense, disciplined by experience and inspired by goodness, issues in practical wisdom. Indeed, goodness in a measure implies wisdom—the highest wisdom—the union of the worldly with the spiritual. "The correspondences of wisdom and goodness," says Sir Henry Taylor, "are manifold; and that they will accompany each other is to be inferred, not only because men's wisdom makes them good, but because their goodness makes them wise." 106

It is because of this controlling power of character in life that we often see men exercise an amount of influence apparently out of all proportion to their intellectual endowments. They appear to act by means of some latent power, some reserved force, which acts secretly, by mere presence. As Burke said of a powerful nobleman of the last century, "his virtues were his means." The secret is, that the

aims of such men are felt to be pure and noble, and they act upon others with a constraining power.

Though the reputation of men of genuine character may be of slow growth, their true qualities cannot be wholly concealed. They may be misrepresented by some, and misunderstood by others; misfortune and adversity may, for a time, overtake them but, with patience and endurance, they will eventually inspire the respect and command the confidence which they really deserve.

It has been said of Sheridan that, had he possessed reliableness of character, he might have ruled the world; whereas, for want of it, his splendid gifts were comparatively useless. He dazzled and amused, but was without weight or influence in life or politics. Even the poor pantomimist of Drury Lane felt himself his superior. Thus, when Delpini one day pressed the manager for arrears of salary, Sheridan sharply reproved him, telling him he had forgotten his station. "No, indeed, Monsieur Sheridan, I have not," retorted Delpini; "I know the difference between us perfectly well. In birth, parentage, and education, you are superior to me; but in life, character, and behaviour, I am superior to you."

Unlike Sheridan, Burke, his countryman, was a great man of character. He was thirty-five before he gained a seat in Parliament, yet he found time to carve his name deep in the political history of England. He was a man of great gifts, and of transcendent force of character. Yet he had a weakness, which proved a serious defect—it was his want of temper; his genius was sacrificed to his irritability. And without this apparently minor gift of temper, the most splendid

endowments may be comparatively valueless to their possessor.

Character is formed by a variety of minute circumstances, more or less under the regulation and control of the individual. Not a day passes without its discipline, whether for good or for evil. There is no act, however trivial, but has its train of consequences, as there is no hair so small but casts its shadow. It was a wise saying of Mrs. Schimmelpenninck's mother, never to give way to what is little; or by that little, however you may despise it, you will be practically governed.

Every action, every thought, every feeling, contributes to the education of the temper, the habits, and understanding; and exercises an inevitable influence upon all the acts of our future life. Thus character is undergoing constant change, for better or for worse—either being elevated on the one hand, or degraded on the other. "There is no fault nor folly of my life," says Mr. Ruskin, "that does not rise up against me, and take away my joy, and shorten my power of possession, of sight, of understanding. And every past effort of my life, every gleam of rightness or good in it, is with me now, to help me in my grasp of this art and its vision." [107]

The mechanical law, that action and reaction are equal, holds true also in morals. Good deeds act and react on the doers of them; and so do evil. Not only so: they produce like effects, by the influence of example, on those who are the subjects of them. But man is not the creature, so much as he is the creator, of circumstances: [108] and, by the exercise of his freewill, he can direct his actions so that they shall be productive of good rather than evil. "Nothing can work me

damage but myself," said St. Bernard; "the harm that I sustain I carry about with me; and I am never a real sufferer but by my own fault."

The best sort of character, however, cannot be formed without effort. There needs the exercise of constant self-watchfulness, self-discipline, and self-control. There may be much faltering, stumbling, and temporary defeat; difficulties and temptations manifold to be battled with and overcome; but if the spirit be strong and the heart be upright, no one need despair of ultimate success. The very effort to advance—to arrive at a higher standard of character than we have reached—is inspiring and invigorating; and even though we may fall short of it, we cannot fail to be improved by every, honest effort made in an upward direction.

And with the light of great examples to guide us—representatives of humanity in its best forms—every one is not only justified, but bound in duty, to aim at reaching the highest standard of character: not to become the richest in means, but in spirit; not the greatest in worldly position, but in true honour; not the most intellectual, but the most virtuous; not the most powerful and influential, but the most truthful, upright, and honest.

It was very characteristic of the late Prince Consort—a man himself of the purest mind, who powerfully impressed and influenced others by the sheer force of his own benevolent nature—when drawing up the conditions of the annual prize to be given by Her Majesty at Wellington College, to determine that it should be awarded, not to the cleverest boy, nor to the most bookish boy, nor to the most precise, diligent, and prudent boy,—but to the noblest boy,

to the boy who should show the most promise of becoming a large-hearted, high-motived man. 109

Character exhibits itself in conduct, guided and inspired by principle, integrity, and practical wisdom. In its highest form, it is the individual will acting energetically under the influence of religion, morality, and reason. It chooses its way considerately, and pursues it steadfastly; esteeming duty above reputation, and the approval of conscience more than the world's praise. While respecting the personality of others, it preserves its own individuality and independence; and has the courage to be morally honest, though it may be unpopular, trusting tranquilly to time and experience for recognition.

Although the force of example will always exercise great influence upon the formation of character, the self-originating and sustaining force of one's own spirit must be the mainstay. This alone can hold up the life, and give individual independence and energy. "Unless man can erect himself above himself," said Daniel, a poet of the Elizabethan era, "how poor a thing is man!" Without a certain degree of practical efficient force—compounded of will, which is the root, and wisdom, which is the stem of character—life will be indefinite and purposeless—like a body of stagnant water, instead of a running stream doing useful work and keeping the machinery of a district in motion.

When the elements of character are brought into action by determinate will, and, influenced by high purpose, man enters upon and courageously perseveres in the path of duty, at whatever cost of worldly interest, he may be said to

approach the summit of his being. He then exhibits character in its most intrepid form, and embodies the highest idea of manliness. The acts of such a man become repeated in the life and action of others. His very words live and become actions. Thus every word of Luther's rang through Germany like a trumpet. As Richter said of him, "His words were half-battles." And thus Luther's life became transfused into the life of his country, and still lives in the character of modern Germany.

On the other hand, energy, without integrity and a soul of goodness, may only represent the embodied principle of evil. It is observed by Novalis, in his 'Thoughts on Morals,' that the ideal of moral perfection has no more dangerous rival to contend with than the ideal of the highest strength and the most energetic life, the maximum of the barbarian —which needs only a due admixture of pride, ambition, and selfishness, to be a perfect ideal of the devil. Amongst men of such stamp are found the greatest scourges and devastators of the world—those elect scoundrels whom Providence, in its inscrutable designs, permits to fulfil their mission of destruction upon earth. 1010

Very different is the man of energetic character inspired by a noble spirit, whose actions are governed by rectitude, and the law of whose life is duty. He is just and upright,—in his business dealings, in his public action, and in his family life—justice being as essential in the government of a home as of a nation. He will be honest in all things—in his words and in his work. He will be generous and merciful to his opponents, as well as to those who are weaker than himself.

It was truly said of Sheridan—who, with all his improvidence, was generous, and never gave pain—that,

"His wit in the combat, as gentle as bright,
Never carried a heart-stain away on its blade."

Such also was the character of Fox, who commanded the affection and service of others by his uniform heartiness and sympathy. He was a man who could always be most easily touched on the side of his honour. Thus, the story is told of a tradesman calling upon him one day for the payment of a promissory note which he presented. Fox was engaged at the time in counting out gold. The tradesman asked to be paid from the money before him. "No," said Fox, "I owe this money to Sheridan; it is a debt of honour; if any accident happened to me, he would have nothing to show." "Then," said the tradesman, "I change MY debt into one of honour;" and he tore up the note. Fox was conquered by the act: he thanked the man for his confidence, and paid him, saying, "Then Sheridan must wait; yours is the debt of older standing."

The man of character is conscientious. He puts his conscience into his work, into his words, into his every action. When Cromwell asked the Parliament for soldiers in lieu of the decayed serving-men and tapsters who filled the Commonwealth's army, he required that they should be men "who made some conscience of what they did;" and such were the men of which his celebrated regiment of "Ironsides" was composed.

The man of character is also reverential. The possession of this quality marks the noblest, and highest type of manhood and womanhood: reverence for things consecrated by the homage of generations—for high

objects, pure thoughts, and noble aims—for the great men of former times, and the highminded workers amongst our contemporaries. Reverence is alike indispensable to the happiness of individuals, of families, and of nations. Without it there can be no trust, no faith, no confidence, either in man or God—neither social peace nor social progress. For reverence is but another word for religion, which binds men to each other, and all to God.

"The man of noble spirit," says Sir Thomas Overbury, "converts all occurrences into experience, between which experience and his reason there is marriage, and the issue are his actions. He moves by affection, not for affection; he loves glory, scorns shame, and governeth and obeyeth with one countenance, for it comes from one consideration. Knowing reason to be no idle gift of nature, he is the steersman of his own destiny. Truth is his goddess, and he takes pains to get her, not to look like her. Unto the society of men he is a sun, whose clearness directs their steps in a regular motion. He is the wise man's friend, the example of the indifferent, the medicine of the vicious. Thus time goeth not from him, but with him, and he feels age more by the strength of his soul than by the weakness of his body. Thus feels he no pain, but esteems all such things as friends, that desire to file off his fetters, and help him out of prison." 1011

Energy of will—self-originating force—is the soul of every great character. Where it is, there is life; where it is not, there is faintness, helplessness, and despondency. "The strong man and the waterfall," says the proverb, "channel their own path." The energetic leader of noble spirit not only wins a way for himself, but carries others with him. His

every act has a personal significance, indicating vigour, independence, and self-reliance, and unconsciously commands respect, admiration, and homage. Such intrepidity of character characterised Luther, Cromwell, Washington, Pitt, Wellington, and all great leaders of men.

"I am convinced," said Mr. Gladstone, in describing the qualities of the late Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons, shortly after his death—"I am convinced that it was the force of will, a sense of duty, and a determination not to give in, that enabled him to make himself a model for all of us who yet remain and follow him, with feeble and unequal steps, in the discharge of our duties; it was that force of will that in point of fact did not so much struggle against the infirmities of old age, but actually repelled them and kept them at a distance. And one other quality there is, at least, that may be noticed without the smallest risk of stirring in any breast a painful emotion. It is this, that Lord Palmerston had a nature incapable of enduring anger or any sentiment of wrath. This freedom from wrathful sentiment was not the result of painful effort, but the spontaneous fruit of the mind. It was a noble gift of his original nature—a gift which beyond all others it was delightful to observe, delightful also to remember in connection with him who has left us, and with whom we have no longer to do, except in endeavouring to profit by his example wherever it can lead us in the path of duty and of right, and of bestowing on him those tributes of admiration and affection which he deserves at our hands."

The great leader attracts to himself men of kindred character, drawing them towards him as the loadstone

draws iron. Thus, Sir John Moore early distinguished the three brothers Napier from the crowd of officers by whom he was surrounded, and they, on their part, repaid him by their passionate admiration. They were captivated by his courtesy, his bravery, and his lofty disinterestedness; and he became the model whom they resolved to imitate, and, if possible, to emulate. "Moore's influence," says the biographer of Sir William Napier, "had a signal effect in forming and maturing their characters; and it is no small glory to have been the hero of those three men, while his early discovery of their mental and moral qualities is a proof of Moore's own penetration and judgment of character."

There is a contagiousness in every example of energetic conduct. The brave man is an inspiration to the weak, and compels them, as it were, to follow him. Thus Napier relates that at the combat of Vera, when the Spanish centre was broken and in flight, a young officer, named Havelock, sprang forward, and, waving his hat, called upon the Spaniards within sight to follow him. Putting spurs to his horse, he leapt the abbatis which protected the French front, and went headlong against them. The Spaniards were electrified; in a moment they dashed after him, cheering for "EL CHICO BLANCO!" [10the fair boy], and with one shock they broke through the French and sent them flying downhill. 1012

And so it is in ordinary life. The good and the great draw others after them; they lighten and lift up all who are within reach of their influence. They are as so many living centres of beneficent activity. Let a man of energetic and upright character be appointed to a position of trust and authority,

and all who serve under him become, as it were, conscious of an increase of power. When Chatham was appointed minister, his personal influence was at once felt through all the ramifications of office. Every sailor who served under Nelson, and knew he was in command, shared the inspiration of the hero.

When Washington consented to act as commander-in-chief, it was felt as if the strength of the American forces had been more than doubled. Many years late; in 1798, when Washington, grown old, had withdrawn from public life and was living in retirement at Mount Vernon, and when it seemed probable that France would declare war against the United States, President Adams wrote to him, saying, "We must have your name, if you will permit us to use it; there will be more efficacy in it than in many an army." Such was the esteem in which the great President's noble character and eminent abilities were held by his countrymen! 1013

An incident is related by the historian of the Peninsular War, illustrative of the personal influence exercised by a great commander over his followers. The British army lay at Sauroren, before which Soult was advancing, prepared to attack, in force. Wellington was absent, and his arrival was anxiously looked for. Suddenly a single horseman was seen riding up the mountain alone. It was the Duke, about to join his troops. One of Campbell's Portuguese battalions first descried him, and raised a joyful cry; then the shrill clamour, caught up by the next regiment, soon swelled as it ran along the line into that appalling shout which the British soldier is wont to give upon the edge of battle, and which no enemy ever heard unmoved. Suddenly he stopped at a

conspicuous point, for he desired both armies should know he was there, and a double spy who was present pointed out Soult, who was so near that his features could be distinguished. Attentively Wellington fixed his eyes on that formidable man, and, as if speaking to himself, he said: "Yonder is a great commander; but he is cautious, and will delay his attack to ascertain the cause of those cheers; that will give time for the Sixth Division to arrive, and I shall beat him"—which he did. 1014

In some cases, personal character acts by a kind of talismanic influence, as if certain men were the organs of a sort of supernatural force. "If I but stamp on the ground in Italy," said Pompey, "an army will appear." At the voice of Peter the Hermit, as described by the historian, "Europe arose, and precipitated itself upon Asia." It was said of the Caliph Omar that his walking-stick struck more terror into those who saw it than another man's sword. The very names of some men are like the sound of a trumpet. When the Douglas lay mortally wounded on the field of Otterburn, he ordered his name to be shouted still louder than before, saying there was a tradition in his family that a dead Douglas should win a battle. His followers, inspired by the sound, gathered fresh courage, rallied, and conquered; and thus, in the words of the Scottish poet:—

"The Douglas dead, his name hath won the field." 1015

There have been some men whose greatest conquests have been achieved after they themselves were dead. "Never," says Michelet, "was Caesar more alive, more powerful, more terrible, than when his old and worn-out body, his withered corpse, lay pierced with blows; he

appeared then purified, redeemed,—that which he had been, despite his many stains—the man of humanity." [1016] Never did the great character of William of Orange, surnamed the Silent, exercise greater power over his countrymen than after his assassination at Delft by the emissary of the Jesuits. On the very day of his murder the Estates of Holland resolved "to maintain the good cause, with God's help, to the uttermost, without sparing gold or blood;" and they kept their word.

The same illustration applies to all history and morals. The career of a great man remains an enduring monument of human energy. The man dies and disappears; but his thoughts and acts survive, and leave an indelible stamp upon his race. And thus the spirit of his life is prolonged and perpetuated, moulding the thought and will, and thereby contributing to form the character of the future. It is the men that advance in the highest and best directions, who are the true beacons of human progress. They are as lights set upon a hill, illumining the moral atmosphere around them; and the light of their spirit continues to shine upon all succeeding generations.

It is natural to admire and revere really great men. They hallow the nation to which they belong, and lift up not only all who live in their time, but those who live after them. Their great example becomes the common heritage of their race; and their great deeds and great thoughts are the most glorious of legacies to mankind. They connect the present with the past, and help on the increasing purpose of the future; holding aloft the standard of principle, maintaining the dignity of human character, and filling the mind with

traditions and instincts of all that is most worthy and noble in life.

Character, embodied in thought and deed, is of the nature of immortality. The solitary thought of a great thinker will dwell in the minds of men for centuries until at length it works itself into their daily life and practice. It lives on through the ages, speaking as a voice from the dead, and influencing minds living thousands of years apart. Thus, Moses and David and Solomon, Plato and Socrates and Xenophon, Seneca and Cicero and Epictetus, still speak to us as from their tombs. They still arrest the attention, and exercise an influence upon character, though their thoughts be conveyed in languages unspoken by them and in their time unknown. Theodore Parker has said that a single man like Socrates was worth more to a country than many such states as South Carolina; that if that state went out of the world to-day, she would not have done so much for the world as Socrates. 1017

Great workers and great thinkers are the true makers of history, which is but continuous humanity influenced by men of character—by great leaders, kings, priests, philosophers, statesmen, and patriots—the true aristocracy of man. Indeed, Mr. Carlyle has broadly stated that Universal History is, at bottom, but the history of Great Men. They certainly mark and designate the epochs of national life. Their influence is active, as well as reactive. Though their mind is, in a measure; the product of their age, the public mind is also, to a great extent, their creation. Their individual action identifies the cause—the institution. They think great thoughts, cast them abroad, and the thoughts

make events. Thus the early Reformers initiated the Reformation, and with it the liberation of modern thought. Emerson has said that every institution is to be regarded as but the lengthened shadow of some great man: as Islamism of Mahomet, Puritanism of Calvin, Jesuitism of Loyola, Quakerism of Fox, Methodism of Wesley, Abolitionism of Clarkson.

Great men stamp their mind upon their age and nation—as Luther did upon modern Germany, and Knox upon Scotland. 1018 And if there be one man more than another that stamped his mind on modern Italy, it was Dante. During the long centuries of Italian degradation his burning words were as a watchfire and a beacon to all true men. He was the herald of his nation's liberty—braving persecution, exile, and death, for the love of it. He was always the most national of the Italian poets, the most loved, the most read. From the time of his death all educated Italians had his best passages by heart; and the sentiments they enshrined inspired their lives, and eventually influenced the history of their nation. "The Italians," wrote Byron in 1821, "talk Dante, write Dante, and think and dream Dante, at this moment, to an excess which would be ridiculous, but that he deserves their admiration." 1019

A succession of variously gifted men in different ages—extending from Alfred to Albert—has in like manner contributed, by their life and example, to shape the multiform character of England. Of these, probably the most influential were the men of the Elizabethan and Cromwellian, and the intermediate periods—amongst which we find the great names of Shakspeare, Raleigh, Burleigh,

Sidney, Bacon, Milton, Herbert, Hampden, Pym, Eliot, Vane, Cromwell, and many more—some of them men of great force, and others of great dignity and purity of character. The lives of such men have become part of the public life of England, and their deeds and thoughts are regarded as among the most cherished bequeathments from the past.

So Washington left behind him, as one of the greatest treasures of his country, the example of a stainless life—of a great, honest, pure, and noble character—a model for his nation to form themselves by in all time to come. And in the case of Washington, as in so many other great leaders of men, his greatness did not so much consist in his intellect, his skill, and his genius, as in his honour, his integrity, his truthfulness, his high and controlling sense of duty—in a word, in his genuine nobility of character.

Men such as these are the true lifeblood of the country to which they belong. They elevate and uphold it, fortify and ennoble it, and shed a glory over it by the example of life and character which they have bequeathed. "The names and memories of great men," says an able writer, "are the dowry of a nation. Widowhood, overthrow, desertion, even slavery, cannot take away from her this sacred inheritance.... Whenever national life begins to quicken.... the dead heroes rise in the memories of men, and appear to the living to stand by in solemn spectatorship and approval. No country can be lost which feels herself overlooked by such glorious witnesses. They are the salt of the earth, in death as well as in life. What they did once, their descendants have still and always a right to do after them; and their example lives in their country, a continual

stimulant and encouragement for him who has the soul to adopt it." 1020

But it is not great men only that have to be taken into account in estimating the qualities of a nation, but the character that pervades the great body of the people. When Washington Irving visited Abbotsford, Sir Walter Scott introduced him to many of his friends and favourites, not only amongst the neighbouring farmers, but the labouring peasantry. "I wish to show you," said Scott, "some of our really excellent plain Scotch people. The character of a nation is not to be learnt from its fine folks, its fine gentlemen and ladies; such you meet everywhere, and they are everywhere the same." While statesmen, philosophers, and divines represent the thinking power of society, the men who found industries and carve out new careers, as well as the common body of working-people, from whom the national strength and spirit are from time to time recruited, must necessarily furnish the vital force and constitute the real backbone of every nation.

Nations have their character to maintain as well as individuals; and under constitutional governments—where all classes more or less participate in the exercise of political power—the national character will necessarily depend more upon the moral qualities of the many than of the few. And the same qualities which determine the character of individuals, also determine the character of nations. Unless they are highminded, truthful, honest, virtuous, and courageous, they will be held in light esteem by other nations, and be without weight in the world. To have character, they must needs also be reverential, disciplined,

self-controlling, and devoted to duty. The nation that has no higher god than pleasure, or even dollars or calico, must needs be in a poor way. It were better to revert to Homer's gods than be devoted to these; for the heathen deities at least imaged human virtues, and were something to look up to.

As for institutions, however good in themselves, they will avail but little in maintaining the standard of national character. It is the individual men, and the spirit which actuates them, that determine the moral standing and stability of nations. Government, in the long run, is usually no better than the people governed. Where the mass is sound in conscience, morals, and habit, the nation will be ruled honestly and nobly. But where they are corrupt, self-seeking, and dishonest in heart, bound neither by truth nor by law, the rule of rogues and wirepullers becomes inevitable.

The only true barrier against the despotism of public opinion, whether it be of the many or of the few, is enlightened individual freedom and purity of personal character. Without these there can be no vigorous manhood, no true liberty in a nation. Political rights, however broadly framed, will not elevate a people individually depraved. Indeed, the more complete a system of popular suffrage, and the more perfect its protection, the more completely will the real character of a people be reflected, as by a mirror, in their laws and government. Political morality can never have any solid existence on a basis of individual immorality. Even freedom, exercised by a debased people,

would come to be regarded as a nuisance, and liberty of the press but a vent for licentiousness and moral abomination.

Nations, like individuals, derive support and strength from the feeling that they belong to an illustrious race, that they are the heirs of their greatness, and ought to be the perpetuators of their glory. It is of momentous importance that a nation should have a great past 1021 to look back upon. It steadies the life of the present, elevates and upholds it, and lightens and lifts it up, by the memory of the great deeds, the noble sufferings, and the valorous achievements of the men of old. The life of nations, as of men, is a great treasury of experience, which, wisely used, issues in social progress and improvement; or, misused, issues in dreams, delusions, and failure. Like men, nations are purified and strengthened by trials. Some of the most glorious chapters in their history are those containing the record of the sufferings by means of which their character has been developed. Love of liberty and patriotic feeling may have done much, but trial and suffering nobly borne more than all.

A great deal of what passes by the name of patriotism in these days consists of the merest bigotry and narrow-mindedness; exhibiting itself in national prejudice, national conceit, amid national hatred. It does not show itself in deeds, but in boastings—in howlings, gesticulations, and shrieking helplessly for help—in flying flags and singing songs—and in perpetual grinding at the hurdy-gurdy of long-dead grievances and long-remedied wrongs. To be infested by SUCH a patriotism as this is, perhaps, amongst the greatest curses that can befall any country.

But as there is an ignoble, so is there a noble patriotism—the patriotism that invigorates and elevates a country by noble work—that does its duty truthfully and manfully—that lives an honest, sober, and upright life, and strives to make the best use of the opportunities for improvement that present themselves on every side; and at the same time a patriotism that cherishes the memory and example of the great men of old, who, by their sufferings in the cause of religion or of freedom, have won for themselves a deathless glory, and for their nation those privileges of free life and free institutions of which they are the inheritors and possessors.

Nations are not to be judged by their size any more than individuals: