

# GEORGE MACDONALD

A DISH OF ORTS :  
CHIEFLY PAPERS ON THE  
IMAGINATION, AND ON  
SHAKESPEARE

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the Imagination, and on Shakespeare**

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# George MacDonald

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### PREFACE

Since printing throughout the title *Orts*, a doubt has arisen in my mind as to its fitting the nature of the volume. It could hardly, however, be imagined that I associate the idea of *worthlessness* with the work contained in it. No one would insult his readers by offering them what he counted valueless scraps, and telling them they were such. These papers, those two even which were caught in the net of the ready-writer from extempore utterance, whatever their merits in themselves; are the results of by no means trifling labour. So much a man *ought* to be able to say for his work. And hence I might defend, if not quite justify my title—for they are but fragmentary presentments of larger meditation. My friends at least will accept them as such, whether they like their collective title or not.

The title of the last is not quite suitable. It is that of the religious newspaper which reported the sermon. I noted the fact too late for correction. It ought to be *True Greatness*.

The paper on *The Fantastic Imagination* had its origin in the repeated request of readers for an explanation of things in certain shorter stories I had written. It forms the preface to an American edition of my so-called Fairy Tales.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

EDENBRIDGE, KENT. *August 5, 1893.*

## THE IMAGINATION: ITS FUNCTIONS AND ITS CULTURE

[Footnote: 1867.]

There are in whose notion education would seem to consist in the production of a certain repose through the development of this and that faculty, and the depression, if not eradication, of this and that other faculty. But if mere repose were the end in view, an unsparing depression of all the faculties would be the surest means of approaching it, provided always the animal instincts could be depressed likewise, or, better still, kept in a state of constant repletion. Happily, however, for the human race, it possesses in the passion of hunger even, a more immediate saviour than in the wisest selection and treatment of its faculties. For repose is not the end of education; its end is a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future, an urging on of the motions of life, which had better far be accelerated into fever, than retarded into lethargy.

By those who consider a balanced repose the end of culture, the imagination must necessarily be regarded as the one faculty before all others to be suppressed. “Are there not facts?” say they. “Why forsake them for fancies? Is there not that which, may be *known*? Why forsake it for inventions? What God hath made, into that let man inquire.”

We answer: To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination. It is aroused by facts, is nourished by facts; seeks for higher and yet higher laws in those facts; but refuses to regard science as the sole interpreter of nature, or the laws of science as the only region of discovery.

We must begin with a definition of the word *imagination*, or rather some description of the faculty to which we give the name.

The word itself means an *imaging* or a making of likenesses. The imagination is that faculty which gives form to thought—not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any mode upon which the senses can lay hold. It is, therefore, that faculty in man which is likeliest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the *creative* faculty, and its exercise *creation*. *Poet* means *maker*. We must not forget, however, that between creator and poet lies the one unpassable gulf which distinguishes—far be it from us to say *divides*—all that is God’s from all that is man’s; a gulf teeming with infinite revelations, but a gulf over which no man can pass to find out God, although God needs not to pass over it to find man; the gulf between that which calls, and that which is thus called into being; between that which makes in its own image and that which is made in that image. It is better to keep the word *creation* for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God; except it be as an occasional symbolic expression, whose daring is fully recognized, of the likeness of man’s work to the work of his maker. The necessary unlikeness between the creator and the created holds within it the equally necessary likeness of the thing made to him who makes it, and so of the work of the made to the work of the maker. When therefore, refusing to employ the word *creation* of the work of man, we yet use the word *imagination* of the work of God, we cannot be said to dare at all. It is only to give the name of man’s faculty to that power after which and by which it was fashioned. The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God. Everything of man must have been of God first; and it will help much towards our understanding of the imagination and its functions in man if we first succeed in regarding aright the imagination of God, in which the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being.

As to *what* thought is in the mind of God ere it takes form, or what the form is to him ere he utters it; in a word, what the consciousness of God is in either case, all we can say is, that our consciousness in the resembling conditions must, afar off, resemble his. But when we come to consider

the acts embodying the Divine thought (if indeed thought and act be not with him one and the same), then we enter a region of large difference. We discover at once, for instance, that where a man would make a machine, or a picture, or a book, God makes the man that makes the book, or the picture, or the machine. Would God give us a drama? He makes a Shakespere. Or would he construct a drama more immediately his own? He begins with the building of the stage itself, and that stage is a world—a universe of worlds. He makes the actors, and they do not act,—they *are* their part. He utters them into the visible to work out their life—his drama. When he would have an epic, he sends a thinking hero into his drama, and the epic is the soliloquy of his Hamlet. Instead of writing his lyrics, he sets his birds and his maidens a-singing. All the processes of the ages are God's science; all the flow of history is his poetry. His sculpture is not in marble, but in living and speech-giving forms, which pass away, not to yield place to those that come after, but to be perfected in a nobler studio. What he has done remains, although it vanishes; and he never either forgets what he has once done, or does it even once again. As the thoughts move in the mind of a man, so move the worlds of men and women in the mind of God, and make no confusion there, for there they had their birth, the offspring of his imagination. Man is but a thought of God.

If we now consider the so-called creative faculty in man, we shall find that in no *primary* sense is this faculty creative. Indeed, a man is rather *being thought* than *thinking*, when a new thought arises in his mind. He knew it not till he found it there, therefore he could not even have sent for it. He did not create it, else how could it be the surprise that it was when it arose? He may, indeed, in rare instances foresee that something is coming, and make ready the place for its birth; but that is the utmost relation of consciousness and will he can bear to the dawning idea. Leaving this aside, however, and turning to the *embodiment* or revelation of thought, we shall find that a man no more *creates* the forms by which he would reveal his thoughts, than he creates those thoughts themselves.

For what are the forms by means of which a man may reveal his thoughts? Are they not those of nature? But although he is created in the closest sympathy with these forms, yet even these forms are not born in his mind. What springs there is the perception that this or that form is already an expression of this or that phase of thought or of feeling. For the world around him is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind; an inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents—the crystal pitchers that shall protect his thought and not need to be broken that the light may break forth. The meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling. God has made the world that it should thus serve his creature, developing in the service that imagination whose necessity it meets. The man has but to light the lamp within the form: his imagination is the light, it is not the form. Straightway the shining thought makes the form visible, and becomes itself visible through the form. [Footnote: We would not be understood to say that the man works consciously even in this. Oftentimes, if not always, the vision arises in the mind, thought and form together.]

In illustration of what we mean, take a passage from the poet Shelley.

In his poem *Adonais*, written upon the death of Keats, representing death as the revealer of secrets, he says:—

“The one remains; the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light for ever shines; earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
Until death tramples it to fragments.”

This is a new embodiment, certainly, whence he who gains not, for the moment at least, a loftier feeling of death, must be dull either of heart or of understanding. But has Shelley created this figure, or only put together its parts according to the harmony of truths already embodied in each of the

parts? For first he takes the inventions of his fellow-men, in glass, in colour, in dome: with these he represents life as finite though elevated, and as an analysis although a lovely one. Next he presents eternity as the dome of the sky above this dome of coloured glass—the sky having ever been regarded as the true symbol of eternity. This portion of the figure he enriches by the attribution of whiteness, or unity and radiance. And last, he shows us Death as the destroying revealer, walking aloft through, the upper region, treading out this life-bubble of colours, that the man may look beyond it and behold the true, the uncoloured, the all-coloured.

But although the human imagination has no choice but to make use of the forms already prepared for it, its operation is the same as that of the divine inasmuch as it does put thought into form. And if it be to man what creation is to God, we must expect to find it operative in every sphere of human activity. Such is, indeed, the fact, and that to a far greater extent than is commonly supposed.

The sovereignty of the imagination, for instance, over the region of poetry will hardly, in the present day at least, be questioned; but not every one is prepared to be told that the imagination has had nearly as much to do with the making of our language as with “Macbeth” or the “Paradise Lost.” The half of our language is the work of the imagination.

For how shall two agree together what name they shall give to a thought or a feeling. How shall the one show the other that which is invisible? True, he can unveil the mind’s construction in the face—that living eternally changeful symbol which God has hung in front of the unseen spirit—but that without words reaches only to the expression of present feeling. To attempt to employ it alone for the conveyance of the intellectual or the historical would constantly mislead; while the expression of feeling itself would be misinterpreted, especially with regard to cause and object: the dumb show would be worse than dumb.

But let a man become aware of some new movement within him. Loneliness comes with it, for he would share his mind with his friend, and he cannot; he is shut up in speechlessness. Thus

He *may* live a man forbid  
Weary seven nights nine times nine,

or the first moment of his perplexity may be that of his release. Gazing about him in pain, he suddenly beholds the material form of his immaterial condition. There stands his thought! God thought it before him, and put its picture there ready for him when he wanted it. Or, to express the thing more prosaically, the man cannot look around him long without perceiving some form, aspect, or movement of nature, some relation between its forms, or between such and himself which resembles the state or motion within him. This he seizes as the symbol, as the garment or body of his invisible thought, presents it to his friend, and his friend understands him. Every word so employed with a new meaning is henceforth, in its new character, born of the spirit and not of the flesh, born of the imagination and not of the understanding, and is henceforth submitted to new laws of growth and modification.

“Thinkest thou,” says Carlyle in “Past and Present,” “there were no poets till Dan Chaucer? No heart burning with a thought which it could not hold, and had no word for; and needed to shape and coin a word for—what thou callest a metaphor, trope, or the like? For every word we have there was such a man and poet. The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor and bold questionable originality. Thy very ATTENTION, does it not mean an *attentio*, a STRETCHING-TO? Fancy that act of the mind, which all were conscious of, which none had yet named,—when this new poet first felt bound and driven to name it. His questionable originality and new glowing metaphor was found adoptable, intelligible, and remains our name for it to this day.”

All words, then, belonging to the inner world of the mind, are of the imagination, are originally poetic words. The better, however, any such word is fitted for the needs of humanity, the sooner it loses its poetic aspect by commonness of use. It ceases to be heard as a symbol, and appears only

as a sign. Thus thousands of words which were originally poetic words owing their existence to the imagination, lose their vitality, and harden into mummies of prose. Not merely in literature does poetry come first, and prose afterwards, but poetry is the source of all the language that belongs to the inner world, whether it be of passion or of metaphysics, of psychology or of aspiration. No poetry comes by the elevation of prose; but the half of prose comes by the “massing into the common clay” of thousands of winged words, whence, like the lovely shells of by-gone ages, one is occasionally disinterred by some lover of speech, and held up to the light to show the play of colour in its manifold laminations.

For the world is—allow us the homely figure—the human being turned inside out. All that moves in the mind is symbolized in Nature. Or, to use another more philosophical, and certainly not less poetic figure, the world is a sensuous analysis of humanity, and hence an inexhaustible wardrobe for the clothing of human thought. Take any word expressive of emotion—take the word *emotion* itself—and you will find that its primary meaning is of the outer world. In the swaying of the woods, in the unrest of the “wavy plain,” the imagination saw the picture of a well-known condition of the human mind; and hence the word *emotion*. [Footnote: This passage contains only a repetition of what is far better said in the preceding extract from Carlyle, but it was written before we had read (if reviewers may be allowed to confess such ignorance) the book from which that extract is taken.]

But while the imagination of man has thus the divine function of putting thought into form, it has a duty altogether human, which is paramount to that function—the duty, namely, which springs from his immediate relation to the Father, that of following and finding out the divine imagination in whose image it was made. To do this, the man must watch its signs, its manifestations. He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of His hands.

“But to follow those is the province of the intellect, not of the imagination.”—We will leave out of the question at present that poetic interpretation of the works of Nature with which the intellect has almost nothing, and the imagination almost everything, to do. It is unnecessary to insist that the higher being of a flower even is dependent for its reception upon the human imagination; that science may pull the snowdrop to shreds, but cannot find out the idea of suffering hope and pale confident submission, for the sake of which that darling of the spring looks out of heaven, namely, God’s heart, upon us his wiser and more sinful children; for if there be any truth in this region of things acknowledged at all, it will be at the same time acknowledged that that region belongs to the imagination. We confine ourselves to that questioning of the works of God which is called the province of science.

“Shall, then, the human intellect,” we ask, “come into readier contact with the divine imagination than that human imagination?” The work of the Higher must be discovered by the search of the Lower in degree which is yet similar in kind. Let us not be supposed to exclude the intellect from a share in every highest office. Man is not divided when the manifestations of his life are distinguished. The intellect “is all in every part.” There were no imagination without intellect, however much it may appear that intellect can exist without imagination. What we mean to insist upon is, that in finding out the works of God, the Intellect must labour, workman-like, under the direction of the architect, Imagination. Herein, too, we proceed in the hope to show how much more than is commonly supposed the imagination has to do with human endeavour; how large a share it has in the work that is done under the sun.

“But how can the imagination have anything to do with science? That region, at least, is governed by fixed laws.”

“True,” we answer. “But how much do we know of these laws? How much of science already belongs to the region of the ascertained—in other words, has been conquered by the intellect? We will not now dispute, your vindication of the *ascertained* from the intrusion of the imagination; but we do claim for it all the undiscovered, all the unexplored.” “Ah, well! There it can do little harm. There let it run riot if you will.” “No,” we reply. “Licence is not what we claim when we assert the

duty of the imagination to be that of following and finding out the work that God maketh. Her part is to understand God ere she attempts to utter man. Where is the room for being fanciful or riotous here? It is only the ill-bred, that is, the uncultivated imagination that will amuse itself where it ought to worship and work.”

“But the facts of Nature are to be discovered only by observation and experiment.” True. But how does the man of science come to think of his experiments? Does observation reach to the non-present, the possible, the yet unconceived? Even if it showed you the experiments which *ought* to be made, will observation reveal to you the experiments which *might* be made? And who can tell of which kind is the one that carries in its bosom the secret of the law you seek? We yield you your facts. The laws we claim for the prophetic imagination. “He hath set the world *in* man’s heart,” not in his understanding. And the heart must open the door to the understanding. It is the far-seeing imagination which beholds what might be a form of things, and says to the intellect: “Try whether that may not be the form of these things;” which beholds or invents a harmonious relation of parts and operations, and sends the intellect to find out whether that be not *the* harmonious relation of them—that is, the law of the phenomenon it contemplates. Nay, the poetic relations themselves in the phenomenon may suggest to the imagination the law that rules its scientific life. Yea, more than this: we dare to claim for the true, childlike, humble imagination, such an inward oneness with the laws of the universe that it possesses in itself an insight into the very nature of things.

Lord Bacon tells us that a prudent question is the half of knowledge. Whence comes this prudent question? we repeat. And we answer, From the imagination. It is the imagination that suggests in what direction to make the new inquiry—which, should it cast no immediate light on the answer sought, can yet hardly fail to be a step towards final discovery. Every experiment has its origin in hypothesis; without the scaffolding of hypothesis, the house of science could never arise. And the construction of any hypothesis whatever is the work of the imagination. The man who cannot invent will never discover. The imagination often gets a glimpse of the law itself long before it is or can be *ascertained* to be a law. [Footnote: This paper was already written when, happening to mention the present subject to a mathematical friend, a lecturer at one of the universities, he gave us a corroborative instance. He had lately *guessed* that a certain algebraic process could be shortened exceedingly if the method which his imagination suggested should prove to be a true one—that is, an algebraic law. He put it to the test of experiment—committed the verification, that is, into the hands of his intellect—and found the method true. It has since been accepted by the Royal Society.

Noteworthy illustration we have lately found in the record of the experiences of an Edinburgh detective, an Irishman of the name of McLevy. That the service of the imagination in the solution of the problems peculiar to his calling is well known to him, we could adduce many proofs. He recognizes its function in the construction of the theory which shall unite this and that hint into an organic whole, and he expressly sets forth the need of a theory before facts can be serviceable:—

“I would wait for my ‘idea’... I never did any good without mine.... Chance never smiled on me unless I poked her some way; so that my ‘notion,’ after all, has been in the getting of it my own work only perfected by a higher hand.”

“On leaving the shop I went direct to Prince’s Street,—of course with an idea in my mind; and somehow I have always been contented with one idea when I could not get another; and the advantage of sticking by one is, that the other don’t jostle it and turn you about in a circle when you should go in a straight line.” (Footnote: Since quoting the above I have learned that the book referred to is unworthy of confidence. But let it stand as illustration where it cannot be proof.)]

The region belonging to the pure intellect is straitened: the imagination labours to extend its territories, to give it room. She sweeps across the borders, searching out new lands into which she may guide her plodding brother. The imagination is the light which redeems from the darkness for the eyes of the understanding. Novalis says, “The imagination is the stuff of the intellect”—affords, that is, the material upon which the intellect works. And Bacon, in his “Advancement of Learning,”

fully recognizes this its office, corresponding to the foresight of God in this, that it beholds afar off. And he says: “Imagination is much akin to miracle-working faith.” [Footnote: We are sorry we cannot verify this quotation, for which we are indebted to Mr. Oldbuck the Antiquary, in the novel of that ilk. There is, however, little room for doubt that it is sufficiently correct.]

In the scientific region of her duty of which we speak, the Imagination cannot have her perfect work; this belongs to another and higher sphere than that of intellectual truth—that, namely, of full-globed humanity, operating in which she gives birth to poetry—truth in beauty. But her function in the complete sphere of our nature, will, at the same time, influence her more limited operation in the sections that belong to science. Coleridge says that no one but a poet will make any further *great* discoveries in mathematics; and Bacon says that “wonder,” that faculty of the mind especially attendant on the child-like imagination, “is the seed of knowledge.” The influence of the poetic upon the scientific imagination is, for instance, especially present in the construction of an invisible whole from the hints afforded by a visible part; where the needs of the part, its uselessness, its broken relations, are the only guides to a multiplex harmony, completeness, and end, which is the whole. From a little bone, worn with ages of death, older than the man can think, his scientific imagination dashed with the poetic, calls up the form, size, habits, periods, belonging to an animal never beheld by human eyes, even to the mingling contrasts of scales and wings, of feathers and hair. Through the combined lenses of science and imagination, we look back into ancient times, so dreadful in their incompleteness, that it may well have been the task of seraphic faith, as well as of cherubic imagination, to behold in the wallowing monstrosities of the terror-teeming earth, the prospective, quiet, age-long labour of God preparing the world with all its humble, graceful service for his unborn Man. The imagination of the poet, on the other hand, dashed with the imagination of the man of science, revealed to Goethe the prophecy of the flower in the leaf. No other than an artistic imagination, however, fulfilled of science, could have attained to the discovery of the fact that the leaf is the imperfect flower.

When we turn to history, however, we find probably the greatest operative sphere of the intellectuo-constructive imagination. To discover its laws; the cycles in which events return, with the reasons of their return, recognizing them notwithstanding metamorphosis; to perceive the vital motions of this spiritual body of mankind; to learn from its facts the rule of God; to construct from a succession of broken indications a whole accordant with human nature; to approach a scheme of the forces at work, the passions overwhelming or upheaving, the aspirations securely upraising, the selfishnesses debasing and crumbling, with the vital interworking of the whole; to illuminate all from the analogy with individual life, and from the predominant phases of individual character which are taken as the mind of the people—this is the province of the imagination. Without her influence no process of recording events can develop into a history. As truly might that be called the description of a volcano which occupied itself with a delineation of the shapes assumed by the smoke expelled from the mountain’s burning bosom. What history becomes under the full sway of the imagination may be seen in the “History of the French Revolution,” by Thomas Carlyle, at once a true picture, a philosophical revelation, a noble poem.

There is a wonderful passage about *Time* in Shakespere’s “Rape of Lucrece,” which shows how he understood history. The passage is really about history, and not about time; for time itself does nothing—not even “blot old books and alter their contents.” It is the forces at work in time that produce all the changes; and they are history. We quote for the sake of one line chiefly, but the whole stanza is pertinent.

“Time’s glory is to calm contending kings,  
To unmask falsehood, and bring truth to light,  
To stamp the seal of time in aged things,  
To wake the morn and sentinel the night,

*To wrong the wronger till he render right; To ruinat proud buildings  
with thy hours,  
And smear with dust their glittering golden towers.”*

*To wrong the wronger till he render right.* Here is a historical cycle worthy of the imagination of Shakespeare, yea, worthy of the creative imagination of our God—the God who made the Shakespeare with the imagination, as well as evolved the history from the laws which that imagination followed and found out.

In full instance we would refer our readers to Shakespeare’s historical plays; and, as a side-illustration, to the fact that he repeatedly represents his greatest characters, when at the point of death, as relieving their overcharged minds by prophecy. Such prophecy is the result of the light of imagination, cleared of all distorting dimness by the vanishing of earthly hopes and desires, cast upon the facts of experience. Such prophecy is the perfect working of the historical imagination.

In the interpretation of individual life, the same principles hold; and nowhere can the imagination be more healthily and rewardingly occupied than in endeavouring to construct the life of an individual out of the fragments which are all that can reach us of the history of even the noblest of our race. How this will apply to the reading of the gospel story we leave to the earnest thought of our readers.

We now pass to one more sphere in which the student imagination works in glad freedom—the sphere which is understood to belong more immediately to the poet.

We have already said that the forms of Nature (by which word *forms* we mean any of those conditions of Nature which affect the senses of man) are so many approximate representations of the mental conditions of humanity. The outward, commonly called the material, is *informed* by, or has form in virtue of, the inward or immaterial—in a word, the thought. The forms of Nature are the representations of human thought in virtue of their being the embodiment of God’s thought. As such, therefore, they can be read and used to any depth, shallow or profound. Men of all ages and all developments have discovered in them the means of expression; and the men of ages to come, before us in every path along which we are now striving, must likewise find such means in those forms, unfolding with their unfolding necessities. The man, then, who, in harmony with nature, attempts the discovery of more of her meanings, is just searching out the things of God. The deepest of these are far too simple for us to understand as yet. But let our imagination interpretive reveal to us one severed significance of one of her parts, and such is the harmony of the whole, that all the realm of Nature is open to us henceforth—not without labour—and in time. Upon the man who can understand the human meaning of the snowdrop, of the primrose, or of the daisy, the life of the earth blossoming into the cosmical flower of a perfect moment will one day seize, possessing him with its prophetic hope, arousing his conscience with the vision of the “rest that remaineth,” and stirring up the aspiration to enter into that rest:

“Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve!  
But long as godlike wish, or hope divine,  
Informs my spirit, ne’er can I believe  
That this magnificence is wholly thine!  
—From worlds not quickened by the sun  
A portion of the gift is won;  
An intermingling of Heaven’s pomp is spread  
On ground which British shepherds tread!”

Even the careless curve of a frozen cloud across the blue will calm some troubled thoughts, may slay some selfish thoughts. And what shall be said of such gorgeous shows as the scarlet poppies in

the green corn, the likest we have to those lilies of the field which spoke to the Saviour himself of the care of God, and rejoiced His eyes with the glory of their God-devised array? From such visions as these the imagination reaps the best fruits of the earth, for the sake of which all the science involved in its construction, is the inferior, yet willing and beautiful support.

From what we have now advanced, will it not then appear that, on the whole, the name given by our Norman ancestors is more fitting for the man who moves in these regions than the name given by the Greeks? Is not the *Poet*, the *Maker*, a less suitable name for him than the *Trouvère*, the *Finder*? At least, must not the faculty that finds precede the faculty that utters?

But is there nothing to be said of the function of the imagination from the Greek side of the question? Does it possess no creative faculty? Has it no originating power?

Certainly it would be a poor description of the Imagination which omitted the one element especially present to the mind that invented the word *Poet*.—It can present us with new thought-forms—new, that is, as revelations of thought. It has created none of the material that goes to make these forms. Nor does it work upon raw material. But it takes forms already existing, and gathers them about a thought so much higher than they, that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought. [Footnote: Just so Spenser describes the process of the embodiment of a human soul in his Platonic “Hymn in Honour of Beauty.”]

“She frames her house in which she will be placed  
Fit for herself....  
And the gross matter by a sovereign might  
Tempers so trim....  
For of the soul the body form doth take;  
For soul is form, and doth the body make.”]

The nature of this process we will illustrate by an examination of the well-known *Bugle Song* in Tennyson’s “Princess.”

First of all, there is the new music of the song, which does not even remind one of the music of any other. The rhythm, rhyme, melody, harmony are all an embodiment in sound, as distinguished from word, of what can be so embodied—the *feeling* of the poem, which goes before, and prepares the way for the following thought—tunes the heart into a receptive harmony. Then comes the new arrangement of thought and figure whereby the meaning contained is presented as it never was before. We give a sort of paraphractical synopsis of the poem, which, partly in virtue of its disagreeableness, will enable the lovers of the song to return to it with an increase of pleasure.

The glory of midsummer mid-day upon mountain, lake, and ruin. Give nature a voice for her gladness. Blow, bugle.

Nature answers with dying echoes, sinking in the midst of her splendour into a sad silence.

Not so with human nature. The echoes of the word of truth gather volume and richness from every soul that re-echoes it to brother and sister souls.

With poets the *fashion* has been to contrast the stability and rejuvenescence of nature with the evanescence and unreturning decay of humanity:—

“Yet soon reviving plants and flowers, anew shall deck the plain;  
The woods shall hear the voice of Spring, and flourish green again.  
But man forsakes this earthly scene, ah! never to return:  
Shall any following Spring revive the ashes of the urn?”

But our poet vindicates the eternal in humanity:—

“O Love, they die in yon rich sky,  
They faint on hill or field or river:  
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,  
And grow for ever and for ever.  
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying;  
And answer, echoes, answer, Dying, dying, dying.”

Is not this a new form to the thought—a form which makes us feel the truth of it afresh? And every new embodiment of a known truth must be a new and wider revelation. No man is capable of seeing for himself the whole of any truth: he needs it echoed back to him from every soul in the universe; and still its centre is hid in the Father of Lights. In so far, then, as either form or thought is new, we may grant the use of the word Creation, modified according to our previous definitions.

This operation of the imagination in choosing, gathering, and vitally combining the material of a new revelation, may be well illustrated from a certain employment of the poetic faculty in which our greatest poets have delighted. Perceiving truth half hidden and half revealed in the slow speech and stammering tongue of men who have gone before them, they have taken up the unfinished form and completed it; they have, as it were, rescued the soul of meaning from its prison of uninformed crudity, where it sat like the Prince in the “Arabian Nights,” half man, half marble; they have set it free in its own form, in a shape, namely, which it could “through every part impress.” Shakespeare’s keen eye suggested many such a rescue from the tomb—of a tale drearily told—a tale which no one now would read save for the glorified form in which he has re-embodied its true contents. And from Tennyson we can produce one specimen small enough for our use, which, a mere chip from the great marble re-embodiment of the old legend of Arthur’s death, may, like the hand of Achilles holding his spear in the crowded picture,

“Stand for the whole to be imagined.”

In the “History of Prince Arthur,” when Sir Bedivere returns after hiding Excalibur the first time, the king asks him what he has seen, and he answers—

“Sir, I saw nothing but waves and wind.”

The second time, to the same question, he answers—

“Sir, I saw nothing but the water<sup>1</sup> wap, and the waves wan.”

This answer Tennyson has expanded into the well-known lines—

“I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag;”

slightly varied, for the other occasion, into—

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<sup>1</sup> The word *wap* is plain enough; the word *wan* we cannot satisfy ourselves about. Had it been used with regard to the water, it might have been worth remarking that *wan*, meaning dark, gloomy, turbid, is a common adjective to a river in the old Scotch ballad. And it might be an adjective here; but that is not likely, seeing it is conjoined with the verb *wap*. The Anglo-Saxon *wanian*, to decrease, might be the root-word, perhaps, (in the sense of *to ebb*), if this water had been the sea and not a lake. But possibly the meaning is, “I heard the water *whoop* or *wail aloud*” (from *Wópan*); and “the waves *whine* or *bewail*” (from *Wánian* to lament). But even then the two verbs would seem to predicate of transposed subjects.

“I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.”

But, as to this matter of *creation*, is there, after all, I ask yet, any genuine sense in which a man may be said to create his own thought-forms? Allowing that a new combination of forms already existing might be called creation, is the man, after all, the author of this new combination? Did he, with his will and his knowledge, proceed wittingly, consciously, to construct a form which should embody his thought? Or did this form arise within him without will or effort of his—vivid if not clear—certain if not outlined? Ruskin (and better authority we do not know) will assert the latter, and we think he is right: though perhaps he would insist more upon the absolute perfection of the vision than we are quite prepared to do. Such embodiments are not the result of the man's intention, or of the operation of his conscious nature. His feeling is that they are given to him; that from the vast unknown, where time and space are not, they suddenly appear in luminous writing upon the wall of his consciousness. Can it be correct, then, to say that he created them? Nothing less so, as it seems to us. But can we not say that they are the creation of the unconscious portion of his nature? Yes, provided we can understand that that which is the individual, the man, can know, and not know that it knows, can create and yet be ignorant that virtue has gone out of it. From that unknown region we grant they come, but not by its own blind working. Nor, even were it so, could any amount of such production, where no will was concerned, be dignified with the name of creation. But God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is His candle. Our hope lies in no most perfect mechanism even of the spirit, but in the wisdom wherein we live and move and have our being. Thence we hope for endless forms of beauty informed of truth. If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imaginations, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of a decay which could never feel—only declare—a slow return towards primeval chaos. But the Maker is our Light.

One word more, ere we turn to consider the culture of this noblest faculty, which we might well call the creative, did we not see a something in God for which we would humbly keep our mighty word:—the fact that there is always more in a work of art—which is the highest human result of the embodying imagination—than the producer himself perceived while he produced it, seems to us a strong reason for attributing to it a larger origin than the man alone—for saying at the last, that the inspiration of the Almighty shaped its ends.

We return now to the class which, from the first, we supposed hostile to the imagination and its functions generally. Those belonging to it will now say: “It was to no imagination such as you have been setting forth that we were opposed, but to those wild fancies and vague reveries in which young people indulge, to the damage and loss of the real in the world around them.”

“And,” we insist, “you would rectify the matter by smothering the young monster at once—because he has wings, and, young to their use, flutters them about in a way discomposing to your nerves, and destructive to those notions of propriety of which this creature—you stop not to inquire whether angel or pterodactyle—has not yet learned even the existence. Or, if it is only the creature's vagaries of which you disapprove, why speak of them as *the* exercise of the imagination? As well speak of religion as the mother of cruelty because religion has given more occasion of cruelty, as of all dishonesty and devilry, than any other object of human interest. Are we not to worship, because our forefathers burned and stabbed for religion? It is more religion we want. It is more imagination we need. Be assured that these are but the first vital motions of that whose results, at least in the region of science, you are more than willing to accept.” That evil may spring from the imagination, as from everything except the perfect love of God, cannot be denied. But infinitely worse evils would be the result of its absence. Selfishness, avarice, sensuality, cruelty, would flourish tenfold; and the power of Satan would be well established ere some children had begun to choose. Those who would

quell the apparently lawless tossing of the spirit, called the youthful imagination, would suppress all that is to grow out of it. They fear the enthusiasm they never felt; and instead of cherishing this divine thing, instead of giving it room and air for healthful growth, they would crush and confine it—with but one result of their victorious endeavours—imposthume, fever, and corruption. And the disastrous consequences would soon appear in the intellect likewise which they worship. Kill that whence spring the crude fancies and wild day-dreams of the young, and you will never lead them beyond dull facts—dull because their relations to each other, and the one life that works in them all, must remain undiscovered. Whoever would have his children avoid this arid region will do well to allow no teacher to approach them—not even of mathematics—who has no imagination.

“But although good results may appear in a few from the indulgence of the imagination, how will it be with the many?”

We answer that the antidote to indulgence is development, not restraint, and that such is the duty of the wise servant of Him who made the imagination.

“But will most girls, for instance, rise to those useful uses of the imagination? Are they not more likely to exercise it in building castles in the air to the neglect of houses on the earth? And as the world affords such poor scope for the ideal, will not this habit breed vain desires and vain regrets? Is it not better, therefore, to keep to that which is known, and leave the rest?”

“Is the world so poor?” we ask in return. The less reason, then, to be satisfied with it; the more reason to rise above it, into the region of the true, of the eternal, of things as God thinks them. This outward world is but a passing vision of the persistent true. We shall not live in it always. We are dwellers in a divine universe where no desires are in vain, if only they be large enough. Not even in this world do all disappointments breed only vain regrets. [Footnote:

“We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which, having been, must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In years that bring the philosophic mind.”]

And as to keeping to that which is known and leaving the rest—how many affairs of this world are so well-defined, so capable of being clearly understood, as not to leave large spaces of uncertainty, whose very correlate faculty is the imagination? Indeed it must, in most things, work after some fashion, filling the gaps after some possible plan, before action can even begin. In very truth, a wise imagination, which is the presence of the spirit of God, is the best guide that man or woman can have; for it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully; undefined, yet vivid visions of something beyond, something which eye has not seen nor ear heard, have far more influence than any logical sequences whereby the same things may be demonstrated to the intellect. It is the nature of the thing, not the clearness of its outline, that determines its operation. We live by faith, and not by sight. Put the question to our mathematicians—only be sure the question reaches them—whether they would part with the well-defined perfection of their diagrams, or the dim, strange, possibly half-obliterated characters woven in the web of their being; their science, in short, or their poetry; their certainties, or their hopes; their consciousness of knowledge, or their vague sense of that which cannot be known absolutely: will they hold by their craft or by their inspirations, by their

intellects or their imaginations? If they say the former in each alternative, I shall yet doubt whether the objects of the choice are actually before them, and with equal presentation.

What can be known must be known severely; but is there, therefore, no faculty for those infinite lands of uncertainty lying all about the sphere hollowed out of the dark by the glimmering lamp of our knowledge? Are they not the natural property of the imagination? there, *for* it, that it may have room to grow? there, that the man may learn to imagine greatly like God who made him, himself discovering their mysteries, in virtue of his following and worshipping imagination?

All that has been said, then, tends to enforce the culture of the imagination. But the strongest argument of all remains behind. For, if the whole power of pedantry should rise against her, the imagination will yet work; and if not for good, then for evil; if not for truth, then for falsehood; if not for life, then for death; the evil alternative becoming the more likely from the unnatural treatment she has experienced from those who ought to have fostered her. The power that might have gone forth in conceiving the noblest forms of action, in realizing the lives of the true-hearted, the self-forgetting, will go forth in building airy castles of vain ambition, of boundless riches, of unearned admiration. The imagination that might be devising how to make home blessed or to help the poor neighbour, will be absorbed in the invention of the new dress, or worse, in devising the means of procuring it. For, if she be not occupied with the beautiful, she will be occupied by the pleasant; that which goes not out to worship, will remain at home to be sensual. Cultivate the mere intellect as you may, it will never reduce the passions: the imagination, seeking the ideal in everything, will elevate them to their true and noble service. Seek not that your sons and your daughters should not see visions, should not dream dreams; seek that they should see true visions, that they should dream noble dreams. Such out-going of the imagination is one with aspiration, and will do more to elevate above what is low and vile than all possible inculcations of morality. Nor can religion herself ever rise up into her own calm home, her crystal shrine, when one of her wings, one of the twain with which she flies, is thus broken or paralyzed.

“The universe is infinitely wide,  
And conquering Reason, if self-glorified,  
Can nowhere move uncrossed by some new wall  
Or gulf of mystery, which thou alone,  
Imaginative Faith! canst overleap,  
In progress towards the fount of love.”

The danger that lies in the repression of the imagination may be well illustrated from the play of “Macbeth.” The imagination of the hero (in him a powerful faculty), representing how the deed would appear to others, and so representing its true nature to himself, was his great impediment on the path to crime. Nor would he have succeeded in reaching it, had he not gone to his wife for help—sought refuge from his troublesome imagination with her. She, possessing far less of the faculty, and having dealt more destructively with what she had, took his hand, and led him to the deed. From her imagination, again, she for her part takes refuge in unbelief and denial, declaring to herself and her husband that there is no reality in its representations; that there is no reality in anything beyond the present effect it produces on the mind upon which it operates; that intellect and courage are equal to any, even an evil emergency; and that no harm will come to those who can rule themselves according to their own will. Still, however, finding her imagination, and yet more that of her husband, troublesome, she effects a marvellous combination of materialism and idealism, and asserts that things are not, cannot be, and shall not be more or other than people choose to think them. She says,—

“These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.”

“The sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures.”

But she had over-estimated the power of her will, and under-estimated that of her imagination. Her will was the one thing in her that was bad, without root or support in the universe, while her imagination was the voice of God himself out of her own unknown being. The choice of no man or woman can long determine how or what he or she shall think of things. Lady Macbeth’s imagination would not be repressed beyond its appointed period—a time determined by laws of her being over which she had no control. It arose, at length, as from the dead, overshadowing her with all the blackness of her crime. The woman who drank strong drink that she might murder, dared not sleep without a light by her bed; rose and walked in the night, a sleepless spirit in a sleeping body, rubbing the spotted hand of her dreams, which, often as water had cleared it of the deed, yet smelt so in her sleeping nostrils, that all the perfumes of Arabia would not sweeten it. Thus her long down-trodden imagination rose and took vengeance, even through those senses which she had thought to subordinate to her wicked will.

But all this is of the imagination itself, and fitter, therefore, for illustration than for argument. Let us come to facts.—Dr. Pritchard, lately executed for murder, had no lack of that invention, which is, as it were, the intellect of the imagination—its lowest form. One of the clergymen who, at his own request, attended the prisoner, went through indescribable horrors in the vain endeavour to induce the man simply to cease from lying: one invention after another followed the most earnest asseverations of truth. The effect produced upon us by this clergyman’s report of his experience was a moral dismay, such as we had never felt with regard to human being, and drew from us the exclamation, “The man could have had no imagination.” The reply was, “None whatever.” Never seeking true or high things, caring only for appearances, and, therefore, for inventions, he had left his imagination all undeveloped, and when it represented his own inner condition to him, had repressed it until it was nearly destroyed, and what remained of it was set on fire of hell. [Footnote: One of the best weekly papers in London, evidently as much in ignorance of the man as of the facts of the case, spoke of Dr. MacLeod as having been engaged in “white-washing the murderer for heaven.” So far is this from a true representation, that Dr. MacLeod actually refused to pray with him, telling him that if there was a hell to go to, he must go to it.]

Man is “the roof and crown of things.” He is the world, and more. Therefore the chief scope of his imagination, next to God who made him, will be the world in relation to his own life therein. Will he do better or worse in it if this imagination, touched to fine issues and having free scope, present him with noble pictures of relationship and duty, of possible elevation of character and attainable justice of behaviour, of friendship and of love; and, above all, of all these in that life to understand which as a whole, must ever be the loftiest aspiration of this noblest power of humanity? Will a woman lead a more or a less troubled life that the sights and sounds of nature break through the crust of gathering anxiety, and remind her of the peace of the lilies and the well-being of the birds of the air? Or will life be less interesting to her, that the lives of her neighbours, instead of passing like shadows upon a wall, assume a consistent wholeness, forming themselves into stories and phases of life? Will she not hereby love more and talk less? Or will she be more unlikely to make a good match—? But here we arrest ourselves in bewilderment over the word *good*, and seek to re-arrange our thoughts. If what mothers mean by a *good* match, is the alliance of a man of position and means—or let them throw intellect, manners, and personal advantages into the same scale—if this be all, then we grant the daughter of cultivated imagination may not be manageable, will probably be obstinate. “We hope she will be obstinate enough. [Footnote: Let women who feel the wrongs of their kind teach women to be high-minded in their relation to men, and they will do more for the social elevation of women, and the establishment of their rights, whatever those rights may be, than by any amount of intellectual

development or assertion of equality. Nor, if they are other than mere partisans, will they refuse the attempt because in its success men will, after all, be equal, if not greater gainers, if only thereby they should be “feelingly persuaded” what they are.] But will the girl be less likely to marry a *gentleman*, in the grand old meaning of the sixteenth century? when it was no irreverence to call our Lord

“The first true gentleman that ever breathed;”

or in that of the fourteenth?—when Chaucer teaching “whom is worthy to be called gentill,” writes thus:—

“The first stocke was full of rightwisnes,  
Trew of his worde, sober, pitous and free,  
Clene of his goste, and loved besinesse,  
Against the vice of slouth in honeste;  
And but his heire love vertue as did he,  
He is not gentill though he rich seme,  
All weare he miter, crowne, or diademe.”

Will she be less likely to marry one who honours women, and for their sakes, as well as his own, honours himself? Or to speak from what many would regard as the mother’s side of the question—will the girl be more likely, because of such a culture of her imagination, to refuse the wise, true-hearted, generous rich man, and fall in love with the talking, verse-making fool, *because* he is poor, as if that were a virtue for which he had striven? The highest imagination and the lowliest common sense are always on one side.

For the end of imagination is *harmony*. A right imagination, being the reflex of the creation, will fall in with the divine order of things as the highest form of its own operation; “will tune its instrument here at the door” to the divine harmonies within; will be content alone with growth towards the divine idea, which includes all that is beautiful in the imperfect imaginations of men; will know that every deviation from that growth is downward; and will therefore send the man forth from its loftiest representations to do the commonest duty of the most wearisome calling in a hearty and hopeful spirit. This is the work of the right imagination; and towards this work every imagination, in proportion to the rightness that is in it, will tend. The reveries even of the wise man will make him stronger for his work; his dreaming as well as his thinking will render him sorry for past failure, and hopeful of future success.

To come now to the culture of the imagination. Its development is one of the main ends of the divine education of life with all its efforts and experiences. Therefore the first and essential means for its culture must be an ordering of our life towards harmony with its ideal in the mind of God. As he that is willing to do the will of the Father, shall know of the doctrine, so, we doubt not, he that will do the will of THE POET, shall behold the Beautiful. For all is God’s; and the man who is growing into harmony with His will, is growing into harmony with himself; all the hidden glories of his being are coming out into the light of humble consciousness; so that at the last he shall be a pure microcosm, faithfully reflecting, after his manner, the mighty macrocosm. We believe, therefore, that nothing will do so much for the intellect or the imagination as *being good*—we do not mean after any formula or any creed, but simply after the faith of Him who did the will of his Father in heaven.

But if we speak of direct means for the culture of the imagination, the whole is comprised in two words—food and exercise. If you want strong arms, take animal food, and row. Feed your imagination with food convenient for it, and exercise it, not in the contortions of the acrobat, but in the movements of the gymnast. And first for the food.

Goethe has told us that the way to develop the aesthetic faculty is to have constantly before our eyes, that is, in the room we most frequent, some work of the best attainable art. This will teach us to refuse the evil and choose the good. It will plant itself in our minds and become our counsellor. Involuntarily, unconsciously, we shall compare with its perfection everything that comes before us for judgment. Now, although no better advice could be given, it involves one danger, that of narrowness. And not easily, in dread of this danger, would one change his tutor, and so procure variety of instruction. But in the culture of the imagination, books, although not the only, are the readiest means of supplying the food convenient for it, and a hundred books may be had where even one work of art of the right sort is unattainable, seeing such must be of some size as well as of thorough excellence. And in variety alone is safety from the danger of the convenient food becoming the inconvenient model.

Let us suppose, then, that one who himself justly estimates the imagination is anxious to develop its operation in his child. No doubt the best beginning, especially if the child be young, is an acquaintance with nature, in which let him be encouraged to observe vital phenomena, to put things together, to speculate from what he sees to what he does not see. But let earnest care be taken that upon no matter shall he go on talking foolishly. Let him be as fanciful as he may, but let him not, even in his fancy, sin against fancy's sense; for fancy has its laws as certainly as the most ordinary business of life. When he is silly, let him know it and be ashamed.

But where this association with nature is but occasionally possible, recourse must be had to literature. In books, we not only have store of all results of the imagination, but in them, as in her workshop, we may behold her embodying before our very eyes, in music of speech, in wonder of words, till her work, like a golden dish set with shining jewels, and adorned by the hands of the cunning workmen, stands finished before us. In this kind, then, the best must be set before the learner, that he may eat and not be satisfied; for the finest products of the imagination are of the best nourishment for the beginnings of that imagination. And the mind of the teacher must mediate between the work of art and the mind of the pupil, bringing them together in the vital contact of intelligence; directing the observation to the lines of expression, the points of force; and helping the mind to repose upon the whole, so that no separable beauties shall lead to a neglect of the scope—that is the shape or form complete. And ever he must seek to *show* excellence rather than talk about it, giving the thing itself, that it may grow into the mind, and not a eulogy of his own upon the thing; isolating the point worthy of remark rather than making many remarks upon the point.

Especially must he endeavour to show the spiritual scaffolding or skeleton of any work of art; those main ideas upon which the shape is constructed, and around which the rest group as ministering dependencies.

But he will not, therefore, pass over that intellectual structure without which the other could not be manifested. He will not forget the builder while he admires the architect. While he dwells with delight on the relation of the peculiar arch to the meaning of the whole cathedral, he will not think it needless to explain the principles on which it is constructed, or even how those principles are carried out in actual process. Neither yet will the tracery of its windows, the foliage of its crockets, or the fretting of its mouldings be forgotten. Every beauty will have its word, only all beauties will be subordinated to the final beauty—that is, the unity of the whole.

Thus doing, he shall perform the true office of friendship. He will introduce his pupil into the society which he himself prizes most, surrounding him with the genial presence of the high-minded, that this good company may work its own kind in him who frequents it.

But he will likewise seek to turn him aside from such company, whether of books or of men, as might tend to lower his reverence, his choice, or his standard. He will, therefore, discourage indiscriminate reading, and that worse than waste which consists in skimming the books of a circulating library. He knows that if a book is worth reading at all, it is worth reading well; and that, if it is not worth reading, it is only to the most accomplished reader that it *can* be worth skimming. He

will seek to make him discern, not merely between the good and the evil, but between the good and the not so good. And this not for the sake of sharpening the intellect, still less of generating that self-satisfaction which is the closest attendant upon criticism, but for the sake of choosing the best path and the best companions upon it. A spirit of criticism for the sake of distinguishing only, or, far worse, for the sake of having one's opinion ready upon demand, is not merely repulsive to all true thinkers, but is, in itself, destructive of all thinking. A spirit of criticism for the sake of the truth—a spirit that does not start from its chamber at every noise, but waits till its presence is desired—cannot, indeed, garnish the house, but can sweep it clean. Were there enough of such wise criticism, there would be ten times the study of the best writers of the past, and perhaps one-tenth of the admiration for the ephemeral productions of the day. A gathered mountain of misplaced worships would be swept into the sea by the study of one good book; and while what was good in an inferior book would still be admired, the relative position of the book would be altered and its influence lessened.

Speaking of true learning, Lord Bacon says: “It taketh away vain admiration of anything, *which is the root of all weakness.*”

The right teacher would have his pupil easy to please, but ill to satisfy; ready to enjoy, unready to embrace; keen to discover beauty, slow to say, “Here I will dwell.”

But he will not confine his instructions to the region of art. He will encourage him to read history with an eye eager for the dawning figure of the past. He will especially show him that a great part of the Bible is only thus to be understood; and that the constant and consistent way of God, to be discovered in it, is in fact the key to all history.

In the history of individuals, as well, he will try to show him how to put sign and token together, constructing not indeed a whole, but a probable suggestion of the whole.

And, again, while showing him the reflex of nature in the poets, he will not be satisfied without sending him to Nature herself; urging him in country rambles to keep open eyes for the sweet fashionings and blendings of her operation around him; and in city walks to watch the “human face divine.”

Once more: he will point out to him the essential difference between reverie and thought; between dreaming and imagining. He will teach him not to mistake fancy, either in himself or in others for imagination, and to beware of hunting after resemblances that carry with them no interpretation.

Such training is not solely fitted for the possible development of artistic faculty. Few, in this world, will ever be able to utter what they feel. Fewer still will be able to utter it in forms of their own. Nor is it necessary that there should be many such. But it is necessary that all should feel. It is necessary that all should understand and imagine the good; that all should begin, at least, to follow and find out God.

“The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out,” says Solomon. “As if,” remarks Bacon on the passage, “according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide his works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game.”

One more quotation from the book of Ecclesiastes, setting forth both the necessity we are under to imagine, and the comfort that our imagining cannot outstrip God's making.

“I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in his time; also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”

Thus to be playfellows with God in this game, the little ones may gather their daisies and follow their painted moths; the child of the kingdom may pore upon the lilies of the field, and gather faith as the birds of the air their food from the leafless hawthorn, ruddy with the stores God has laid up for them; and the man of science

“May sit and rightly spell

Of every star that heaven doth shew,  
And every herb that sips the dew;  
Till old experience do attain  
To something like prophetic strain.”

## A SKETCH OF INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

[Footnote: 1880.]

“I wish I had thought to watch when God was making me!” said a child once to his mother. “Only,” he added, “I was not made till I was finished, so I couldn’t.” We cannot recall whence we came, nor tell how we began to be. We know approximately how far back we can remember, but have no idea how far back we may not have forgotten. Certainly we knew once much that we have forgotten now. My own earliest definable memory is of a great funeral of one of the Dukes of Gordon, when I was between two and three years of age. Surely my first knowledge was not of death. I must have known much and many things before, although that seems my earliest memory. As in what we foolishly call maturity, so in the dawn of consciousness, both before and after it has begun to be buttressed with *self*-consciousness, each succeeding consciousness dims—often obliterates—that which went before, and with regard to our past as well as our future, imagination and faith must step into the place vacated of knowledge. We are aware, and we know that we are aware, but when or how we began to be aware, is wrapt in a mist that deepens on the one side into deepest night, and on the other brightens into the full assurance of existence. Looking back we can but dream, looking forward we lose ourselves in speculation; but we may both speculate and dream, for all speculation is not false, and all dreaming is not of the unreal. What may we fairly imagine as to the inward condition of the child before the first moment of which his memory affords him testimony?

It is one, I venture to say, of absolute, though, no doubt, largely negative faith. Neither memory of pain that is past, nor apprehension of pain to come, once arises to give him the smallest concern. In some way, doubtless very vague, for his being itself is a border-land of awful mystery, he is aware of being surrounded, enfolded with an atmosphere of love; the sky over him is his mother’s face; the earth that nourishes him is his mother’s bosom. The source, the sustentation, the defence of his being, the endless mediation betwixt his needs and the things that supply them, are all one. There is no type so near the highest idea of relation to a God, as that of the child to his mother. Her face is God, her bosom Nature, her arms are Providence—all love—one love—to him an undivided bliss.

The region beyond him he regards from this vantage-ground of unquestioned security. There things may come and go, rise and vanish—he neither desires nor bemoans them. Change may grow swift, its swiftness grow fierce, and pass into storm: to him storm is calm; his haven is secure; his rest cannot be broken: he is accountable for nothing, knows no responsibility. Conscience is not yet awake, and there is no conflict. His waking is full of sleep, yet his very being is enough for him.

But all the time his mother lives in the hope of his growth. In the present babe, her heart broods over the coming boy—the unknown marvel closed in the visible germ. Let mothers lament as they will over the change from childhood to maturity, which of them would not grow weary of nursing for ever a child in whom no live law of growth kept unfolding an infinite change! The child knows nothing of growth—desires none—but grows. Within him is the force of a power he can no more resist than the peach can refuse to swell and grow ruddy in the sun. By slow, inappreciable, indivisible accretion and unfolding, he is lifted, floated, drifted on towards the face of the awful mirror in which he must encounter his first foe—must front himself.

By degrees he has learned that the world is around, and not within him—that he is apart, and that is apart; from consciousness he passes to self-consciousness. This is a second birth, for now a higher life begins. When a man not only lives, but knows that he lives, then first the possibility of a real life commences. By *real life*, I mean life which has a share in its own existence.

For now, towards the world around him—the world that is not his mother, and, actively at least, neither loves him nor ministers to him, reveal themselves certain relations, initiated by fancies, desires, preferences, that arise within himself—reasonable or not matters little:—founded in reason, they can in no case be *devoid* of reason. Every object concerned in these relations presents itself to the man

as lovely, desirable, good, or ugly, hateful, bad; and through these relations, obscure and imperfect, and to a being weighted with a strong faculty for mistake, begins to be revealed the existence and force of Being other and higher than his own, recognized as *Will*, and first of all in its opposition to his desires. Thereupon begins the strife without which there never was, and, I presume, never can be, any growth, any progress; and the first result is what I may call the third birth of the human being.

The first opposing glance of the mother wakes in the child not only answering opposition, which is as the rudimentary sac of his own coming will, but a new something, to which for long he needs no name, so natural does it seem, so entirely a portion of his being, even when most he refuses to listen to and obey it. This new something—we call it *Conscience*—sides with his mother, and causes its presence and judgment to be felt not only before but after the event, so that he soon comes to know that it is well with him or ill with him as he obeys or disobeys it. And now he not only knows, not only knows that he knows, but knows he knows that he knows—knows that he is self-conscious—that he has a conscience. With the first sense of resistance to it, the power above him has drawn nearer, and the deepest within him has declared itself on the side of the highest without him. At one and the same moment, the heaven of his childhood has, as it were, receded and come nigher. He has run from under it, but it claims him. It is farther, yet closer—immeasurably closer: he feels on his being the grasp and hold of his mother's. Through the higher individuality he becomes aware of his own. Through the assertion of his mother's will, his own begins to awake. He becomes conscious of himself as capable of action—of doing or of not doing; his responsibility has begun.

He slips from her lap; he travels from chair to chair; he puts his circle round the room; he dares to cross the threshold; he braves the precipice of the stair; he takes the greatest step that, according to George Herbert, is possible to man—that out of doors, changing the house for the universe; he runs from flower to flower in the garden; crosses the road; wanders, is lost, is found again. His powers expand, his activity increases; he goes to school, and meets other boys like himself; new objects of strife are discovered, new elements of strife developed; new desires are born, fresh impulses urge. The old heaven, the face and will of his mother, recede farther and farther; a world of men, which he foolishly thinks a nobler as it is a larger world, draws him, claims him. More or less he yields. The example and influence of such as seem to him more than his mother like himself, grow strong upon him. His conscience speaks louder. And here, even at this early point in his history, what I might call his fourth birth *may* begin to take place: I mean the birth in him of the Will—the real Will—not the pseudo-will, which is the mere Desire, swayed of impulse, selfishness, or one of many a miserable motive. When the man, listening to his conscience, wills and does the right, irrespective of inclination as of consequence, then is the man free, the universe open before him. He is born from above. To him conscience needs never speak aloud, needs never speak twice; to him her voice never grows less powerful, for he never neglects what she commands. And when he becomes aware that he can will his will, that God has given him a share in essential life, in the causation of his own being, then is he a man indeed. I say, even here this birth may begin; but with most it takes years not a few to complete it. For, the power of the mother having waned, the power of the neighbour is waxing. If the boy be of common clay, that is, of clay willing to accept dishonour, this power of the neighbour over him will increase and increase, till individuality shall have vanished from him, and what his friends, what society, what the trade or the profession say, will be to him the rule of life. With such, however, I have to do no more than with the deaf dead, who sleep too deep for words to reach them.

My typical child of man is not of such. He is capable not of being influenced merely, but of influencing—and first of all of influencing himself; of taking a share in his own making; of determining actively, not by mere passivity, what he shall be and become; for he never ceases to pay at least a little heed, however poor and intermittent, to the voice of his conscience, and to-day he pays more heed than he did yesterday.

Long ere now the joy of space, of room, has laid hold upon him—the more powerfully if he inhabit a wild and broken region. The human animal delights in motion and change, motions of his

members even violent, and swiftest changes of place. It is as if he would lay hold of the infinite by ceaseless abandonment and choice of a never-abiding stand-point, as if he would lay hold of strength by the consciousness of the strength he has. He is full of unrest. He must know what lies on the farther shore of every river, see how the world looks from every hill: *What is behind? What is beyond?* is his constant cry. To learn, to gather into himself, is his longing. Nor do many years pass thus, it may be not many months, ere the world begins to come alive around him. He begins to feel that the stars are strange, that the moon is sad, that the sunrise is mighty. He begins to see in them all the something men call beauty. He will lie on the sunny bank and gaze into the blue heaven till his soul seems to float abroad and mingle with the infinite made visible, with the boundless condensed into colour and shape. The rush of the water through the still twilight, under the faint gleam of the exhausted west, makes in his ears a melody he is almost aware he cannot understand. Dissatisfied with his emotions he desires a deeper waking, longs for a greater beauty, is troubled with the stirring in his bosom of an unknown ideal of Nature. Nor is it an ideal of Nature alone that is forming within him. A far more precious thing, a human ideal namely, is in his soul, gathering to itself shape and consistency. The wind that at night fills him with sadness—he cannot tell why, in the daytime haunts him like a wild consciousness of strength which has neither difficulty nor danger enough to spend itself upon. He would be a champion of the weak, a friend to the great; for both he would fight—a merciless foe to every oppressor of his kind. He would be rich that he might help, strong that he might rescue, brave—that he counts himself already, for he has not proved his own weakness. In the first encounter he fails, and the bitter cup of shame and confusion of face, wholesome and saving, is handed him from the well of life. He is not yet capable of understanding that one such as he, filled with the glory and not the duty of victory, could not but fail, and therefore ought to fail; but his dismay and chagrin are soothed by the forgetfulness the days and nights bring, gently wiping out the sins that are past, that the young life may have a fresh chance, as we say, and begin again unburdened by the weight of a too much present failure.

And now, probably at school, or in the first months of his college-life, a new phase of experience begins. He has wandered over the border of what is commonly called science, and the marvel of facts multitudinous, strung upon the golden threads of law, has laid hold upon him. His intellect is seized and possessed by a new spirit. For a time knowledge is pride; the mere consciousness of knowing is the reward of its labour; the ever recurring, ever passing contact of mind with a new fact is a joy full of excitement, and promises an endless delight. But ever the thing that is known sinks into insignificance, save as a step of the endless stair on which he is climbing—whither he knows not; the unknown draws him; the new fact touches his mind, flames up in the contact, and drops dark, a mere fact, on the heap below. Even the grandeur of law as law, so far from adding fresh consciousness to his life, causes it no small suffering and loss. For at the entrance of Science, nobly and gracefully as she bears herself, young Poetry shrinks back startled, dismayed. Poetry is true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry; but young Poetry is timid and Science is fearless, and bears with her a colder atmosphere than the other has yet learned to brave. It is not that Madam Science shows any antagonism to Lady Poetry; but the atmosphere and plane on which alone they can meet as friends who understand each other, is the mind and heart of the sage, not of the boy. The youth gazes on the face of Science, cold, clear, beautiful; then, turning, looks for his friend—but, alas! Poetry has fled. With a great pang at the heart he rushes abroad to find her, but descries only the rainbow glimmer of her skirt on the far horizon. At night, in his dreams, she returns, but never for a season may he look on her face of loveliness. What, alas! have evaporation, caloric, atmosphere, refraction, the prism, and the second planet of our system, to do with “sad Hesper o’er the buried sun?” From quantitative analysis how shall he turn again to “the rime of the ancient mariner,” and “the moving moon” that “went up the sky, and nowhere did abide”? From his window he gazes across the sands to the mightily troubled ocean: “What is the storm to me any more!” he cries; “it is but the clashing of countless water-drops!” He finds relief in the discovery that, the moment you place man in the midst of it,

the clashing of water-drops becomes a storm, terrible to heart and brain: human thought and feeling, hope, fear, love, sacrifice, make the motions of nature alive with mystery and the shadows of destiny. The relief, however, is but partial, and may be but temporary; for what if this mingling of man and Nature in the mind of man be but the casting of a coloured shadow over her cold indifference? What if she means nothing—never was meant to mean anything! What if in truth “we receive but what we give, and in our life alone doth Nature live!” What if the language of metaphysics as well as of poetry be drawn, not from Nature at all, but from human fancy concerning her!

At length, from the unknown, whence himself he came, appears an angel to deliver him from this horror—this stony look—ah, God! of soulless law. The woman is on her way whose part it is to meet him with a life other than his own, at once the complement of his, and the visible presentment of that in it which is beyond his own understanding. The enchantment of what we specially call *love* is upon him—a deceiving glamour, say some, showing what is not, an opening of the eyes, say others, revealing that of which a man had not been aware: men will still be divided into those who believe that the horses of fire and the chariots of fire are ever present at their need of them, and those who class the prophet and the drunkard in the same category as the fools of their own fancies. But what this love is, he who thinks he knows least understands. Let foolish maidens and vulgar youths simper and jest over it as they please, it is one of the most potent mysteries of the living God. The man who can love a woman and remain a lover of his wretched self, is fit only to be cast out with the broken potsherds of the city, as one in whom the very salt has lost its savour. With this love in his heart, a man puts on at least the vision robes of the seer, if not the singing robes of the poet. Be he the paltriest human animal that ever breathed, for the time, and in his degree, he rises above himself. His nature so far clarifies itself, that here and there a truth of the great world will penetrate, sorely dimmed, through the fog-laden, self-shadowed atmosphere of his microcosm. For the time, I repeat, he is not a lover only, but something of a friend, with a reflex touch of his own far-off childhood. To the youth of my history, in the light of his love—a light that passes outward from the eyes of the lover—the world grows alive again, yea radiant as an infinite face. He sees the flowers as he saw them in boyhood, recovering from an illness of all the winter, only they have a yet deeper glow, a yet fresher delight, a yet more unspeakable soul. He becomes pitiful over them, and not willingly breaks their stems, to hurt the life he more than half believes they share with him. He cannot think anything created only for him, any more than only for itself. Nature is no longer a mere contention of forces, whose heaven and whose hell in one is the dull peace of an equilibrium; but a struggle, through splendour of colour, graciousness of form, and evasive vitality of motion and sound, after an utterance hard to find, and never found but marred by the imperfection of the small and weak that would embody and set forth the great and mighty. The waving of the tree-tops is the billowy movement of a hidden delight. The sun lifts his head with intent to be glorious. No day lasts too long, no night comes too soon: the twilight is woven of shadowy arms that draw the loving to the bosom of the Night. In the woman, the infinite after which he thirsts is given him for his own.

Man's occupation with himself turns his eyes from the great life beyond his threshold: when love awakes, he forgets himself for a time, and many a glimpse of strange truth finds its way through his windows, blocked no longer by the shadow of himself. He may now catch even a glimpse of the possibilities of his own being—may dimly perceive for a moment the image after which he was made. But alas! too soon, self, radiant of darkness, awakes; every window becomes opaque with shadow, and the man is again a prisoner. For it is not the highest word alone that the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in, choke, and render unfruitful. Waking from the divine vision, if that can be called waking which is indeed dying into the common day, the common man regards it straightway as a foolish dream; the wise man believes in it still, holds fast by the memory of the vanished glory, and looks to have it one day again a present portion of the light of his life. He knows that, because of the imperfection and dulness and weakness of his nature, after every vision follow the inclosing clouds, with the threat of an ever during dark; knows that, even if

the vision could tarry, it were not well, for the sake of that which must yet be done with him, yet be made of him, that it should tarry. But the youth whose history I am following is not like the former, nor as yet like the latter.

From whatever cause, then, whether of fault, of natural law, or of supernal will, the flush that seemed to promise the dawn of an eternal day, shrinks and fades, though, with him, like the lagging skirt of the sunset in the northern west, it does not vanish, but travels on, a withered pilgrim, all the night, at the long last to rise the aureole of the eternal Aurora. And now new paths entice him—or old paths opening fresh horizons. With stronger thews and keener nerves he turns again to the visible around him. The changelessness amid change, the law amid seeming disorder, the unity amid units, draws him again. He begins to descry the indwelling poetry of science. The untiring forces at work in measurable yet inconceivable spaces of time and room, fill his soul with an awe that threatens to uncreate him with a sense of littleness; while, on the other side, the grandeur of their operations fills him with such an informing glory, the mere presence of the mighty facts, that he no more thinks of himself, but in humility is great, and knows it not. Rapt spectator, seer entranced under the magic wand of Science, he beholds the billions of billions of miles of incandescent vapour begin a slow, scarce perceptible revolution, gradually grow swift, and gather an awful speed. He sees the vapour, as it whirls, condensing through slow eternities to a plastic fluidity. He notes ring after ring part from the circumference of the mass, break, rush together into a globe, and the glowing ball keep on through space with the speed of its parent bulk. It cools and still cools and condenses, but still fiercely glows. Presently—after tens of thousands of years is the creative *presently*—arises fierce contention betwixt the glowing heart and its accompanying atmosphere. The latter invades the former with antagonistic element. He listens in his soul, and hears the rush of ever descending torrent rains, with the continuous roaring shock of their evanishment in vapour—to turn again to water in the higher regions, and again rush to the attack upon the citadel of fire. He beholds the slow victory of the water at last, and the great globe, now glooming in a cloak of darkness, covered with a wildly boiling sea—not boiling by figure of speech, under contending forces of wind and tide, but boiling high as the hills to come, with veritable heat. He sees the rise of the wrinkles we call hills and mountains, and from their sides the avalanches of water to the lower levels. He sees race after race of living things appear, as the earth becomes, for each new and higher kind, a passing home; and he watches the succession of terrible convulsions dividing kind from kind, until at length the kind he calls his own arrives. Endless are the visions of material grandeur unfathomable, awaked in his soul by the bare facts of external existence.

But soon comes a change. So far as he can see or learn, all the motion, all the seeming dance, is but a rush for death, a panic flight into the moveless silence. The summer wind, the tropic tornado, the softest tide, the fiercest storm, are alike the tumultuous conflict of forces, rushing, and fighting as they rush, into the arms of eternal negation. On and on they hurry—down and down, to a cold stirless solidity, where wind blows not, water flows not, where the seas are not merely tideless and beat no shores, but frozen cleave with frozen roots to their gulfy basin. All things are on the steep-sloping path to final evanishment, uncreation, non-existence. He is filled with horror—not so much of the dreary end, as at the weary hopelessness of the path thitherward. Then a dim light breaks upon him, and with it a faint hope revives, for he seems to see in all the forms of life, innumerable varied, a spirit rushing upward from death—a something in escape from the terror of the downward cataract, of the rest that knows not peace. “Is it not,” he asks, “the soaring of the silver dove of life from its potsherd-bed—the heavenward flight of some higher and incorruptible thing? Is not vitality, revealed in growth, itself an unending resurrection?”

The vision also of the oneness of the universe, ever reappearing through the vapours of question, helps to keep hope alive in him. To find, for instance, the law of the relation of the arrangements of the leaves on differing plants, correspond to the law of the relative distances of the planets in approach to their central sun, wakes in him that hope of a central Will, which alone can justify one ecstatic throb at any seeming loveliness of the universe. For without the hope of such a centre, delight is unreason

—a mockery not such as the skeleton at the Egyptian feast, but such rather as a crowned corpse at a feast of skeletons. Life without the higher glory of the unspeakable, the atmosphere of a God, is not life, is not worth living. He would rather cease to be, than walk the dull level of the commonplace—than live the unideal of men in whose company he can take no pleasure—men who are as of a lower race, whom he fain would lift, who will not rise, but for whom as for himself he would cherish the hope they do their best to kill. Those who seem to him great, recognize the unseen—believe the roots of science to be therein hid—regard the bringing forth into sight of the things that are invisible as the end of all Art and every art—judge the true leader of men to be him who leads them closer to the essential facts of their being. Alas for his love and his hope, alas for himself, if the visible should exist for its own sake only!—if the face of a flower means nothing—appeals to no region beyond the scope of the science that would unveil its growth. He cannot believe that its structure exists for the sake of its laws; that would be to build for the sake of its joints a scaffold where no house was to stand. Those who put their faith in Science are trying to live in the scaffold of the house invisible.

He finds harbour and comfort at times in the written poetry of his fellows. He delights in analyzing and grasping the thought that informs the utterance. For a moment, the fine figure, the delicate phrase, make him jubilant and strong; but the jubilation and the strength soon pass, for it is not any of the *forms*, even of the thought-forms of truth that can give rest to his soul.

History attracts him little, for he is not able to discover by its records the operation of principles yielding hope for his race. Such there may be, but he does not find them. What hope for the rising wave that knows in its rise only its doom to sink, and at length be dashed on the low shore of annihilation?

But the time would fail me to follow the doubling of the soul coursed by the hounds of Death, or to set down the forms innumerable in which the golden Haemony springs in its path,

Of sovran use

‘Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp.

And now the shadows are beginning to lengthen towards the night, which, whether there be a following morn or no, is the night, and spreads out the wings of darkness. And still as it approaches the more aware grows the man of a want that differs from any feeling I have already sought to describe—a sense of insecurity, in no wise the same as the doubt of life beyond the grave—a need more profound even than that which cries for a living Nature. And now he plainly knows, that, all his life, like a conscious duty unfulfilled, this sense has haunted his path, ever and anon descending and clinging, a cold mist, about his heart. What if this lack was indeed the root of every other anxiety! Now freshly revived, this sense of not having, of something, he knows not what, for lack of which his being is in pain at its own incompleteness, never leaves him more. And with it the terror has returned and grows, lest there should be no Unseen Power, as his fathers believed, and his mother taught him, filling all things and *meaning* all things,—no Power with whom, in his last extremity, awaits him a final refuge. With the quickening doubt falls a tenfold blight on the world of poetry, both that in Nature and that in books. Far worse than that early chill which the assertions of science concerning what it knows, cast upon his inexperienced soul, is now the shivering death which its pretended denials concerning what it knows not, send through all his vital frame. The soul departs from the face of beauty, when the eye begins to doubt if there be any soul behind it; and now the man feels like one I knew, affected with a strange disease, who saw in the living face always the face of a corpse. What can the world be to him who lives for thought, if there be no supreme and perfect Thought,—none but such poor struggles after thought as he finds in himself? Take the eternal thought from the heart of things, no longer can any beauty be real, no more can shape, motion, aspect of nature have significance in itself, or sympathy with human soul. At best and most the beauty he thought he saw was but the projected perfection of his own being, and from himself as the crown and summit of things, the soul of the man shrinks with horror: it is the more imperfect being who knows the least his incompleteness, and for

whom, seeing so little beyond himself, it is easiest to imagine himself the heart and apex of things, and rejoice in the fancy. The killing power of a godless science returns upon him with tenfold force. The ocean-tempest is once more a mere clashing of innumerable water-drops; the green and amber sadness of the evening sky is a mockery of sorrow; his own soul and its sadness is a mockery of himself. There is nothing in the sadness, nothing in the mockery. To tell him as comfort, that in his own thought lives the meaning if nowhere else, is mockery worst of all; for if there be no truth in them, if these things be no embodiment, to make them serve as such is to put a candle in a death's-head to light the dying through the place of tombs. To his former foolish fancy a primrose might preach a childlike trust; the untoiling lilies might from their field cast seeds of a higher growth into his troubled heart; now they are no better than the colour the painter leaves behind him on the doorpost of his workshop, when, the day's labour over, he wipes his brush on it ere he depart for the night. The look in the eyes of his dog, happy in that he is short-lived, is one of infinite sadness. All graciousness must henceforth be a sorrow: it has to go with the sunsets. That a thing must cease takes from it the joy of even an aeonian endurance—for its *kind* is mortal; it belongs to the nature of things that cannot live. The sorrow is not so much that it shall perish as that it could not live—that it is not in its nature a real, that is, an eternal thing. His children are shadows—their life a dance, a sickness, a corruption. The very element of unselfishness, which, however feeble and beclouded it may be, yet exists in all love, in giving life its only dignity adds to its sorrow. Nowhere at the root of things is love—it is only a something that came after, some sort of fungous excrescence in the hearts of men grown helplessly superior to their origin. Law, nothing but cold, impassive, material law, is the root of things—lifeless happily, so not knowing itself, else were it a demon instead of a creative nothing. Endeavour is paralyzed in him. “Work for posterity,” says he of the skyless philosophy; answers the man, “How can I work without hope? Little heart have I to labour, where labour is so little help. What can I do for my children that would render their life less hopeless than my own! Give me all you would secure for them, and my life would be to me but the worse mockery. The true end of labour would be, to lessen the number doomed to breathe the breath of this despair.”

Straightway he develops another and a deeper mood. He turns and regards himself. Suspicion or sudden insight has directed the look. And there, in himself, he discovers such imperfection, such wrong, such shame, such weakness, as cause him to cry out, “It were well I should cease! Why should I mourn after life? Where were the good of prolonging it in a being like me? ‘What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth!’” Such insights, when they come, the seers do their best, in general, to obscure; suspicion of themselves they regard as a monster, and would stifle. They resent the waking of such doubt. Any attempt at the raising in them of their buried best they regard as an offence against intercourse. A man takes his social life in his hand who dares it. Few therefore understand the judgment of Hamlet upon himself; the common reader is so incapable of imagining he could mean it of his own general character as a man, that he attributes the utterance to shame for the postponement of a vengeance, which indeed he must have been such as his critic to be capable of performing upon no better proof than he had yet had. When the man whose unfolding I would now represent, regards even his dearest love, he finds it such a poor, selfish, low-lived thing, that in his heart he shames himself before his children and his friends. How little labour, how little watching, how little pain has he endured for their sakes! He reads of great things in this kind, but in himself he does not find them. How often has he not been wrongfully displeased—wrathful with the innocent! How often has he not hurt a heart more tender than his own! Has he ever once been faithful to the height of his ideal? Is his life on the whole a thing to regard with complacency, or to be troubled exceedingly concerning? Beyond him rise and spread infinite seeming possibilities—height beyond height, glory beyond glory, each rooted in and rising from his conscious being, but alas! where is any hope of ascending them? These hills of peace, “in a season of calm weather,” seem to surround and infold him, as a land in which he could dwell at ease and at home: surely among them lies the place of his birth!—while against their purity and grandeur the being of his consciousness

shows miserable—dark, weak, and undefined—a shadow that would fain be substance—a dream that would gladly be born into the light of reality. But alas if the whole thing be only in himself—if the vision be a dream of nothing, a revelation of lies, the outcome of that which, helplessly existent, is yet not created, therefore cannot create—if not the whole thing only be a dream of the impotent, but the impotent be himself but a dream—a dream of his own—a self-dreamed dream—with no master of dreams to whom to cry! Where then the cherished hope of one day atoning for his wrongs to those who loved him!—they are nowhere—vanished for ever, upmingled and dissolved in the primeval darkness! If truth be but the hollow of a sphere, ah, never shall he cast himself before them, to tell them that now at last, after long years of revealing separation, he knows himself and them, and that now the love of them is a part of his very being—to implore their forgiveness on the ground that he hates, despises, contemns, and scorns the self that showed them less than absolute love and devotion! Never thus shall he lay his being bare to their eyes of love! They do not even rest, for they do not and will not know it. There is no voice nor hearing in them, and how can there be in him any heart to live! The one comfort left him is, that, unable to follow them, he shall yet die and cease, and fare as they—go also nowhither!

To a man under the dismay of existence dissociated from power, unrooted in, unshadowed by a creating Will, who is Love, the Father of Man—to him who knows not being and God together, the idea of death—a death that knows no reviving, must be, and ought to be the blessedest thought left him. “O land of shadows!” well may such a one cry! “land where the shadows love to ecstatic self-loss, yet forget, and love no more! land of sorrows and despairs, that sink the soul into a deeper Tophet than death has ever sounded! broken kaleidoscope! shaken camera! promiser, speaking truth to the ear, but lying to the sense! land where the heart of my friend is sorrowful as my heart—the more sorrowful that I have been but a poor and far-off friend! land where sin is strong and righteousness faint! where love dreams mightily and walks abroad so feeble! land where the face of my father is dust, and the hand of my mother will never more caress! where my children will spend a few years of like trouble to mine, and then drop from the dream into the no-dream! gladly, O land of sickliest shadows—gladly, that is, with what power of gladness is in me, I take my leave of thee! Welcome the cold, pain-soothing embrace of immortal Death! Hideous are his looks, but I love him better than Life: he is true, and will not deceive us. Nay, he only is our saviour, setting us free from the tyranny of the false that ought to be true, and sets us longing in vain.”

But through all the man's doubts, fears, and perplexities, a certain whisper, say rather, an uncertain rumour, a vague legendary murmur, has been at the same time about, rather than in, his ears—never ceasing to haunt his air, although hitherto he has hardly heeded it. He knows it has come down the ages, and that some in every age have been more or less influenced by a varied acceptance of it. Upon those, however, with whom he has chiefly associated, it has made no impression beyond that of a remarkable legend. It is the story of a man, represented as at least greater, stronger, and better than any other man. With the hero of this tale he has had a constantly recurring, though altogether undefined suspicion that he has something to do. It is strongest, though not even then strong, at such times when he is most aware of evil and imperfection in himself. Betwixt the two, the idea of this man and his knowledge of himself, seems to lie, dim-shadowy, some imperative duty. He knows that the whole matter concerning the man is commemorated in many of the oldest institutions of his country, but up to this time he has shrunk from the demands which, by a kind of spiritual insight, he foresaw would follow, were he once to admit certain things to be true. He has, however, known some and read of more who by their faith in the man conquered all anxiety, doubt, and fear, lived pure, and died in gladsome hope. On the other hand, it seems to him that the faith which was once easy has now become almost an impossibility. And what is it he is called upon to believe? One says one thing, another another. Much that is asserted is simply unworthy of belief, and the foundation of the whole has in his eyes something of the look of a cunningly devised fable. Even should it be true, it

cannot help him, he thinks, for it does not even touch the things that make his woe: the God the tale presents is not the being whose very existence can alone be his cure.

But he meets one who says to him, "Have you then come to your time of life, and not yet ceased to accept hearsay as ground of action—for there is action in abstaining as well as in doing? Suppose the man in question to have taken all possible pains to be understood, does it follow of necessity that he is now or ever was fairly represented by the bulk of his followers? With such a moral distance between him and them, is it possible?"

"But the whole thing has from first to last a strange aspect!" our thinker replies.

"As to the *last* that is not yet come. And as to its *aspect*, its reality must be such as human eye could never convey to reading heart. Every human idea of it *must* be more or less wrong. And yet perhaps the truer the aspect the stranger it would be. But is it not just with ordinary things you are dissatisfied? And should not therefore the very strangeness of these to you little better than rumours incline you to examine the object of them? Will you assert that nothing strange can have to do with human affairs? Much that was once scarce credible is now so ordinary that men have grown stupid to the wonder inherent in it. Nothing around you serves your need: try what is at least of another class of phenomena. What if the things rumoured belong to a *more* natural order than these, lie nearer the roots of your dissatisfied existence, and look strange only because you have hitherto been living in the outer court, not in the *penetralia* of life? The rumour has been vital enough to float down the ages, emerging from every storm: why not see for yourself what may be in it? So powerful an influence on human history, surely there will be found in it signs by which to determine whether the man understood himself and his message, or owed his apparent greatness to the deluded worship of his followers! That he has always had foolish followers none will deny, and none but a fool would judge any leader from such a fact. Wisdom as well as folly will serve a fool's purpose; he turns all into folly. I say nothing now of my own conclusions, because what you imagine my opinions are as hateful to me as to you disagreeable and foolish."

So says the friend; the man hears, takes up the old story, and says to himself, "Let me see then what I can see!"

I will not follow him through the many shadows and slow dawns by which at length he arrives at this much: A man claiming to be the Son of God says he has come to be the light of men; says, "Come to me, and I will give you rest;" says, "Follow me, and you shall find my Father; to know him is the one thing you cannot do without, for it is eternal life." He has learned from the reported words of the man, and from the man himself as in the tale presented, that the bliss of his conscious being is his Father; that his one delight is to do the will of that Father—the only thing in his eyes worthy of being done, or worth having done; that he would make men blessed with his own blessedness; that the cry of creation, the cry of humanity shall be answered into the deepest soul of desire; that less than the divine mode of existence, the godlike way of being, can satisfy no man, that is, make him content with his consciousness; that not this world only, but the whole universe is the inheritance of those who consent to be the children of their Father in heaven, who put forth the power of their will to be of the same sort as he; that to as many as receive him he gives power to become the sons of God; that they shall be partakers of the divine nature, of the divine joy, of the divine power—shall have whatever they desire, shall know no fear, shall love perfectly, and shall never die; that these things are beyond the grasp of the knowing ones of the world, and to them the message will be a scorn; but that the time will come when its truth shall be apparent, to some in confusion of face, to others in joy unspeakable; only that we must beware of judging, for many that are first shall be last, and there are last that shall be first.

To find himself in such conscious as well as vital relation with the source of his being, with a Will by which his own will exists, with a Consciousness by and through which he is conscious, would indeed be the end of all the man's ills! nor can he imagine any other, not to say better way, in which his sorrows could be met, understood and annihilated. For the ills that oppress him are both within

him and without, and over each kind he is powerless. If the message were but a true one! If indeed this man knew what he talked of! But if there should be help for man from anywhere beyond him, some *one* might know it first, and may not this be the one? And if the message be so great, so perfect as this man asserts, then only a perfect, an eternal man, at home in the bosom of the Father, could know, or bring, or tell it. According to the tale, it had been from the first the intent of the Father to reveal himself to man as man, for without the knowledge of the Father after man's own modes of being, he could not grow to real manhood. The grander the whole idea, the more likely is it to be what it claims to be! and if not high as the heavens above the earth, beyond us yet within our reach, it is not for us, it cannot be true. Fact or not, the existence of a God such as Christ, a God who is a good man infinitely, is the only idea containing hope enough for man! If such a God has come to be known, marvel must surround the first news at least of the revelation of him. Because of its marvel, shall men find it in reason to turn from the gracious rumour of what, if it be true, must be the event of all events? And could marvel be lovelier than the marvel reported? But the humble men of heart alone can believe in the high—they alone can perceive, they alone can embrace grandeur. Humility is essential greatness, the inside of grandeur.

Something of such truths the man glimmeringly sees. But in his mind awake, thereupon, endless doubts and questions. What if the whole idea of his mission was a deception born of the very goodness of the man? What if the whole matter was the invention of men pretending themselves the followers of such a man? What if it was a little truth greatly exaggerated? Only, be it what it may, less than its full idea would not be enough for the wants and sorrows that weaken and weigh him down!

He passes through many a thorny thicket of inquiry; gathers evidence upon evidence; reasons upon the goodness of the men who wrote: they might be deceived, but they dared not invent; holds with himself a thousand arguments, historical, psychical, metaphysical—which for their setting-forth would require volumes; hears many an opposing, many a scoffing word from men “who surely know, else would they speak?” and finds himself much where he was before. But at least he is haunting the possible borders of discovery, while those who turn their backs upon the idea are divided from him by a great gulf—it may be of moral difference. To him there is still a grand auroral hope about the idea, and it still draws him; the others, taking the thing from merest report of opinion, look anywhere but thitherward. He who would not trust his best friend to set forth his views of life, accepts the random judgements of unknown others for a sufficing disposal of what the highest of the race have regarded as a veritable revelation from the Father of men. He sees in it therefore nothing but folly; for what he takes for the thing nowhere meets his nature. Our searcher at least holds open the door for the hearing of what voice may come to him from the region invisible: if there be truth there, he is where it will find him.

As he continues to read and reflect, the perception gradually grows clear in him, that, if there be truth in the matter, he must, first of all, and beyond all things else, give his best heed to the reported words of the man himself—to what he says, not what is said about him, valuable as that may afterwards prove to be. And he finds that concerning these words of his, the man says, or at least plainly implies, that only the obedient, childlike soul can understand them. It follows that the judgement of no man who does not obey can be received concerning them or the speaker of them—that, for instance, a man who hates his enemy, who tells lies, who thinks to serve God and Mammon, whether he call himself a Christian or no, has not the right of an opinion concerning the Master or his words—at least in the eyes of the Master, however it may be in his own. This is in the very nature of things: obedience alone places a man in the position in which he can see so as to judge that which is above him. In respect of great truths investigation goes for little, speculation for nothing; if a man would know them, he must obey them. Their nature is such that the only door into them is obedience. And the truth-seeker perceives—which allows him no loophole of escape from life—that what things the Son of Man requires of him, are either such as his conscience backs for just, or such as seem too great, too high for any man. But if there be help for him, it must be a help that recognizes the highest

in him, and urges him to its use. Help cannot come to one made in the image of God, save in the obedient effort of what life and power are in him, for God is action. In such effort alone is it possible for need to encounter help. It is the upstretched that meets the downstretched hand. He alone who obeys can with confidence pray—to him alone does an answer seem a thing that may come. And should anything spoken by the Son of Man seem to the seeker unreasonable, he feels in the rest such a majesty of duty as compels him to judge with regard to the other, that he has not yet perceived its true nature, or its true relation to life.

And now comes the crisis: if here the man sets himself honestly to do the thing the Son of Man tells him, he so, and so first, sets out positively upon the path which, if there be truth in these things, will conduct him to a knowledge of the whole matter; not until then is he a disciple. If the message be a true one, the condition of the knowledge of its truth is not only reasonable but an unavoidable necessity. If there be help for him, how otherways should it draw nigh? He has to be assured of the highest truth of his being: there can be no other assurance than that to be gained thus, and thus alone; for not only by obedience does a man come into such contact with truth as to know what it is, and in regard to truth knowledge and belief are one. That things which cannot appear save to the eye capable of seeing them, that things which cannot be recognized save by the mind of a certain development, should be examined by eye incapable, and pronounced upon by mind undeveloped, is absurd. The deliverance the message offers is a change such that the man shall *be* the rightness of which he talked: while his soul is not a hungered, athirst, aglow, a groaning after righteousness—that is, longing to be himself honest and upright, it is an absurdity that he should judge concerning the way to this rightness, seeing that, while he walks not in it, he is and shall be a dishonest man: he knows not whither it leads and how can he know the way! What he *can* judge of is, his duty at a given moment—and that not in the abstract, but as something to be by him *done*, neither more, nor less, nor other than *done*. Thus judging and doing, he makes the only possible step nearer to righteousness and righteous judgement; doing otherwise, he becomes the more unrighteous, the more blind. For the man who knows not God, whether he believes there is a God or not, there can be, I repeat, no judgement of things pertaining to God. To our supposed searcher, then, the crowning word of the Son of Man is this, “If any man is willing to do the will of the Father, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

Having thus accompanied my type to the borders of liberty, my task for the present is over. The rest let him who reads prove for himself. Obedience alone can convince. To convince without obedience I would take no bootless labour; it would be but a gain for hell. If any man call these things foolishness, his judgement is to me insignificant. If any man say he is open to conviction, I answer him he can have none but on the condition, by the means of obedience. If a man say, “The thing is not interesting to me,” I ask him, “Are you following your conscience? By that, and not by the interest you take or do not take in a thing, shall you be judged. Nor will anything be said to you, or of you, in that day, whatever *that day* mean, of which your conscience will not echo every syllable.”

Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity. Life parted from its causative life would be no life; it would at best be but a barrack of corruption, an outpost of annihilation. In proportion as the union is incomplete, the derived life is imperfect. And no man can be one with neighbour, child, dearest, except as he is one with his origin; and he fails of his perfection so long as there is one being in the universe he could not love.

Of all men he is bound to hold his face like a flint in witness of this truth who owes everything that makes for eternal good, to the belief that at the heart of things and causing them to be, at the centre of monad, of world, of protoplasmic mass, of loving dog, and of man most cruel, is an absolute, perfect love; and that in the man Christ Jesus this love is with us men to take us home. To nothing else do I for one owe any grasp upon life. In this I see the setting right of all things. To the man who believes in the Son of God, poetry returns in a mighty wave; history unrolls itself in harmony; science shows crowned with its own aureole of holiness. There is no enlivener of the imagination, no enabler

of the judgment, no strengthener of the intellect, to compare with the belief in a live Ideal, at the heart of all personality, as of every law. If there be no such live Ideal, then a falsehood can do more for the race than the facts of its being; then an unreality is needful for the development of the man in all that is real, in all that is in the highest sense true; then falsehood is greater than fact, and an idol necessary for lack of a God. They who deny cannot, in the nature of things, know what they deny. When one sees a chaos begin to put on the shape of an ordered world, he will hardly be persuaded it is by the power of a foolish notion bred in a diseased fancy.

Let the man then who would rise to the height of his being, be persuaded to test the Truth by the deed—the highest and only test that can be applied to the loftiest of all assertions. To every man I say, “Do the truth you know, and you shall learn the truth you need to know.”

## ST. GEORGE'S DAY, 1564

[Footnote: 1864.]

All England knows that this year (1864) is the three hundredth since Shakspeare was born. The strong probability is likewise that this month of April is that in which he first saw the earthly light. On the twenty-sixth of April he was baptized. Whether he was born on the twenty-third, to which effect there may once have been a tradition, we do not know; but though there is nothing to corroborate that statement, there are two facts which would incline us to believe it if we could: the one that he *died* on the twenty-third of April, thus, as it were, completing a cycle; and the other that the twenty-third of April is St. George's Day. If there is no harm in indulging in a little fanciful sentiment about such a grand fact, we should say that certainly it was *St. George for merry England*

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