

HAMILTON

WRIGHT MABIE

ESSAYS ON WORK AND
CULTURE

Hamilton Wright Mabie
Essays on Work and Culture

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Chapter I

Tool or Man?

A complete man is so uncommon that when he appears he is looked upon with suspicion, as if there must be something wrong about him. If a man is content to deal vigorously with affairs, and leave art, religion, and science to the enjoyment or refreshment or enlightenment of others, he is accepted as strong, sound and wise; but let him add to practical sagacity a love of poetry and some skill in the practice of it; let him be not only honest and trustworthy, but genuinely religious; let him be not only keenly observant and exact in his estimate of trade influences and movements, but devoted to the study of some science, and there goes abroad the impression that he is superficial. It is written, apparently, in the modern, and especially in the American, consciousness, that a man can do but one thing well; if he attempts more than one thing, he betrays the weakness of versatility. If this view of life is sound, man is born to imperfect development and must not struggle with fate. He may have natural aptitudes of many kinds; he may have a passionate desire to try three or four different instruments; he may have a force of vitality which is equal to the demands of several vocations or avocations; but he must disregard the most powerful impulses of his nature; he must select one tool, and with that tool he must do all the work appointed to him.

If he is a man of business, he must turn a deaf ear to the voices of art; if he writes prose, he must not permit himself the delight of writing verse; if he uses the pen, he must not use the voice. If he ventures to employ two languages for his thought, to pour his energy into two channels, the awful judgment of superficiality falls on him like a decree of fate.

So fixed has become the habit of confusing the use of manifold gifts with mere dexterity that men of quality and power often question the promptings which impel them to use different or diverse forms of expression; as if a man were born to use only one limb and enjoy only one resource in this many-sided universe!

Specialisation has been carried so far that it has become an organised tyranny through the curiously perverted view of life which it has developed in some minds. A man is permitted, in these days, to cultivate one faculty or master one field of knowledge, but he must not try to live a whole life, or work his nature out on all sides, under penalty of public suspicion and disapproval. If a Pericles were to appear among us, he would be discredited by the very qualities which made him the foremost public man of his time among the most intelligent and gifted people who have yet striven to solve the problems of life. If Michelangelo came among us, he would be compelled to repress his tremendous energy or face the suspicion of the critical mind of the age; it is not permitted a man, in these days, to excel in painting, sculpture, architecture, and sonnet-writing. If, in addition, such a man were to exhibit moral qualities of a very unusual order, he would deepen the suspicion that he was not playing the game of life fairly; for there are those who have so completely broken life into fragments that they not only deny the possibility of the possession of the ability to do more than one thing well, but the existence of any kind of connection between character and achievement.

Man is not only a fragment, but the world is a mass of unrelated parts; religion, science, morals, and art moving in little spheres of their own, without the possibility of contact. The arts were born at the foot of the altar, as we are sometimes reminded; but let the artist beware how he entertains religious ideas or emotions to-day; to suggest that art and morals have any interior relation is, in certain circles, to awaken pity that one's knowledge of these things is still so rudimentary. The scholar must

beware of the graces of style; if, like the late Master of Balliol, he makes a translation so touched with distinction and beauty that it is likely to become a classic in the language in which it is newly lodged, there are those who look askance at his scholarship; for knowledge, to be pure and genuine, must be rude, slovenly, and barbarous in expression. The religious teacher may master the principles of his faith, but let him beware how he applies them to the industrial or social conditions of society. If he ventures to make this dangerous experiment, he is promptly warned that he is encroaching on the territory of the economist and sociologist. The artist must not permit himself to care for truth, because it has come to be understood in some quarters that he is concerned with beauty, and with beauty alone. To assume that there is any unity in life, any connection between character and achievement, any laws of growth which operate in all departments and in all men, is to discredit one's intelligence and jeopardise one's influence. One field and one tool to each man seems to be the maxim of this divisive philosophy—if that can be called a philosophy which discards unity as a worn-out metaphysical conception, and separates not only men but the arts, occupations, and skills from each other by impassable gulfs.

Versatility is often a treacherous ease, which leads the man who possesses it into fields where he has no sure footing because he has no first-hand knowledge, and therefore no real power; and against this tendency, so prevalent in this country, the need of concentration must continually be urged. The great majority of men lack the abounding vitality which must find a variety of channels to give it free movement. But the danger which besets some men ought not to be made a limitation for men of superior strength; it ought not to be used as a barrier to keep back those whose inward impulse drives them forward, not in one but in many directions. Above all, the limitations of a class ought not to be made the basis of a conception of life which divides its activities by hard and fast lines, and tends, by that process of hardening which shows itself in every field of thought or work, to make men tools and machines instead of free, creative forces in society.

A man of original power can never be confined within the limits of a single field of interest and activity, nor can he ever be content to bear the marks and use the skill of a single occupation. He cannot pour his whole force into one channel; there is always a reserve of power beyond the demands of the work which he has in hand at the moment. Wherever he may find his place and whatever work may come to his hand, he must always be aware of the larger movement of life which incloses his special task; and he must have the consciousness of direct relation with that central power of which all activities are inadequate manifestations. To a man of this temper the whole range of human interests must remain open, and such a man can never escape the conviction that life is a unity under all its complexities; that all activities stand vitally related to each other; that truth, beauty, knowledge, and character must be harmonised and blended in every real and adequate development of the human spirit. To the growth of every flower earth, sun, and atmosphere must contribute; in the making of a man all the rich forces of nature and civilisation must have place.

Chapter II

The Man in the Work

The general mind possesses a kind of divination which discovers itself in those comments, criticisms, and judgments which pass from man to man through a wide area and sometimes through long periods of time. The opinion which appears at first glance to be an expression of materialism often shows, upon closer study, an element of idealism or a touch of spiritual discernment. It is customary, for instance, to say of a man that he lives in his works; as if the enduring quality of his fame rested in and was dependent upon the tangible products of his genius or his skill. There is truth in the phrase even when its scope is limited to this obvious meaning; but there is a deeper truth behind the truism,—the truth that a man lives in his works, not only because they commemorate but because they express him. They are products of his skill; but they are also the products of his soul. The man is revealed in them, and abides in them, not as a statue in a temple, but as a seed in the grain and the fruit. They have grown out of him, and they uncover the secrets of his spiritual life. No man can conceal himself from his fellows; everything he fashions or creates interprets and explains him.

This deepest significance of work has always been divined even when it has not been clearly perceived. Men have understood that there is a spiritual quality even in the most material products of a man's activity, and, even in ruder times, they have discerned the inner relation of the things which a man makes with the man himself. In our time, when the immense significance of this essential harmony between spirit and product has been accepted as a guiding principle in historic investigation, the stray spear-head and broken potsherd are prized by the anthropologist, because a past race lives in them. The lowest and commonest kind of domestic vessels and implements disclose to the student of to-day not only the stage of manual skill which their makers had reached, but also the general ideas of life which those makers held. When it comes to the higher products, character, temperament, and genius are discerned in every mutilated fragment. The line on an urn reveals the spirit of the unknown sculptor who cut it in the enduring stone. It has often been said that if every memorial of the Greek race save the Parthenon had perished, it would be possible to gain a clear and true impression of the spiritual condition and quality of that race.

The great artists are the typical and representative men of the race, and whatever is true of them is true, in a lesser degree, of men in general. There is in the work of every great sculptor, painter, writer, composer, architect, a distinctive and individual manner so marked and unmistakable as to identify the man whenever and wherever a bit of his work appears. If a statue of Phidias were to be found without any mark of the sculptor upon it, there would be no delay in determining whose work it was; no educated musician would be uncertain for a moment about a composition of Wagner's if he heard it for the first time without knowledge of its source; nor would a short story from the hand of Hawthorne remain unclaimed a day after its publication. Now, this individual manner and quality, so evident that it is impossible not to recognise it whenever it appears, is not a trick of skill; it has its source in a man's temperament and genius; it is the subtlest and most deep-going disclosure of his nature. In so far as a spiritual quality can be contained and expressed in any form of speech known among men—and all the arts are forms of speech—that which is most secret and sacred in a man is freely given to the world in his work.

Work is sacred, therefore, not only because it is the fruit of self-denial, patience, and toil, but because it uncovers the soul of the worker. We deal with each other on so many planes, and have so much speech with each other about things of little moment, that we often lose the sense of the sanctity which attaches to personality whenever it appears. There come moments, however, when some intimate experience is confided to us, and then, in the pause of talk, we become aware that we are in presence of a human soul behind the familiar face of our friend, and that we are on holy

ground. In such moments the quick emotion, the sudden thrill, bear eloquent witness to that deeper and diviner life in which we all share, but of which we rarely seem aware. This perception of the presence of a man's soul comes to us when we stand before a true work of art. We not only uncover our heads, but our hearts are uncovered as well. Here is one who through all his skill speaks to us in a language which we understand, but which we rarely hear. A great work of art not only liberates the imagination, but the heart as well; for it speaks to us more intimately than our friends are able to speak, and that reticence which holds us back from perfect intercourse when we look into each other's faces vanishes. A few lines read in the solitude of the woods, or before the open fire, often kindle the emotion and imagination which slumber within us; in companionship with the greatest minds our shyness vanishes; we not only take but give with unconscious freedom. When we reach this stage we have reached the man who lives not only by but in the work, and whose innermost nature speaks to us and confides in us through the form of speech which he has chosen.

The higher the quality of the work, the clearer the disclosure of the spirit which fashioned it and gave it the power to search and liberate. The plays of Sophocles are, in many ways, the highest and most representative products of the Greek literary genius; they show that genius at the moment when all its qualities were in harmony and perfectly balanced between the spiritual vision which it formed of life, and the art form to which it commits that precious and impalpable possession. One of the distinctive qualities of these plays is their objectivity; their detachment from the moods and experiences of the dramatist. This detachment is so complete that at first glance every trace of the dramatist seems to have been erased. But there are many passages besides the famous lines descriptive of the grove at Colonus which betray the personality behind the plays; and, studied more closely, the very detachment of the drama from the dramatist is significant of character. In the poise, harmony, and balance of these beautiful creations there is revealed the instinct for proportion, the self-control and the subordination of the parts to the whole which betray a nature committed by its very instincts to a passionate devotion to beauty. In one of the poems of our own century which belongs in the first rank of artistic achievements, "In Memoriam," the highest themes are touched with the strength of one who knows how to face the problems of life with impartial and impersonal courage, and with the tenderness of one whose own heart has felt the immediate pressure of these tremendous questions. So every great work, whether personal or impersonal in intention, conveys to the intelligent reader an impression of the thought behind the skill, and of the character behind the thought. Goethe frankly declared that his works constituted one great confession. All work is confession and revelation as well.

Chapter III

Work as Self-Expression

The higher the kind and quality of a man's work, the more completely does it express his personality. There are forms of work so rudimentary that the touch of individuality is almost entirely absent, and there are forms of work so distinctive and spiritual that they are instantly and finally associated with one man. The degree in which a man individualises his work and gives it the quality of his own mind and spirit is, therefore, the measure of his success in giving his nature free and full expression. For work, in this large sense, is the expression of the man; and as the range and significance of all kinds of expression depend upon the scope and meaning of the ideas, forces, skills, and qualities expressed, so the dignity and permanence of work depend upon the power and insight of the worker. All sound work is true and genuine self-expression, but work has as many gradations of quality and significance as has character or ability. Dealing with essentially the same materials, each man in each generation has the opportunity of adding to the common material that touch of originality in temperament, insight, or skill which is his only possible contribution to civilisation.

The spiritual nature of work and its relation to character are seen in the diversity of work which the different races have done, and in the unmistakable stamp which the work of each race bears. First as a matter of instinct, and later as a matter of intelligence, each race has followed, in its activities, the lines of least resistance, and put its energies forth in ways which were most attractive because they offered the freest range and were nearest at hand. The attempt of some historians of a philosophical turn of mind to fit each race into a category and to give each race a sharply defined sphere of influence has been carried too far, and has discredited the effort to interpret arbitrarily the genius of the different races and to assign arbitrarily their functions. It remains true, however, that, in a broad sense, each race has had a peculiar quality of mind and spirit which may be called its genius, and each has followed certain general lines and kept within certain general limits in doing its work. The people who lived on the great plains of Central Asia worked in a different temper and with wide divergence of manner from the people who lived on the banks of the Nile; and the Jew, the Greek, and the Roman showed their racial differences as distinctly in the form and quality of their work as in the temper of their mind and character. And thus, on a great historical scale, the significance of work as an expression of character is unmistakably disclosed.

In this sense work is practically inclusive of every force and kind of life since every real worker puts into it all that is most distinctive in his nature. The moral quality contributes sincerity, veracity, solidity of structure; the intellectual quality is disclosed in order, lucidity, and grasp of thought; the artistic quality is seen in symmetry proportion, beauty of construction and of detail; the spiritual quality is revealed in depth of insight and the scope of relationships brought into view between the specific work and the world in which it is done. In work of the finer order, dealing with the more impressionable material, there are discoverable not only the character and quality of the worker, but the conditions under which he lives; the stage of civilisation, the vigour or languor of vital energy, the richness or poverty of social life, the character of the soil and of the landscape, the pallor or the bloom of vegetation, the shining or the veiling of the skies. So genuinely and deeply does a man put himself into the thing he does that whatever affects him affects it, and all that flows into him of spiritual, human, and natural influence flows into and is conserved by it. A bit of work of the highest quality is a key to a man's life because it is the product of that life, and it brings to light that which is hidden in the man as truly as the flower lays bare to the sun that which was folded in the seed. What a man does is, therefore, an authentic revelation of what he is, and by their works men are fairly and rightly judged.

For this reason no man can live in any real sense who fails to give his personality expression through some form of activity. For action in some field is the final stage of development; and to stop short of action, to rest in emotion or thought, is to miss the higher fruits of living and to evade one's responsibility to himself as well as to society. The man whose artistic instinct is deep cannot be content with those visions which rise out of the deeps of the imagination and wait for that expression which shall give them objective reality; the vision brings with it a moral necessity which cannot be evaded without serious loss. Indeed, the vitality of the imagination depends largely upon the fidelity with which its images are first realised in thought and then embodied by the hand. To comprehend what life means in the way of truth and power, one must act as well as think and feel. For action itself is a process of revelation, and the sincerity and power with which a man puts forth that which is disclosed to him determine the scope of the disclosure of truth which he receives. To comprehend all that life involves of experience, or offers of power, one must give full play to all the force that is in him. It is significant that the men of creative genius are, as a rule, men of the greatest productive power. One marvels at the magnitude of the work of such men as Michelangelo and Rembrandt, as Beethoven and Wagner, as Shakespeare, Balzac, Thackeray, Carlyle, and Browning; not discerning that, as these master workers gave form and substance to their visions and insight, the power to see and to understand deepened and expanded apace with their achievements.

Chapter IV

The Pain of Youth

It is the habit of the poets, and of many who are poets neither in vision nor in faculty, to speak of youth as if it were a period of unshadowed gaiety and pleasure, with no consciousness of responsibility and no sense of care. The freshness of feeling, the delight in experience, the joy of discovery, the unspent vitality which welcomes every morning as a challenge to one's strength, invest youth with a charm which art is always striving to preserve, and which men who have parted from it remember with a sense of pathos; for the morning of life comes but once, and when it fades something goes which never returns. There are ample compensations, there are higher joys and deeper insights and relationships; but a magical charm which touches all things and turns them to gold, vanishes with the morning. In reaching its perfection of beauty the flower must part with the dewy promise of its earliest growth.

All this is true of youth, which in many ways symbolises the immortal part of man's nature, and must be, therefore, always beautiful and sacred to him. But it is untrue that the sky of youth has no clouds and the spirit of youth no cares; on the contrary, no period of life is in many ways more painful. The finer the organisation and the greater the ability, the more difficult and trying the experiences through which the youth passes. George Eliot has pointed out a striking peculiarity of childish grief in the statement that the child has no background of other griefs against which the magnitude of its present sorrow may be measured. While that sorrow lasts it is complete, absolute, and hopeless, because the child has no memory of other trials endured, of other sorrows survived. In this fact about the earliest griefs lies the source also of the pains of youth. The young man is an undeveloped power; he is largely ignorant of his own capacity, often without inward guidance towards his vocation; he is unadjusted to the society in which he must find a place for himself. He is full of energy and aspiration, but he does not know how to expend the one or realise the other. His soul has wings, but he cannot fly, because, like the eagle, he must have space on the ground before he rises in the air. If his imagination is active he has moments of rapture, days of exaltation, when the world seems to lie before him clear from horizon to horizon. His hours of study overflow with the passion for knowledge, and his hours of play are haunted by beautiful or noble dreams. The world is full of wonder and mystery, and the young explorer is impatient to be on his journey. No plan is then too great to be accomplished, no moral height too difficult to be attained. After all that has been said, the rapture of youth, when youth means opportunity, remains unexpressed. No poet will ever entirely compass it, as no poet will ever quite ensnare in speech the measureless joy of those festival mornings in June when Nature seems on the point of speaking in human language.

But this rapture is inward; it has its source in the earliest perception of the richness of life and man's capacity to appropriate it. It is the rapture of discovery, not of possession; the rapture of promise, not of achievement. It is without the verification of experience or the corroborative evidence of performance. Youth is possibility; that is its charm, its joy, and its power; but it is also its limitation. There lies before it the real crisis through which every man of parts and power passes: the development of the inward force and the adjustment of the personality to the order of life. The shadow of that crisis is never quite absent from those radiant skies which the poets love to recall; the uncertainty of that supreme issue in experience is never quite out of mind. Siegfried must meet the dragon before he can climb those heights on which, encircled by fire, his ideal is to take the form and substance of reality; and the prelusive notes of that fateful struggle are heard long before the sword is forged or the hour of destiny has come.

There is no test of character more severe or difficult to bear than the suspense of waiting. The man who can act eases his soul under the greatest calamities; but he who is compelled to wait, unless he

be of hardy fibre, eats his heart out in a futile despair. Troops will endure losses when they are caught up in the stir of a charge which would demoralise and scatter them if they were compelled to halt under the relentless guns of masked batteries. Now, the characteristic trial of youth is this experience of waiting at a moment when the whole nature craves expression and the satisfaction of action. The greater the volume of energy in the man who has yet to find his vocation and place, the more trying the ordeal. There are moments in the life of the young imagination when the very splendour of its dreams fills the soul with despair, because there seems no hope of giving them outward reality; and the clearer the consciousness of the possession of power, the more poignant the feeling that it may find no channel through which to add itself to the impulsion which drives forward the work of society.

The reality of this crisis in spiritual experience—the adjustment between the personality and the physical, social, and industrial order in which it must find its place and task—is the measure of its possible painfulness. It is due, perhaps, to the charm which invests youth, as one looks back upon it from maturity or age, that its pain is forgotten and that sympathy withheld which youth craves often without knowing why it craves. A helpful comprehension of the phase of experience through which he is passing is often the supreme need of the ardent young spirit. His pain has its roots in his ignorance of his own powers and of the world. He strives again and again to put himself in touch with organised work; he takes up one task after another in a fruitless endeavour to succeed. He does not know what he is fitted to do, and he turns helplessly from one form of work for which he has no faculty to another for which he has less. His friends begin to think of him as a ne'er-do-weel; and, more pathetic still, the shadow of failure begins to darken his own spirit. And yet it may be that in this halting, stumbling, ineffective human soul, vainly striving to put its hand to its task, there is some rare gift, some splendid talent, waiting for the ripe hour and the real opportunity! In such a crisis sympathetic comprehension is invaluable, but it is rarely given, and the youth works out his problem in isolation. If he is courageous and persistent he finds his place at last; and work brings peace, strength, self-comprehension.

Chapter V

The Year of Wandering

Goethe prefaces Wilhelm Meister's travels with some lines full of that sagacity which was so closely related to his insight:

What shap'st thou here at the world? 't is shapen long ago;
The Maker shaped it, he thought it best even so;
Thy lot is appointed, go follow its hest;
Thy way is begun, thou must walk, and not rest;
For sorrow and care cannot alter the case;
And running, not raging, will win thee the race.

My inheritance, how wide and fair!
Time is my estate: to time I'm heir.

Between the preparation and the work, the apprenticeship and the actual dealing with a task or an art, there comes, in the experience of many young men, a period of uncertainty and wandering which is often misunderstood and counted as time wasted, when it is, in fact, a period rich in full and free development. In the days when Wilhelm Meister was written, the *Wanderjahr* or year of travel was a recognised part of student life, and was held in high regard as contributing a valuable element to a complete education. "The Europe of the Renaissance," writes M. Wagner, "was fairly furrowed in every direction by students, who often travelled afoot and barefoot to save their shoes." These wayfarers were light-hearted and often empty-handed; they were in quest of knowledge, but the intensity of the search was tempered by gaiety and ease of mood. Under a mask of frivolity, however, youth often wears a serious face, and behind apparent aimlessness there is often a steady and final turning of the whole nature towards its goal.

Uncertainty breeds impatience; and in youth, before the will is firmly seated and the goal clearly seen, impatience often manifests itself in the relaxation of all forms of restraint. The richer the nature the greater the reaction which sometimes sets in at this period; the more varied and powerful the elements to be harmonised in a man's character and life, the greater the ferment and agitation which often precede the final discernment and acceptance of one's work. If the pressure of uncertainty with regard to one's gifts and their uses ought to call out patience and sympathy, so ought that experience of spiritual and intellectual agitation which often intervenes between the training for life and the process of actual living. This experience is a true year of wandering, and there is nothing of which the wanderer stands in such need as the friendly hand and the door which stands hospitably open.

It is the born drudge alone who is content to go from the school to the office or the shop without so much as asking the elementary questions about life. The aspiring want to know what is behind the occupation; they must discover the spiritual necessity of work before they are ready to bend to the inevitable yoke. Strong natures are driven by the very momentum of their own moral impulse to explore the world before they build in it and unite themselves with it; the imagination must be fed with beauty and truth before they are content to choose their task and tools. It is often a sign of greatness in a man that he does not quickly fit into his place or easily find his work. Let him look well at the stars before he bends to his task; he will need to remember them when the days of toil come, as they must come, at times, to every man. Let him see the world with his own eyes before he gives to fortune those hostages which hold him henceforth fast-bound in one place.

It is as natural for ardent and courageous youth to wish to know what is in life, what it means, and what it holds for its children, as for a child to reach for and search the things that surround and attract it. Behind every real worker in the world is a real man, and a man has a right to know the conditions under which he must live, and the choices of knowledge, power, and activity which are offered him. In the education of many men and women, therefore, there comes the year of wandering; the experience of travelling from knowledge to knowledge and from occupation to occupation. There are men and women, it is true, who are born under conditions so free and prosperous that the choice of work is made almost instinctively and unconsciously, and apprenticeship merges into mastery without any intervening agitation or uncertainty. At long intervals Nature not only sends a great talent into the world, but provides in advance for its training and for its steady direction and unfolding; but Nature is not often so minute in her provision for her children. Those who receive most generously from her hand are, for the most part, compelled to discover their gifts and find their places in the general order as the result of much searching, and often of many failures.

And even in the most harmonious natures the elements of agitation and ferment are rarely absent. The forces which go to the making of a powerful man can rarely be adjusted and blended without some disturbance of relations and conditions. This disturbance is sometimes injurious, because it affects the moral foundations upon which character rests; and for this reason the significance of the experience in its relation to development ought to be sympathetically studied. The birth of the imagination and of the passions, the perception of the richness of life, and the consciousness of the possession of the power to master and use that wealth, create a critical moment in the history of youth,—a moment richer in possibilities of all kinds than comes at any later period. Agitation and ferment of soul are inevitable in that wonderful moment. It is as idle to ask youth to be calm and contented in that supreme moment as to ask the discoverer who is catching his first glimpse of a new continent to avoid excitement. There are times when agitation is as normal as is self-control at other and less critical times. There are days in June when Nature seems to betray an almost riotous prodigality of energy; but that prodigality is always well within the limits of order. In youth that which is to be feared is not the explosive force of vitality, but its wrong direction; and it is at this crisis that youth so often makes its mute and unavailing appeal to maturity. The man who has left his year of wandering behind him forgets its joys and perils, and regards it as a deflection from a course which is now perfectly plain, although it may once have been confused and uncertain. He is critical and condemnatory where he ought to be sympathetic and helpful. If he reflects and comprehends, he will hold out the hand of fellowship; for he will understand that the year of wandering is not a manifestation of aimlessness, but of aspiration, and that in its ferment and uncertainty youth is often guided to and finally prepared for its task.

Chapter VI

The Ultimate Test

"I have cut more than one field of oats and wheat," writes M. Charles Wagner, "cradled for long hours under the August sky to the slow cadence of the blade as it swung to and fro, laying low at every stroke the heavy yellow heads. I have heard the quail whistle in the distant fields beyond the golden waves of wheat and the woods that looked blue above the vines. I have thought of the clamours of mankind, of the oven-like cities, of the problems which perplex the age, and my insight has grown clearer. Yes, I am Positive that one of the great curatives of our evils, our maladies, social, moral, and intellectual, would be a return to the soil, a rehabilitation of the work of the fields." In these characteristically ardent words one of the noblest Frenchmen of the day has brought out a truth of general application. To come once more into personal relations with mother earth is to secure health of body and of mind; and with health comes clarity of vision. To touch the soil as a worker is to set all the confined energies of the body free, to incite all its functions to normal activity, to secure that physical harmony which results from a full and normal play of all the physical forces on an adequate object.

In like manner, true work of mind or technical skill brings peace, composure, sanity, to one to whom the proper outlet of his energy has been denied. To youth, possessed by an almost riotous vitality, with great but unused powers of endurance and of positive action, the finding of its task means concentration of energy instead of dissipations directness of action instead of indecision, conscious increase of power instead of deepened sense of inefficiency, and the happiness which rises like a pure spring from the depths of the soul when the whole nature is poised and harmonised. The torments of uncertainty, the waste and disorder of the period of ferment, give place to clear vision, free action, natural growth. There are few moments in life so intoxicating as those which follow the final discovery of the task one is appointed to perform. It is a true home-coming after weary and anxious wandering; it is the lifting of the fog off a perilous coast; it is the shining of the sun after days of shrouded sky.

The "storm and stress" period is always interesting because it predicts the appearance of a new power; and men instinctively love every evidence of the greatness of the race, as they instinctively crave the disclosure of new truth. In the reaction against the monotony of formalism and of that deadly conventionalism which is the peril of every accepted method in religion, art, education, or politics, men are ready to welcome any revolt, however extravagant. Too much life is always better than too little, and the absurdities of young genius are nobler than the selfish prudence of aged sagacity. The wild days at Weimar which Klopstock looked at askance, and not without good reason; the excess of passion and action in Schiller's "Robbers;" the turbulence of the young Romanticists, with long hair and red waistcoats, crowding the Theatre Francais to compel the acceptance of "Hernani,"—these stormy dawns of the new day in art are always captivating to the imagination. Their interest lies, however, not in their turbulence and disorder, but in their promise. If real achievements do not follow the early outbreak, the latter are soon forgotten; if they herald a new birth of power, they are fixed in the memory of a world which, however slow and cold, loves to feel the fresh impulse of the awakening human spirit. The wild days at Weimar were the prelude to a long life of sustained energy and of the highest productivity; "The Robbers" was soon distanced and eclipsed by the noble works of one of the noblest of modern spirits; and to the extravagance of the ardent French Romanticists of 1832 succeeded those great works in verse and prose which have made the last half-century memorable in French literary history.

It is the fruitage of work, not the wild play of undirected energy, which gives an epoch its decisive influence and a man his place and power. Both aspects of the "storm and stress" period need to be kept in mind. When it is tempted to condemn too sternly the extravagance of such a

period, society will do well to recall how often this undirected or ill-directed play of energy has been the forerunner of a noble putting forth of creative power. And those who are involved in such an outpouring of new life, on the other hand, will do well to remember that extravagance is never the sign of art; that licence is never the liberty which sets free the creative force; that "storm and stress" is, at the best, only a promise of sound work; and that its importance and reality depend entirely upon the fruit it bears.

The decisive test, in other words, comes when a man deals, in patience and fidelity, with the task which is set before him. Up to this point his life, however rich and varied, has been a preparation; now comes that final trial of strength which is to bring into clear light whatever power is in him, be that power great or small. If work had no other quality, the fact that it settles a man's place among men would invest it with the highest dignity; for a man's place can be determined only by a complete unfolding and measurement of all the powers that are in him, and this process of development must have all the elements of the highest moral process. So great, indeed, is the importance of work from this point of view that it seems to involve, under the appearance of a provisional judgment, the weight and seriousness of a final judgment of men. Such a judgment, as every man knows who has the conscience either of a moralist or of an artist, is being hourly registered in the growth which is silently accomplished through the steady and skilful doing of one's work, or in the gradual but inevitable decline and decay which accompany and follow the slovenly, indifferent, or unfaithful performance of one's task.

We make or unmake ourselves by and through our work; marring our material and spiritual fortunes or discovering and possessing them at will. The idle talk about the play of chance in the world, the futile attempt to put on the broad back of circumstances that burden of responsibility which rests on our own shoulders, deceives no man in his saner moments. The outward fruits of success are not always within our reach, no matter how strenuous our struggles to pluck them; but that inward strength, of which all forms of outward prosperity are but visible evidences, lies within the grasp of every true worker. Fidelity, skill, energy—the noble putting forth of one's power in some worthy form of work—never fail of that unfolding of the whole man in harmonious strength which is the only ultimate and satisfying form of success.

Chapter VII

Liberation

Work is the most continuous and comprehensive form of action; that form which calls into play and presses into steady service the greatest number of gifts, skills, and powers. Into true work, therefore, a man pours his nature without measure or stint; and in that process he comes swiftly or slowly to a clear realisation of himself. Work sets him face to face with himself. So long as he is getting ready to work he cannot measure his power, nor take full account of his resources of skill, intelligence, and moral endurance; but when he has closed with his task and put his entire force into the doing of it, he comes to an understanding not only of but with himself. Under the testing process of actual contact with materials and obstacles, his strength and his weakness are revealed to him; he learns what lies within his power and what lies beyond it; he takes accurate account of his moral force, and measures himself with some degree of accuracy against a given task or undertaking; he discovers his capacity for growth, and begins to see, through the mist of the future, how far he is likely to go along the road he has chosen. He discerns his lack of skill in various directions, and knows how to secure what he needs; in countless ways he measures himself and comes to know himself.

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