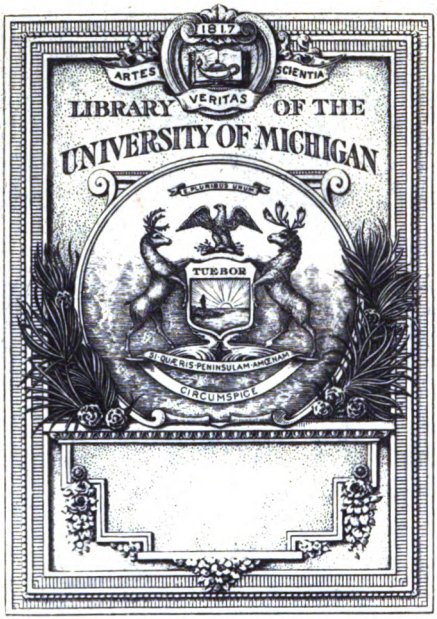

FASHIONABLE

AMUSEMENTS.

Nor I from Virtues call decoy thine ear;
Friendly to pleasure are her sacred laws.
Let Temperance' smile the cup of gladness cheer;
That cup is death if he withhold applause.

Beattie.

BY REV. D. R. THOMASON,

WITH A

RECOMMENDATORY PREFACE,

BY REV. G. Gardiner SPRING, D.D.

NEW-YORK:
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INTRODUCTION.

THE Author of the following pages is a stranger to the American Churches: and should this brief notice of his work introduce it to some by whom it might otherwise remain unknown, the subscriber will feel that he has performed an act of kindness, not to the writer alone, but to the readers of this interesting volume. The subject of which it treats is presented in a manner unusually attractive. If it does not in every instance animadvert upon fashionable amusements with unsparing severity, the attentive reader will find in the end, that the author is no apologist for the arguments by which they have usually been defended. There is a candour and ingenuousness in his discussion, which may perhaps prejudice a few, but which will commend the work to others, by whom, but for this circumstance, it would probably be neglected. Christian parents and Christian families would do well to be familiar with this little volume. They will find no intemperate zeal, no railing and invective, in these pages; but a dispassionate and courteous investigation of the true tendency of customs so unfavourable to the cultivation of piety. Our children and youth are naturally far enough

from God. It were wise and kind not to multiply and increase the temptations and dangers which every where lurk around their path, and beguile them to ruin. The world is gay enough already. The way of death is sufficiently enticing, and abundantly strewed with flowers. All our vigilance and exertion, sedulously and anxiously employed, may well be put in requisition to rectify the vain imaginations of men, control their heedless spirit, and arrest their thoughtlessness by the great realities of religion and eternity. Nothing is more evident than that a passion for fashionable amusements banishes all serious regard for religion, silences the voice of conscience, and neutralizes the means of grace and salvation. They may not always prove the school of vice and profligacy, but they are always the school of thoughtlessness and vanity; where every thing else is fortified, rather than serious thoughts of God and a judgment to come. There is no apology for usages that endanger our immortality. "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

GARDINER SPRING.

New-York, March 1, 1831.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

INDEPENDENTLY of the measure of talent employed in the present production, the Author entertains some apprehensions respecting its success. The work is undoubtedly a desideratum; for, although the subject of Fashionable Amusements has engaged the attention of numerous writers, a volume devoted to the topic has never appeared. The subject, moreover, is inviting, as well as important, and, unless decidedly defective in execution, can hardly fail to become, in some degree, popular.

What, then, are the writer's apprehensions? He affirms them to be neither affected nor groundless. The spirit and tone of the volume, he fears, will, in

some quarters, limit its acceptance. In their opinions of Fashionable Amusements, both the religious and worldly classes of society are, for the most part, confirmed. If they read on the topic, it must be books which will sanction and strengthen their convictions. An acceptable writer must be devoted to their interests; he must be the disputant, rather than the enquirer, an advocate rather than a judge. That in most of the discussions on the subject this taste has been consulted, or at least conformed to, is sufficiently apparent. Coloured representations, overstrained arguments, unsupported assertions, sweeping censure, and unsparing anathemas, are the glittering, but feeble weapons, which have too often been displayed in this field of controversy. They have been wielded in proud, but useless defiance; they have provoked rather than intimidated, and engaged without conquering the foe.

The present writer ventures into the arena, but in a different attitude, and in other habiliments. Though firm to the cause professedly maintained, he is, nevertheless, fair and liberal to his opponents. Contending for truth, and not for victory, he yields the palm into what hands soever justice assigns it. Approaching his subject in the spirit rather of enquiry than opposition, he endeavours to lend an impartial ear to the arguments on either side, and to give them their legitimate weight in the scale of judgment.

That such a spirit is the more commendable, will, by the judicious and considerate, be readily granted; that it will be the more generally approved admits a question. The ignorant, contracted, and bigoted will probably pronounce it timid and compromising; they will be impatient with its arguments, and provoked with its caution; they will censure its candour, and reproach its liberality.

With another class of readers, however, the Author hopes for success—persons of correct mental habits and moral principles, possessing intelligence, a spirit of enquiry, and a love of truth. Such persons will readily perceive the delicacy and difficulty of the task which the writer has undertaken, and will extend to it, he trusts, that consideration and indulgence which it will undoubtedly need. They will welcome an attempt to discover truth, to soften the asperities of party-feeling, and to diffuse, both amongst the advocates and opponents of the gratifications in question, a more calm and equitable judgment on the points in debate. In the sentiments and spirit of the present production, the writer presumes, an identity will especially be found with the habits of thought and feeling which are peculiar to young persons; and on this ground he advances a claim to the particular attention of this class of his readers.

The Author commits his book to the world. He is relieved, in some measure, from the unpleasantness attending the consciousness of its numerous defects, by the hope that his fears have overrated them, and, still farther, by a recollection of the value of the cause to which his labours have been devoted.

London, June 17th, 1827.

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

In laying the present volume before an American public, the Author professes the same motives which induced him to publish it in his native country—a desire to do good. The topics discussed in the following pages, he presumes, cannot but be appropriate and seasonable in the New World as well as the Old: the former fast rivalling the latter, as it obviously does, in refinement and polish, in arts and luxuries, as in the more substantial elements of national greatness; and consequently exposed, in like manner, to the perils to virtue and moral happiness which are ever attendant on such a state of society.

The Author presumes that there will be no *appearance* of ostentation, as he believes there is nothing in the *reality*, in the announcement of his intention to consecrate the profits of this volume to a pious purpose. It will be a proof of the disinterestedness of his motives, at least as far as pecuniary considerations are concerned, and at the same time may secure for his book a notice which a stranger's name and a humble performance might not obtain. He esteems it as much an honor as a duty to place the first fruits of his literary labours on the sanctuary altar of a country endeared to him by the liveliest associations and warmest sympathies. A descendant, not indeed of "the Pilgrim Fathers," but of those brethren and friends who were left behind, and whose prayers and benedictions followed them in their devoted and heroic enterprise, he has cherished, from his earliest years, an enthusiasm of affection for this country, to visit which he has cheerfully left his native land and the endearments of home, and in which, if Divine Providence permit, he designs to spend his days and find his grave.

Greenwich, New-York, March 7, 1831.

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CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

The love of pleasure is man's eldest born,
Born in his cradle, living to his tomb.
Wisdom, her younger sister, though more grave,
Was meant to minister, and not to mar
Imperial Pleasure, queen of human hearts.

YOUNG.

MAN was designed for happiness. The benevolence of the Divine character forbids the converse of this position; while the instinctive desire of happiness, which is common to every breast, together with the profusion of means which are furnished for its gratification, supplies unquestion-

able evidence of its truth. If any other object than immediate gratification is proposed as the aim of his being, it is not because his happiness is deemed of inferior moment, but because his ultimate good is necessarily involved in the duty enjoined. If he is subjected to privations, self-denial, and laborious exertions, it is because they facilitate the purposes which infinite benevolence contemplates in his existence; forming a valuable course of discipline, to train him for a nobler sphere of being, and to prepare him for the full enjoyment of that happiness which will be found in a successful termination of his probationary career.

In the absence of correct apprehensions of this truth have arisen the equally dangerous extremes of Epicureanism and Stoicism; the former making virtue to consist in the unrestrained gratification of every appetite, the latter in the voluntary endurance of privation and pain. That truth prescribes a path equally remote from both

these extremes, is evident on a glance at the circumstances of our present condition. It is a state of probation, and consequently is supplied with a wise admixture of good and evil. Positive sufferings, and criminal pleasures, both attend our steps to try our virtue. To endure the former with becoming fortitude, and resist the solicitations offered by the latter, constitute the triumph of virtue, and the perfection of character. The latter task is undoubtedly the more difficult, and demands therefore the greater share of attention and diligence.

> A harder lesson to learn continence
> In joyous pleasure than in grievous pain;
> For sweetnesse doth allure the weaker sence
> So strongly, that uneathes it can refraine
> From that which feeble nature covets faine;
> But griefe and wrath, that be her enemies,
> And foes of life, she better can restraine;
> Yet virtue vaunts in both her victories.*

But the Author of our existence, while he contemplates us as probationers, and

* Spenser's Faery Queene.

surrounds us with circumstances suited to that character, views us also as beings capable of enjoyment, and with a liberal hand offers us the means of innocent pleasures in as great abundance, there is reason to believe, as at all comports with our moral interests.

What pleasures partake of the former, and what of the latter character, is a question of infinite importance; on which, however, men are by no means agreed. An extensive class of gratifications is, by some persons, pronounced innocent and lawful, and by others criminal and dangerous. So strictly indeed are these opposite sentiments maintained by their respective advocates, and so uniformly do they appear in practice, that they form the distinctive characteristics of each party. What is commonly termed the religious part of society, is distinguished less readily by the peculiarities of its creed, than by its uniform avoidance of what is generally comprehended under the phrase "worldly

amusements." The fact, however, is much to be regretted, that the reasons for this peculiarity have been seldom either clearly defined, or correctly understood. Both parties have betrayed a lamentable ignorance on the question in debate, and their mutual opposition has assumed the character, rather of a party struggle, than the laudable efforts of men anxious for the interests of virtue. Those who maintain the lawfulness of these pursuits, deem the objections advanced by their opponents destitute of reason, and to originate either in narrow-mindedness, or in the affectation of superior sanctity; while on the other hand, those on whom the harsh censure is cast, have not been duly concerned to supply the *rationale* of their sentiments and conduct. In many instances it is deemed a sufficient ground of objection to fashionable amusements that they are the amusements of the world. A reason more infelicitous cannot possibly be alleged. Its absurdity, to every man of sense and reflection, is as palpable as its bigotry is

disgusting. The slightest acquaintance with the principles of Christian virtue, is sufficient for the conviction, that they do not require their professors to avoid these amusements, merely because they are those of the world. Religion prescribes for itself, indeed, a line of demarcation, not for party distinction, but for the preservation of its purity. It enjoins separation, not from the world, but from its improprieties. The beneficent Creator has scattered in our path a profusion of enjoyments, which he designs to be common to his rational creatures, and a refusal of these blessings, because others partake of them, involves both folly and sin. The important relation which subsists between innocent enjoyment and personal virtue, renders every attempt to multiply the sources of the former, not only legitimate, but laudable. If the benevolence of the Deity—a distinguishing attribute of his nature—is met in our happiness, then is it a law of virtue that every means for the increase of happiness should be sought. The sentiment has often been

abused, but it nevertheless forms a maxim both correct and weighty, that

> God is paid when man receives;
> To enjoy is to obey.*

But there is another point of contact between virtue and happiness. By multiplying sources of innocent gratification, the desire to partake of innocent pleasures is weakened. It is evident, that the power which any temptation possesses, depends on the degree of supposed good which it contains. No temptation would be such did it not possess qualities apparently desirable; and in proportion as it possesses these qualities, it becomes influential. The mind is never in a state less liable to seduction, than when already in possession of virtuous pleasure. When removed from the means of gratification, and when moral principle forms the only defence, temptations well timed and well chosen, may make successful advances; but when the heart is already occupied by innocent

* Pope's Universal Prayer.

enjoyments, it is removed from the desire of unlawful gratification, and consequently escapes the danger. Happiness, moreover, in a well-constituted mind, is the parent of gratitude; gratitude is the mainspring of obedience, and forms the strongest stimulus to moral advances.

> Not to turn human brutal, but to build
> Divine on human, pleasure came from heaven.
> In aid to reason was the goddess sent,
> To call up all its strength by such a charm.
> Pleasure first succours virtue; in return,
> Virtue gives pleasure an eternal reign.*

Hence it follows, that to interdict any gratification, unless it is expressly forbidden, or is apparently dangerous, becomes not only undue severity, but positive criminality. The stoic is an enemy at once to happiness and virtue.

Another reason why many persons object to participate in fashionable amusements is, that abstinence from such pur-

* Young's Night Thoughts.

suits forms, in their opinion, the distinguishing characteristic of the professors of religion. This objection possesses all the weakness and absurdity of the former. Is it possible that the differences between the religious and irreligious part of society are so few or so slight as to occasion danger of their being mistaken or unobserved? Is religion a mere profession, to designate which, some arbitrary badge must be invented and appropriated, either like the symbols of office or the titles of rank? Surely if religion is any thing, its genius is peculiar, and those who live under its influence will naturally and necessarily exhibit its characteristics; there needs therefore no arbitrary line of demarkation to separate them from the rest of the world; and if any has been drawn, it cannot be too soon erased.

Nor does the weakness and absurdity merely of such objections to popular amusements render them injudicious by exposing their advocates to ridicule and

contempt, religion itself suffers. It is liable to present, in the conduct of such persons, not the dignity of a rational system, but a detestable compound of weakness, fanaticism, and hypocrisy. Nor is this all; for if the amusements thus interdicted are really unlawful, the situation of many is extremely perilous. Let an intelligent youth, for instance, be accustomed to hear such pursuits declaimed against and forbidden, without a single reason accompanying the prohibition, or such reasons only as his judgment pronounces palpably absurd, how unprepared will he be to meet the first temptation, which a favourable opportunity supplies, to participate in pleasures rendered additionally fascinating by the very prohibition, which has been so decidedly but unsatisfactorily urged. All who have made human character the object of their study, are aware of the vigour of youthful passion, and how impatient it is of restraint. To curb it, the hand of reason must be assiduously employed; the native virtues of

the heart must be carefully cultivated; they must be grafted on the stock of principle, in order to secure their growth and render them productive. The instructer of youth, who attempts to form a virtuous character, at once fair and firm, on the basis of mere prohibition and command, acts with ignorance and folly, similar to that of the inconsiderate builder described in one of our Saviour's parables. Is it too much to affirm, that not a few of those fearful desolations of character, which often distress our view, have in great part been owing to this defective mode of education? The young disciple is probably made sufficiently familiar with the precepts of virtue, but the reasonableness of those precepts have not been exhibited; the rules of moral propriety have been laid down with accuracy and care, but their fitness has not been made apparent; direction is given, but principle is not instilled. These partial efforts are for a time sufficient. While the ductility which attends the first stages of mental growth

continues, nothing more is necessary for preserving the character. The natural affections of the youthful mind, its reverence for authority, and its love of imitation, are alone adequate to the task of binding the heart and forming the practice to virtue. Constantly under the eye of the parent or guardian, presented only with virtuous examples, and removed from temptations to evil, the juvenile character, like the injudicious structure referred to, while the sky is serene and no tempest is nigh, stands alike in beauty and safety; but when its circumstances are reversed; when the passions have become vigorous, the reins of authority slackened, and vicious practices rendered familiar by observation and example; when criminal pleasure solicits to indulgence, rendered additionally fascinating by the charms of novelty; when the scruples of conscience which form the barrier against vice, are undermined by sophistry and shaken by ridicule; when this moral flood assails the fabric, it falls, and its prostrate ruins pre-

sent the sad memento of unskilful design and hapless industry.

On the supposition, therefore, that fashionable amusements are really dangerous, it is important that the instructer of youth should employ his best exertions to prevent exposure to their temptations. It is obvious that unlawful gratification forms the strongest test of youthful virtue. Pleasure, at this early period of life, is peculiarly attractive, and becomes the most powerful enemy. If the severity of this test is to be relaxed, if the fair destroyer is to be interrupted in her pursuit and foiled in her artifices, the hand of truth must be diligently employed to strip the meretricious form of her flattering disguises, and, by exhibiting her genuine character and design, must endeavour to break the spell of her fatal blandishments.

If this object be ever important, it is especially so in the present day. It cannot have escaped observation, that the age in

which we live presents some prominent peculiarities, which have a powerful bearing on the subject under discussion. The relation which the religious part of society sustains to the rest of the community, has of late been considerably altered. The progress of general education and refinement has considerably modified the sentiments, habits, and taste of the professors of religion. The odium which was formerly attached to this class of society, is now almost universally removed; the harsher features of puritanical piety, at least in appearance, have been softened down; its contracted views and illiberal feelings exchanged for opposite qualities, and its general aspect rendered not only unforbidding, but even amiable; so that the profession of religion is not only tolerated, but, to a certain extent, has become fashionable. A spirit so conciliatory on the part of the world, cannot but be viewed by the religious party with complacency, and a wish to concede, as much as possible, the points of difference. The dis-

tance, once broad, and seemingly impassable, is reduced, and constant and convenient opportunity for intercourse is afforded. With this disposition to conciliate, the professors of religion are in considerable danger of compromising their principles, and of resigning the essential characteristics of their faith. The religious youth is especially liable to this peril. Unlike his pious ancestors, he is not kept at a distance from the world by mutual antipathy, nor driven by persecution into exile. On the contrary, he is brought into frequent and friendly contact with the irreligious part of society, and is invited to its pursuits both of business and pleasure. His temptations to yield to unlawful solicitations must be both numerous and powerful; his objections will be met both by argument and banter, and every device will be employed to seduce his heart from its allegiance to virtue, and to tempt his feet from her paths.

What, then, is the best antidote which the guardian of his early character can

employ? Doubtless it is thoroughly to instruct him in the principles of virtue; to put him in possession not only of the precepts, but also of the grounds of moral obligation; to give him a clear insight into the nature and moral tendency of those pleasures against which he is with propriety warned. There is in the human mind, at least before it becomes corrupted by moral evil, an instinctive love of truth. To discern it clearly is its delight, and to adhere to it firmly its pride. As soon as reason dawns to shed its light on his path, then let the youthful disciple be conducted to the temple of this fair divinity, and taught to offer at her shrine the homage of his heart. Let him be taught his dignity as a rational being, and his accountableness as a moral agent; a foundation for virtuous character will then be laid, on which, under the conduct of heavenly guidance, a superstructure may be raised as permanent in its duration as noble and beautiful in its form.*

* The above remarks have been associated in the writer's mind with the subject of a most interesting

To encounter the formidable temptations to which he is exposed, a youth thus instructed is admirably qualified. Inspired with a love of truth, and at the same time taught to separate it from error, he will meet the attacks alike of sophistry and ridicule without fear or failure. Possessing too much skill to be foiled by the former, and too much dignity to shrink

and instructive biographical production of the Rev. J. Durant, entitled "Memoirs of an only Son." It is impossible to peruse these volumes without perceiving that they supply a striking comment on the preceding observations. That this extraordinary youth possessed native qualities, both intellectual and moral, superior to those which are ordinarily allotted to human nature, it would be absurd to deny; but no doubt can be entertained, that to the course of education so singularly happy, received from his earliest years, he was mainly indebted for his high attainments, as well in moral as intellectual character. The firm attachment which he invariably manifested to truth, charms us as much as the ability with which he defended it; and the constancy with which he maintained it, in opposition to the scepticism of some of his companions in study, affords a pleasing proof how thoroughly his mind was imbued with this virtuous feeling.

before the latter, he will be conquered by neither. Clad in intellectual panoply, and inspired by moral courage, he will be fearless of attack; and, conscious of his prowess, he will invite rather than shun the contest. He will never betray the cause which he espouses, either by ignorantly mistaking or cowardly compromising its principles. He will silence, if he cannot convince his opponents, and destroy their opposition, if he does not gain their concurrence. * He will rise with a noble superiority above the sneers and cavils and aspersions of witlings, of infidels, of libertines; preserve unimpaired the sweetness of his temper amid the overflowing of their gall; and, as he passes on with modest greatness through the whole ranks of these unhappy men, eye them by turns with generous compassion and just disdain; not unlike that fearless and flaming spirit of heaven, represented in "Paradise Lost," where, after having remonstrated in vain

* Fordyce's Addresses to Young Men.

against the apostacy of the rebel angels, he is thus described by the poet:

So spake the seraph Abdiel, faithful found;
Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
Nor number nor example with him wrought,
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single. From amidst them forth he passed,
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained
Superior, nor of violence feared aught;
And, with retorted scorn, his back he turned
On those proud towers, to swift destruction doomed.

There is no need, it is presumed, any further to multiply proofs of the importance of the present inquiry. Under the designation of Fashionable Amusements will be included, the Theatre, the Ball Room, Card-playing, and Novel-reading. Each amusement will be taken separately under consideration, its moral character and tendency examined, and the question discussed, whether it may correctly be pronounced a lawful amusement. The

meaning affixed to the term lawful has been already determined. The present is a probationary state; it is accordingly provided both with innocent and criminal pleasures. It is the part of virtue to choose the former, and reject the latter. To make the requisite discrimation, it must be remembered, that the great end of our present existence is, to form a virtuous character, and therefore that those pursuits and pleasures which are compatible with such a design, may be considered legitimate; but whatever, on the other hand, appear subversive of this object, must be interdicted as unlawful and dangerous.

CHAPTER II.

THE THEATRE.

Is there no play,
To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
SHAKSPEARE.

WHOEVER has engaged in the investigation of this subject, under the influence of enlightened judgment and liberal feeling, will have found that it is attended by circumstances which perplex the inquirer, and demand of him patience, caution, and candour.

If the present object were merely to strengthen either of the opposite prejudices which already exist in reference to the stage, the task would be sufficiently easy; but to produce conviction in the minds, both of the advocates and opponents of

theatrical amusements, and thus to destroy their differences, is an arduous enterprise, in which partial success, at most, can be anticipated.

Whoso upon himself will take the skill,
True iustice unto people to divide,
Had need have mightie hands for to fulfill,
That which he doeth with righteous doome decide:
And for to maister wrong and puissant pride,
In vaine it is to deeme of things aright,
And make wrong doers iustice to deride,
Unlesse it be performed with dreadlesse might;
For power is the right-hand of iustice truely hight.*

The difficulty is occasioned by the wide diversity of the general sentiments, maxims, and feelings, subsisting between the contending parties; so that it is not easy to select any common ground in the argument, where the point in debate may, with mutual satisfaction, be fairly adjusted. With a view to this difficulty, the present discussion will be pursued. The position will, of course, on all sides, be admitted, that an essential property of virtue is be-

* Spenser's Faery Queene.

nevolence. In every rightly constituted mind, a desire for the well-being of our fellow-creatures inherently resides. To promote the growth of this principle, and suitably direct its operations, forms an important part of moral culture. The benevolent man will feel it his duty, according to opportunities, to employ himself in the amelioration of human suffering, and in the advancement of general happiness. Every measure which he sees adopted, that has obviously this design and tendency, will meet his approbation, and, if possible, his support; and whatever has plainly an opposite tendency will receive his discountenance and opposition. In cases where both good and evil are the result of any measure, he will carefully balance them, and sanction, or discountenance, according to the preponderance of one or other of these qualities. Some valuable assistance, it is presumed, will be derived from these remarks in the present difficult inquiry. Both the advocates and opponents of the stage will, perhaps, be willing to submit

theatrical amusements to this suitable test:—If, after close and impartial inquiry, a greater amount of good than of evil is apparent, no reason, we think, appears, why a verdict in favour of the stage should not be pronounced. But if the process supplies an opposite result, the contrary opinion cannot be withheld.

That both good and evil are the result of the amusement will not be denied; its professed benefits may be divided into intellectual and moral. To withhold from the pleasures of theatrical performances their claim to intellectual character, would betray either a total destitution of taste for the pleasures of intellect in general, or a most unwarrantable prejudice against theatrical pleasures in particular. It must, however, be conceded to the opponent of stage amusements, that this advantage has been often considerably overrated. The representation of a play, it is maintained, combines many advantages, which are not common to the private perusal of the pro-

duction; the aid of the senses is secured; the *dramatis personæ* are living characters; appropriate and impressive scenery is supplied; the powerful effect of the living voice is added; the representation of the actor, who is supposed best to understand the play, affords a comment on the poet; the spectator has correct conceptions sanctioned, new ones supplied, and erroneous ones corrected.

In its application to a certain class of persons, the truth of this statement is altogether unquestionable. It is easily conceived that minds of an unintellectual character, of a phlegmatic habit, persons who are unaccustomed to efforts of thought, would derive considerable assistance from a stage representation, in their attempts to embrace the mental pleasures of a drama. With relation to minds of an opposite character, the benefit is less obvious. The acknowledgment has not unfrequently been made by persons of thought and imagination, that the purest intellectual pleasure

is found in *reading* a play, and not in witnessing its performance. The fact admits satisfactory explanation. In reading the play, the characters and scenery presented are ideal, and consequently perfect; in the representation both are sensible imitations, and are therefore defective. The reader of a play is allowed the free exercise of the creative faculty, and he can give the persons and scenes introduced a form best adapted to his taste and feelings. The spectator, on the other hand, is entirely dependent on the actors. The former enjoys the perfection of nature, the latter suffers from the imperfections of art. In reading a drama, the spirit of the text is sometimes mistaken or lost, but this evil oftener happens in the representation. The best actors frequently fail, and the inferior performers are perpetually subjecting the spectator to this cause of vexation. Conceive an individual introduced, for the first time, as the spectator of one of our most celebrated dramas. Suppose him to be familiar with the play; that it is his

favourite one; that his imagination, at once powerful and correct, has furnished the scenes with its best creations; that he has studied the beauties of the production, and that both his imagination and heart have drunk deeply into its spirit. He gains admission to the theatre, and takes his seat among the spectators. The magnificence and splendour of the building, the display of beauty and fashion, the gaiety and bustle of the scene, give their corresponding emotions to his mind. At length the tumult ceases, and the whole spectacle is one of silence, order, beauty, and grandeur. The first scene of the play opens to his anxious gaze; his first impressions are all that he could wish, and he yields to the illusion, which is almost complete. As the piece advances, however, he suffers disappointment. The imperfect, though well-attempted representations of the scenery of the drama; the defective acting of the subordinate performers; the frequent indistinctness of the speakers, so often interrupted by the clamours of senseless

admirers and venal critics; the violence, which, in a thousand ways, is done to the exquisite and perfect conceptions of his imagination, every moment force themselves upon his mind, in opposition to his favourable prepossessions, and his honest conviction at last will probably be, that whatever may be the *sensible* gratification derived from the representation of a drama, the higher order of intellectual pleasure is to be found in its private perusal.

The purely mental pleasure supplied by the representation of a drama, after all these reductions, is still considerable. In witnessing the imitative powers of a good actor, an intellectual mind must receive gratification of no inferior description. The genius displayed is certainly of a high order, and, as a triumph of human skill, his exhibitions cannot be contemplated without admiration and delight. Good acting, like a good painting, must be studied by the lovers of art with a high degree of interest. The inferiority of the imitation to the original is, in both cases,

admitted; but the *success* of the copy affords gratification. Beside, an actor is an instructer; he assists to read the productions of the dramatist, discovers new beauties, and increases the interest afforded. Add to this, the exercise of the critical knowledge of the histrionic art, canvassing the merits of different actors, the interest felt in the success of a favourite performer, the pleasurable excitement of mind which is hereby supplied, and the stage will be already invested with innocent attractions sufficiently powerful to obtain, from many, approbation and support.

The *moral* benefits of the stage next demand discussion. The theatre has often been styled "the School of Morals."

> To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
> To raise the genius, and to mend the heart;
> To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
> Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold;
> For this the tragic muse first trod the stage,
> Commanding tears to stream thro' every age;
> Tyrants no more their savage nature kept,
> And foes to virtue wonder how they wept.*

* Pope's Prologue to Cato.

This lofty designation, however, meets with strong opposition from the objectors to the amusement. They reply, if good morals are taught at the theatre, how can it be accounted for, that it is so much the resort of the notoriously immoral? How is it, that while numbers have dated their first entrance upon the paths of vice from the time they commenced attendance at the theatre, so few have by it been reclaimed from moral error, and restored to virtue and happiness? If the object for which theatrical amusements are instituted, is to advance the interests of virtue and morality, why are there any exhibitions allowed, directly subversive of the end? What mean the loose sentiments, the *doubles entendres*, the profane expressions, and the unchaste images, with which many of our most popular dramas abound? Would either virtue or vice be ever invested with the garb in which they are frequently presented on the stage, if the honest design was to exhibit the loveliness of the one and the deformity of the other? Can any one sincerely believe, that to raise the

standard of virtue, and to form the public character on that sacred model, is the end which it either accomplishes or contemplates. It is scarcely sufficient to reply to these pointed and pertinent inquiries, that many dramatic compositions introduced on the stage, embody in them much moral and instructive sentiment; the question is still urged, why are they not exclusively of this character? The mixed nature of stage representations furnishes for the opponent a powerful argument. He contends, that thoroughly to purify the drama, and to render it the channel of perfect moral sentiment, would be injurious to the interests of the stage, and, threaten indeed, its total destruction. The fact, he maintains, has been clearly ascertained, and is generally acknowledged, that the class of persons by which the theatre is principally supported, is too low in its morals and vitiated in its taste, to relish, or even to tolerate the amusements of the stage, under those restrictions which the friends of virtue would wish to impose.

To deny that many who frequent the theatre are virtuous, both in their taste and habits, would at least be uncharitable; on the other hand, truth would be endangered by the assertion, that the mass of a stage auditory is composed of such characters. The theatre, in every age of its history, has been the resort of the licentious and profane. Some may attend this place of amusement for the purpose of intellectual gratification, to pronounce on the merits of the performers, or to dispose fashionably of an idle hour; but the majority, it is to be feared, is attracted by other and less harmless motives. As one evidence of the correctness of this statement, reference has been made to a committee report of one of the royal theatres, from which it appears, that when a proposition was made to exclude females of a certain character from the house, in compliance with the wishes of many persons, who on account of such admissions were compelled to withdraw their sanction, the measure was overruled, under the

conviction that, if adopted, the institution could not be supported. If this statement is correct, the inference is legitimate and unavoidable, that the class of persons on whom stage-managers depend for support, is principally that whose morals are corrupt; and consequently that a virtuous taste does not generally pervade a theatrical assembly. How, then, could the stage undergo such a modification as would render it subservient to pure morality? It must of necessity adapt its exhibitions to the prevailing taste of its supporters; as they "who live to please, must please to live."

The discussion of the question, whether the stage is susceptible of such a modification as would render it an instrument of public utility, is a gratuitous task, inasmuch as the object of the present inquiry is simply this—What is the moral tendency of theatrical amusements, as they are now conducted? The question, however, is neither difficult nor uninteresting. A

remark or two, therefore, may with propriety be offered.

In its present state, it has already been affirmed, the theatre is the creature of popular taste, and must ever remain so, while it depends for its support on public favour. Were its object strictly to communicate intellectual and moral instruction, blended with harmless recreation, would it then receive requisite approbation and support? Admitting that the theatre were under such regulations, as that "a man might go to it, as he goes to church, to learn his duty,"* would it be sufficiently frequented? The question, it is presumed, can hardly create hesitation. The leisure of the Sunday, its acknowledged sanctity, together with the force of habit and a sense of religious duty, are sufficient to secure general attention to the public duties of religious devotion. But could a theatre secure adequate support from

* See Knox's Essay on the Moral Benefits of a good Tragedy.

persons disposed to go to it "*to learn their duty?*" Amid the present taste for speculation, one wonders that the experiment has never been made; or is the project too chimerical and ridiculous for the wildest mercenary adventurer to embrace? By any means could a theatre exist independently of public pecuniary support, it would be left free to adopt its own regulations, and thus might probably become a moral instrument of considerable efficiency and value. Gratuitous admission, and suitable representations, might secure the attendance of a class of the community to which its mode of instruction is best adapted. In proportion to his ignorance man is the creature of his senses, and is dependent on them for the conveyance to his mind both of ideas and impressions. What he sees and hears he will best understand and feel. The stage, therefore, properly conducted, would possess considerable advantages for the instruction and improvement of the lower orders of society. By interesting their attention

and moving their passions, it would open avenues, both to their minds and hearts, which remain closed against the more sober and direct modes of instruction. It would have a power peculiarly its own, to lessen their ignorance, to polish their rudeness, to soften their barbarity, and refine their sensuality, as well as to elevate their taste, to warm their affections, and to raise them in the scale both of intellect and morals. The establishment of a national theatre, of free admission to the lower classes of society, and expressly adapted to their improvement, is a project not unworthy of the attention of our legislators. A distinguished senator has said, "Give me the making of the ballads of my country, and I leave any one to make its laws." Will not this remark, in some measure, apply to theatrical amusements?

The advocate of the stage will probably suggest, that of late years the drama has made considerable moral advances. Without questioning the fact, his opponent

demands, whether the circumstance is to be traced to a disposition on the part of those who conduct stage performances, to lessen the moral evils attending their exhibitions, or to motives of another and inferior character? In the face of facts already stated, he pleads the liberty to inquire, whether policy, rather than principle, may not have suggested the favourable modification. On comparing the public morals of the present day with those of some preceding periods, an opinion, in some respects favourable to the former, must doubtless be pronounced. The general diffusion of education, combined with other causes, has given to the public mind a comparative refinement of feeling, which, if it does not bring popular moral taste into positive alliance with virtue, yet places it at a remove from the grosser qualities of vice. The channels of impure passion, if still broad and deep, are less exposed; the public mind, if not less sensual, is more imaginative; gross desires are modified, if not destroyed; and vice, therefore, most

successfully creates excitement, not in its native form, but under a specious disguise. Such a modification in public taste demands a corresponding change in stage exhibitions; they would otherwise fail of their end. Qualities which were once in unison with public taste, would now be uncongenial; they would repel sooner than attract, and disgust rather than fascinate. Whether these observations correctly mark the points of dissimilarity between the present and past moral character of the stage, and assign the true origin of the change it has undergone, must be determined by the judgment of the candid reader.* If the opinion is correct, it will be evident that, in its relation to public morals, the stage is precisely the same;

* From the character of some of the present stage performances, it would appear that, in the above pages, too liberal a concession is made to the advocate of the amusement. Dryden's Amphytrion has lately been acted at one of the principal theatres; nor did the very severe animadversions of a daily journalist apparently avail to hinder the success of this immoral representation.

that instead of reforming the world, it has been reformed by it; that it is a mere creature of the public, implicitly submitting to its control, and forming a sort of moral barometer, by which the atmospheric state of public taste is duly ascertained.

Another circumstance in the present history of the stage demands attention. Within the last few seasons, the most distinguished, and least exceptionable productions of our great Dramatist have obtained the highest degree of popularity. The friends of theatrical amusements regard this fact as indicative of a progression, both moral and intellectual, in public taste. The legitimacy of the reasoning is questioned by their opponents. It falls, they argue, to the lot of the present conductors of the stage, to command, in the department of tragedy, talent of distinguished pre-eminence. Some of the tragedies of Shakspeare are unquestionably masterpieces in this class of dramatic compositions, and must, therefore, invariably invite

the attention of actors who command, in so high a degree, the genius necessary to the successful performance of these admirable and difficult dramas. While this elevated order of talent exists, the present taste for the best specimens of tragedy may remain; with its decline their popularity will probably cease.

The benefits, both intellectual and moral, which are usually ascribed to theatrical amusements, have, it is presumed, been fully and fairly canvassed; it is time that attention should be directed to the evils of which they are productive. Indirectly this object has, in part, been already accomplished. It has appeared, that although many persons may frequent the theatre with an innocent object, yet that more are led there by opposite feelings. If virtuous persons find gratification in the play-house, vicious persons find it also, and the amusement must partake of some qualities corresponding with their inclinations. The theatre, as a place of resort

for characters congenial with his taste, becomes attractive to the individual immorally disposed. His vicious propensities are there supplied at once with excitement, and with facilities for gratification. But these circumstances, it may be said, are concomitants merely, and ought not to be confounded with the system of stage amusements itself. Such a distinction, however, can be of no importance in the present discussion; for it must be admitted, that they are *inseparable* concomitants, and they ought, therefore, to be included in the list of objections. If these evils are common to every popular amusement, then they are all liable to objection, and unless they appear to supply a counterbalancing weight of good, they must be pronounced indefensible. The attending evil circumstances of theatrical amusements cannot, with justice, escape investigation. Their number and their weight it will be impossible to estimate. How many, within the ensnaring precincts of a play-house, have met with occasions of sin, having

entered with the express purpose of finding them, or been unexpectedly surprised by their temptation! How many workings of unhallowed passion have been felt, which would never have operated, but for the excitement which this scene of guilty fascination has supplied! How many deadly acts of sin would never have been perpetrated, but for the facilities which have here been afforded! How are evil practices here multiplied, and formed into inveterate habits! What momentum is given to the evil bias of the heart! What impetus to unlawful desire! What acceleration to the advances of impiety! What aggravation of guilt, and accumulation of misery are occasioned! What havock of happiness has here been made! How many a flower of virtue, once fresh and fair, has been plucked by the hand of the destroyer, robbed of its charms, and "thrown like a worthless weed away!" How many a youthful foot has here been drawn aside from "wisdom's ways of pleasantness and peace," and conducted

to those regions of infamy and woe, where "none that go in return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life!"

That the picture thus presented is the production of sober reason, and not of rash imagining, will be readily admitted by all whose knowledge of facts renders them competent to form a judgment. Perhaps there will be scarcely a reader of these pages, whose recollection cannot furnish him with, at least, a solitary illustration of its truth. Could every such instance be recorded, and collectively exhibited, who doubts that the detail would appal the heart of the most strenuous advocate of the amusement, and supply to him an overwhelming proof of its incalculable mischief? Would not the catalogue present many, who were industrious, frugal, and honest, until, by a taste for theatrical pleasures, they became idle, dissipated, and worthless?—many, whose wanderings from virtue's paths have been wide and irrecoverable, compelled to identify the

first step which led them astray with the unhappy opportunity that introduced them to this scene of temptation?—many to confess, that here they first pressed to their lips that fatal chalice, to which enchantment had given at once fascination and death?—many a virtuous character, a gallant bark on life's wide ocean, whose gay and prosperous course was faithful to the track which its high destiny prescribed, until the bewitching melody of the syrens, which inhabit this moral vortex, allured to shipwreck and death?

If, then, the labour of collecting materials to supply the balance against the advantages of stage amusements were here suspended, the point in debate would by no means be left undecided. A vast preponderance is already discoverable. The theatre may afford a degree of innocent pleasure and useful instruction, but these benefits are more than counterbalanced by the moral evils of which it is productive. It is possible, although it would be difficult,

perhaps, to adduce the instance, that some unfortunate wanderer from virtue's paths has, in this "school of morals," received a salutary lesson, which has won him back to wisdom, taught him to re-adorn a nature which he had dishonoured, and again to become an honourable member of a community of which he had been the disgrace; but this concession avails nothing, while so many instances of an opposite character are presented to notice.

But another evil of considerable magnitude yet remains. Theatrical amusements have hitherto been viewed in relation to the spectators; it is necessary, further, to consider them in their relation to the performers.

At what expense to others his pleasures are procured, is an inquiry which every benevolent man will deem necessary. If he is convinced, that those who undertake to supply him with gratification are unable to perform their task without injury to themselves, obviously greater than his

enjoyment, he cannot, with any pretensions to benevolent character, engage their services. This position requires no proof. That man, for instance, who can take delight in the barbarous pastime of bull-baiting, or cock-fighting, is destitute of the common characteristics of a human mind, and is placed on a level with the brutes, whose ferocious passions he studies to provoke. That person, moreover, who can be the voluntary and gratified spectator of those pugilistic combats, which have lately so disgraced our country, sinks himself, if possible, yet lower in the scale of being. He is capable of deriving amusement from a spectacle, which exhibits his common nature in its most degraded and disgusting form, its noble powers, both physical and mental, shamefully prostituted, and, in short, an immortal being forming and maturing, with frightful rapidity, a character for perdition.

In their relation to the well-being of those who are employed to supply the

gratification, theatrical amusements demand examination.

It cannot be denied, that stage performers are in many respects, an unfortunate class of the community. Some of them, it is true, have been raised into notice, wealth, and even rank; but amid all the attempts which are made to invest the profession with attributes commanding respect, it still appears, in the eyes of the sober part of mankind, pitiable and contemptible. So inseparable, indeed, is this feeling from the profession, that very few persons, who occupy stations in society even of ordinary respectability, would wish that an intimate relative should devote himself to a theatrical life, what success or advantage soever might be anticipated. Whence originates the unfavourable association, which is invariably connected with this mode of life, it may not be easy to state, but the fact is indisputable.

Nor must this injury, which stage per-

formers invariably suffer, be lightly estimated. A desire for the esteem of others is a powerful and valuable instinct of the human mind, and it cannot be destroyed without immense injury, both to happiness and virtue. A good name is a boon of inestimable worth. It is not bestowed by the capricious hand of fortune; it is least of all subject to her control. It stands aloof from the circumstances of birth, education, and wealth. It is the gift of that gracious Being, who "is no respecter of persons," and is placed equally within the reach of the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, the elevated and lowly. It dignifies the humble, consoles the destitute, and soothes the sorrowful. To lower an individual in the scale of social worth, to sink him in the esteem of others, or in his own esteem, is to inflict on him an irreparable injury.

No wound which warlike hand of enemy,
Inflicts with dint of sword, so sore doth light,
As doth the poysnous sting, which infamy
Infixeth in the name of noble wight;

For by no art nor any leaches might
It ever can recured be againe;
Nor all the skill, which that immortal spright
Of Podalyrius did in it retaine,
Can remedy such hurts, such hurts are hellish paine.*

To the *female* performers these remarks apply with peculiar force. In the introduction of this sex upon the stage—a practice peculiar to the modern drama—what violence is done to female character! The phenomena which the nature of the sex exhibits, plainly prove, that woman is intended to occupy the secluded walks of life. Her disposition, habits, and talents, unite to designate her the object of private regard, not of public attraction. To force her into publicity is to injure the delicacy of her character, and brush away the hue of its beauty. The delicate respect which she is wont to inspire is, by this means, destroyed; and even while the display of the charms of her person, or powers of her genius, may secure her the

* Spenser's Faery Queene.

raptures of applause, she suffers humiliation, rendering her the object alike of pity to others, and of reproach to herself.

But this is not the greatest injury to which stage performers are subject. The profession, from its very nature, exposes the moral character to imminent peril. The habit of assuming a fictitious character is injurious. The character personated is often a vicious one; prejudicial effects, therefore, necessarily follow. So close a contact with vice, and indeed identity with it, cannot be safe. Familiarity with vice, it is universally admitted, weakens its power to repel and disgust:

> Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
> But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*

The actor, in personating bad characters, must direct his thoughts into an

* Pope's Essay on Man.

exceptionable channel, cherish evil dispositions, and become, in fact, for the time, the vicious being he describes. Nor is there any countervailing advantage supplied by occasional personifications of virtuous character. Of this he is deprived, in considerable measure, by the native bias of the human mind to moral evil rather than good, and the greater facility with which vice communicates its properties. In real life the imitation of an evil example is easier than that of a good one, and so it must be in the fictitious world. The habit, moreover, of personating ideal character has a necessary tendency to destroy what is native and genuine.

The moral evils of a theatrical life are abundantly exhibited by fact. Stage-performers are generally immoral. In most instances, perhaps, virtuous character has been destroyed previously to their introduction to this mode of life; but to the nature of their profession, the associations

they form, their facilities for vicious indulgence, the powerful temptations to which they are exposed, and above all to the loss of self-respect,* which forms so

* The following interesting anecdote is given in a late number of a periodical publication. The late Rev. Samuel Lowell, of Bristol, being once at Brighton, expressed a wish to walk on the Steyne, and to have the public characters pointed out to him. Amongst the rest a celebrated comedian was noticed. "Ah!" said Mr. L. "is that ——, my old schoolfellow? I'll speak to him." He therefore accosted him, and the following conversation took place: *Mr. L.* Sir, I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. ——. *Mr.* ——. Yes, Sir, my name is ——, but I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with you. *Mr. L.* What! not know your old schoolfellow, Samuel Lowell? *Mr.* ——. What! are you Samuel Lowell? *Mr. L.* Yes, I am. *Mr.* ——. Well, I am very glad to see you; now tell me your history in five minutes. *Mr. L.* First, my name is Samuel Lowell; I am a dissenting minister at Bristol, where I have lived upwards of twenty years, and I have a large family. *Mr.* ——. So, you are a dissenting minister; well, you are a happy man, for you go to your work with pleasure, and perform it with pleasure; you are a happy man. I go to my work like a fool, to please fools; I am *not* a happy man.

firm a support for virtue, must be undoubtedly ascribed their fixedness in evil principle, their difficulties of restoration, their excesses in dissipation, and their almost inevitable ruin.

The baneful influence of theatrical amusements on the moral character of the performers, supplies a powerful additional argument against this species of gratification. The services of the performers are indeed voluntary, but this circumstance cannot be admitted as an apology. Christian benevolence not only forbids us to become the instrument of others' ruin, it requires us to use exertion, as occasion may serve, for the prevention of self-inflicted injury. He would be guilty of his brother's blood, who willingly supplied the suicide with the instrument of self-destruction, or who neglected the occasion of preventing the rash design.

Without further, therefore, protracting discussion, a decision as to the lawfulness

of stage amusements may be safely pronounced. If the instituted test of their character is legitimate, if the reasoning adopted is not totally defective, the conclusion must inevitably involve a negative. The evils of which it is productive, decidedly outbalance its advantages; and for the same reasons that any system, obviously injurious to society, requires to be discountenanced, theatrical amusements cannot be sanctioned. Ingenuity may doubtless invent many plausible arguments in support of an opposite verdict, as well as entangle the reasoning by which the present conclusion is obtained; inveterate prejudice may oppose, and voluntary scepticism doubt; but we mistake if the candid and conscientious inquirer has not obtained satisfactory evidence and perfect conviction. The argument has been constructed on a basis, to which none, who embrace the first principles of ethical truth, can possibly object. The question is not, whether the amusement may be indulged in by any individual without immediate moral injury to

himself; whether he may not be in such a degree proof against the attacks of temptation, as to stand in no peril from its advances; whether his virtue may not be so much confirmed, as to render harmless an occasional encounter with vice; whether he may not possess in such perfection the faculty of moral discrimination, as to be able accurately to separate the evil from the good, and have his virtuous principles so fully in exercise, as promptly to choose the latter, and reject the former. These inquiries are rendered both impertinent and useless. The position has been made secure, that *on the whole* the stage is injurious to society; that it is a moral engine of mischief; he, therefore, who acknowledges the obligations of benevolence, and who feels himself bound to consult, in his pursuits, the interests of his species, is reduced to the alternative, unless he oppose his principles to his practice, of either denying the preponderance of evil attending the stage, or withdrawing from it entirely his approbation and support.

CHAPTER III.

CARD-PLAYING.

Oh! the dear pleasures of the velvet plain,
The painted tablets dealt and dealt again;
Cards with what rapture, and the polished die,
The yawning chasm of indolence supply.

COWPER.

THERE are few persons, it is presumed, who would not admit the justness as well as the pungency of this satire. Card-playing, for the most part, is so destitute of science, has involved in it so few intellectual qualities, and is altogether of so frivolous a character, that it must be matter of surprise, even with the votaries of the amusement themselves, if they have made it the subject of serious thought, that it should be capable of supplying any degree of pleasure to a rational mind. Its

prevalence, however, amongst all classes of society; the firm ground which it maintains amidst the fluctuations of taste and of fashion, and that too in spite of the contempt and ridicule with which it has been constantly assailed, render it sufficiently evident that the amusement possesses some intrinsic qualities of powerful interest and fascination.

Its advocate argues, that as a social amusement, card-playing is highly convenient. It serves as an agreeable pastime, unites the friendly circle, excludes conversation of an insipid, frivolous, or injurious character, and supplies the party with pleasing employment. Politeness has certainly no easy task to perform in the conduct of a mixed party. The social circle exhibits a great diversity of mental character, tastes, habits, education and talent. In the absence of cards, how is it to be supplied with convenient and agreeable employment, such as will engage the attention of all, and render intercourse

easy, familiar, and pleasant? General conversation, under the restrictions which good manners must necessarily impose, cannot be long sustained with convenience and interest. To meet the circumstances of all, and to be generally interesting, the topics of conversation must be extremely limited and barren. The stores of a well-furnished mind cannot be produced without manifest inconvenience; for this would destroy that mental equality which it is of the first importance to preserve. Conversation, if it is at all familiar and unrestrained, throws open the stores of the mind, elicits its powers, stimulates its efforts, and exhibits the degree of its culture and talents. The equality of mental circumstance, which, in appearance at least, should be preserved in the social circle, would thereby be destroyed. All the care, which the most delicate sense of propriety could exert, would be insufficient to preserve a seeming level; invidious distinctions would be produced, and rendered obvious. In proportion to

the freedom and vivacity of conversation, so would the powers of thought, the stores of knowledge, the ebullitions of wit, and the creations of fancy, be produced, and unavoidably brought into relationships of rivalry.

With a view to this inconvenience, cards have been introduced; and it must be admitted that, to a considerable extent, they accomplish their object. They afford an amusement of which, on equal terms, all can partake. The interesting and the insipid, the gay and the dull, the beautiful and the unattractive, merge their respective distinctions in the feelings of interest, which the amusement in common inspires. There is a provoking mixture of truth and satire in the remarks of Dr. Johnson on this subject. "I cannot but suspect," says he, "that this odious fashion is produced by a conspiracy of the old, the ugly, and the ignorant, against the young and beautiful, the witty and the gay; as a contrivance to level all distinctions of nature and of art, and to confound the

world in a chaos of folly; to take from those who could outshine them, all the advantages of mind and body; to withhold youth from its natural pleasures, deprive wit of its influence, and beauty of its charms; to fix those hearts upon money, to which love has hitherto been entitled; to sink life into a tedious uniformity, and to allow it no other hopes or fears but those of robbing and of being robbed."*

The apology which is offered is plausible, but by no means sufficient. It furnishes adequate reason why card-playing should be tolerated, and why it should frequently invite the attention of the social circle; it must be evident however, even to the most superficial observer, that stronger motives than these reasons are able to supply, lead to the amusement. It is sought with avidity, and produces strong excitement. It is the first, and not the last resource of gratification. To it its

* The Rambler, No. 15.

votaries are not driven by necessity, but they are led by inclination. It has a power to fix the attention, and to interest the feelings, beyond almost every other amusement. An almost magical charm attends it, and how protracted soever, it never wearies. It often painfully and injuriously agitates indeed, but it never produces *ennui*. In short, ingenuity has never invented an amusement so completely absorbing, or that serves more effectually (employing a common phrase) "to kill time." The accurate inquirer, therefore, must search for something more in this amusement than has yet been stated, to account satisfactorily for the remarkable phenomena which it exhibits.

The field they afford for contest appears to be the secret of the interest which games in general create. Contest is a pleasure rendered so by an instinct of the human mind, namely, the love of power. "The joys of conquest are the joys of man." Triumph is a point of ambition,

and the effort to obtain it, calls the mind into agreeable activity. Proofs of superiority, even in trivial efforts, is gratifying. Juvenile recreations illustrate this phenomenon of mind. For the most part they are such as afford scope for contest, and for the trial of superiority. "Almost every game," observes Dr. Thomas Brown, in his lecture on the love of power, "which, in the days of our childhood, amuses or occupies us, is a trial of our strength, agility, or skill, or some of those qualities in which power consists; and we run or wrestle with those, with whom we are, perhaps, in combats of a very different kind, to dispute, in other years, the prize of distinction in the various duties and dignities of life."*

Can the powerful interest which card-playing produces be resolved into this feeling? May the love of power, which

* Brown's Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

forms a constant element in the pleasure of youthful recreations, and which enters into the graver pleasures of "children of a larger growth," be considered the passion to which cards are indebted for their power to engage and to please? The opponent conceives an insuperable obstacle in the way to this conclusion; for cards, he maintains do not afford sufficient scope for the exercise of this feeling. The trial of mental superiority is scarcely furnished by the amusement. Efforts of skill only are capable of supplying the description of gratification to which reference is made. The pleasure of success is produced by the consciousness of discovered superiority; that success, therefore, must not be the gift of fortune, but the reward of merit. The stimulus is wanting, when the result of the contest is beyond the control of the competitor; and that triumph is worthless, which chance, rather than skill, commands. It is remarkable how soon games of chance fail to interest children, and how early they are abandoned for

those which involve the trial of personal skill and prowess. The infantile gamester must be allowed to play at tetotum or dominos for farthings, otherwise these amusements will soon be abandoned for Fox and Geese, or paper bricks for the mimic castle. If all the games of cards do not exclude skill altogether, they demand it only in a very limited degree. The most admired, and most rational game, requires talent of a very humble order, of which the novice only will be often found destitute. To conceive, therefore, of the card-table as affording, even to the most trivial mind, the kind of gratification, which is found in the display of personal superiority, is scarcely possible. The pleasures of success, on this score, must be less than puerile; the contest is of a nature which a child learns to despise. This explanation, therefore, of the nature of the amusement, would involve at once an error in analysis, and a severe reflection on its advocates, many of whom, it must be supposed, are prepared, both by

education and taste, for the highest orders of intellectual gratification.

Hence it would appear, that cards, from their very nature, are incapable in themselves of producing any part of the interest which they possess, and that the gratification they secure must be sought in some concomitant of the amusement. What is it? If cards were the sort of convenient instrument, which, like "the threaded steel," dexterously plied by the fair hand, served just so much to occupy the mind, as to relieve it from the unpleasant consciousness of being unemployed, and to leave more familiar and unrestrained the interchange of thought and communion of soul;—if they served to draw more closely the spiritual bonds of the social circle, and to give facility to thought, freedom to expression, and vivacity to feeling;—if the card-table were the happy and enviable scene where social pleasure reigned, where harmless wit, and innocent gaiety presided; where the glow of sentiment is

kindled, and the sweet toned chords of hearts in unison awakened their music; where the furnished intellect might throw open its stores of intelligence and feeling, and where, in "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," the mind would receive instruction and pleasure, and the heart sensibility and polish; then how insignificant, or even contemptible soever the amusement itself might be, its advocate would be furnished with powerful, if not irresistible arguments for its support. The fact, however, has already appeared, that card-playing cannot plead these advantages. Trivial as is the amusement, it requires the closest attention, and most entire abstraction of mind. Every step in the progress of the game demands the utmost vigilance; and the slightest degree of inattention might endanger success. An ignorant spectator of the card-table might be led to imagine, that the interest excited is similar to that which the mathematician derives from a beautiful but difficult problem of Euclid, and he would

probably find it not easy to persuade himself, that "a trifle light as air," is all that occupies and amuses the interesting group which he beholds, where all is gravity, attention, and silence, scarcely relieved by a single sally of wit, a smile of gaiety, or a glance of kindred and tender thought; where the fascinations of taste, of grace, and of beauty, cease to be felt;—where fair brows are shaded by sombre thought, and bright eyes are chilled by cold abstraction, and where all that is beautiful, and lovely, and gay, is bound, as by the spell of some unholy enchantment, in sadness and silence, in coldness and lifelessness.

> The blood the virgin's cheek forsook,
> A livid paleness spreads o'er all her look;
> She sees, and trembles at the approaching ill,
> Just in the jaws of ruin and Codille.*

What, then, is the attendant circumstance, which gives to the amusement its

* Pope's Rape of the Lock.

singular attraction? Is it the pecuniary considerations which the game involves? It must be admitted, that card-playing is capable of supplying a channel for the flow of mercenary feeling. Money is almost invariably staked at the card-table, and every candid votary of the pleasure will acknowledge, that, without this concomitant, the amusement would, with most persons, lose entirely its power to interest. The advocate of the card-table ascribes this circumstance to custom, whose influence is so powerful, as well in our recreations as in the more serious occupations of life. This explanation, however, is by no means satisfactory to his opponent; for if the use of money in the game were a mere arbitrary appendage, which custom had affixed, surely, in some instances at least, an effort would be made for its removal; since the fact is generally admitted, that this concomitant is an evil. The uniformity of the practice, its universality, in fact, from the highest to the lowest classes of society, in opposition to

the obvious and acknowledged evils both numerous and weighty, of which it is productive, even when ample allowance is made for the tyranny of fashion, afford at least strong presumptive proof, that mercenary considerations constitute an element of the amusement, the removal of which would not only abridge, but entirely destroy the influence it possesses over its admirers. So strong, indeed, is this presumption, that the objector to the amusement, appealing to the honest convictions of his intelligent and candid opponent, may with safety challenge a denial.

Nor does the trifling nature of the sums which are generally staked at the card-table, in any degree invalidate this position. At first sight, indeed, it might appear, that the mercenary feeling, if any is produced, must, under this circumstance, be too feeble to secure the interest to which the objector refers the amusement. It must be remembered, however, that gradations of sums of money are deposited at the

game, proportioned to the circumstances of those who partake of the amusement. It is impossible to determine what amounts are too inconsiderable to provoke cupidity, or what prospect of gain is too slight to stimulate mercenary feeling, and gratify a covetous propensity. The love of gain is all-devouring, and it seizes with avidity the slightest degree of gratification. It resembles the proboscis of an elephant, which, together with its terrible strength, and gigantic grasp, possesses the most delicate sensibility, and a perception of the minutest objects, and appropriates the smallest portions of food which are offered to supply its prodigious appetite. The very habit of such a pursuit is sufficient to engender avaricious desire. The man who devotes himself to money transactions, and acquires his wealth by a multitude of trifling gains, forms insensibly the habit of fixing his attention on the smallest degree of pecuniary profit; he will display an industry to obtain it, and derive a gratification from success, apparently very

disproportionate to the intrinsic value of the sum obtained. This common characteristic of a tradesman is solely the result of the habits which he acquires in his business. Let the votary of the card-table accurately mark the history of his feelings connected with his favourite amusement, and he will doubtless be able to trace a similar process.

If these remarks are correct, considerable importance is unquestionably due to the objections advanced against the amusement. It appears to fall short of the end for which all amusements ought to be appointed, namely, that of supplying rational and harmless recreation. Card-playing is not a rational amusement. It partakes of extreme frivolity. By the wise and the good it has ever been esteemed contemptible. It is somewhere recorded, that Cobilon, the Lacedemonian, being sent to Corinth with a commission, to conclude a treaty of friendship and alliance, when he saw the captains and senators of

that city playing at dice, returned home without doing anything, saying, that he would not so much sully the glory of the Spartans, as that it should be said they had made a league with gamesters. Hence it would seem, that this honest Heathen took every man addicted to gaming for a fool or a knave; and therefore resolved not to have any dealings with such, as neither of these characters could be depended on. It is, moreover, too exciting, too engrossing, too absorbing. It consumes a considerable portion of time, without securing any corresponding advantages. It is too laborious to be purely recreative, while it is unproductive of benefit, either to mind or body; and amid the powerful fascination which it possesses, it leaves unimproved, both the intellect and the feelings, the temper and the taste.

The tendency of the amusement is deeply mischievous. Cupidity is the parent of the gratification, and a tribe of hateful passions its progeny. "The love of money is the

root of all evil," and the card-table furnishes ample comment on the sacred assertion. Pride may dissemble and disown the truth, but too many evidences prove, that selfish complacency and sordid triumph on the one hand, and mortification and envy on the other, are the evil spirits of mischief, which commonly preside at the engagements of the card-table. The perniciousness of gaming was so well understood by the grand imposter Mahomet, that he thought it necessary to prohibit it expressly in the Koran, not as "a thing in itself naturally evil, but only morally so, as it is a step to the greatest vices; for whilst we captivate ourselves to chance, we lose our authority over our passions, being incited to immoderate desire, excessive hope, joy, and grief. We stand or fall at the uncertain cast of the dice, or the turning up of a card. We are slaves to the feeblest wishes, which, if they succeed not, we grow furious, and banish all prudence, temperance, and justice." To young persons especially, the amuse-

ment is injurious. All their recreations should subserve the purposes of intellectual and moral improvement, and while so many amusements, combining this advantage, are at hand, it is a reflection, both on taste and feeling, to prefer to them the frivolous pleasures of card-playing—

> Contrived
> To fill the void of an unfurnished brain,
> To palliate dullness, and give time a shove.*

The reason has been demanded, why chess, as well as cards, should not be prohibited by the objectors to fashionable amusements. The reply is at once easy and satisfactory. The two amusements, both in their nature and tendency, are essentially different. The game of cards is frivolous in itself, and injurious in its effects. This cannot be said of chess. It is a game of science, and the mental effort it demands is, in a high degree, manly.

* Cowper's Task.

It combines many of the advantages of mathematical study, tending to discipline the mind, by accustoming it to efforts of abstraction, and severe processes of thought. Without hesitation, it may be said, that some results to the sex, of a valuable kind might be anticipated, could young ladies be induced to forsake the card-table, and devote some portion of the time, which they are accustomed to occupy in the idle amusement of cards, to the highly intellectual and deeply interesting pleasures of the chess-board. Chess, moreover, unless by confirmed gamblers, is never played at for money. To win the game is ever deemed a sufficient remuneration for the toil of contest, and the successful competitor is never reduced to the degrading task of gathering up the miserable pittances, which have been produced from the pockets of others.

On the score of temper, also, the game of chess is infinitely preferable. "No man can lose a game of chess without

perceiving the wrong move or moves, which led to that termination; his loss is the effect of his own misconduct, which might have been avoided, had he adopted a different course, and which he was at full liberty to have done; he can blame no one but himself; he feels no angry, envious, or malicious passion excited; he cannot embroil himself in any quarrel with his friend, because at starting they possessed equal advantages; and it would be the most absurd thing in the world to quarrel with another because he has made a better use than his neighbour of the opportunities equally afforded to each. But in other games the case is greatly altered; it is a chance whether the players are in any degree placed under equal advantages; one becomes liable to the feelings of envy, the other to those of triumph; the game is proceeded with; and as the effects are in a great degree, if not wholly, incidental, the passions of hope, fear, distrust, anxiety, and various others, are continually excited, and torment the mind. I am now

speaking where no stake or only a trifling one is played for. If large sums are betted, all these evils are awfully magnified, and probably ruin attends one of the parties. If I am in any degree a correct reasoner, whatever tends to provoke anger, to inflame our corrupt passions, to encourage selfishness, and steel the heart against feeling for the disappointments, losses, and distresses of others, must be wrong."*

Numerous and plausible, therefore, as may be the arguments in support of this popular amusement, it nevertheless appears to be indulged in at the expense of what is far more important to character and happiness than the trifling evils which it is designed to avoid. The card-table may secure the social party against the miseries of insipidity, and the horrors of *ennui;* it may preserve pride from mortification, and maintain the punctilios of artificial politeness; but these benefits are produced

* Confessions of a Gamester.

at an expense far exceeding their value. The mind is reduced to an idle and contemptible employment, and the heart is subjected to a severe and dangerous test of its best and most amiable feelings.

When money, moreover, is staked at the card-table, the charge of direct criminality is alleged against the amusement. The argument is constructed upon the same ground on which gaming in general is unlawful—there is an improper employment of money. Wealth is an important instrument of our own and others' good; its possession, therefore, involves a moral responsibility. It is a valuable talent committed to our trust, for the employment of which we are amenable to Him who has placed it in our hands. It must be disbursed under the direction of the judgment, and with the conscientious design of procuring either our own or others' good. We may probably feel ourselves at liberty to purchase an article of luxury; our conscientious scruples are removed by the con-

sideration, that the article is the product of some industrious hand, which needs the money we expend. Let this remark be applied to the subject under consideration. At the card-table money is placed under the control of the contingencies which accompany the game. The person who deposits the money, either needs it for his own use, or he does not. In the former case, he cannot lose it without inconvenience; in the latter, he possesses a superfluity, which he is bound to appropriate to such a purpose as may render it the probable instrument of benefit to another. If he lose the sum, he parts with it criminally; if he gain to it an additional sum, he is guilty of a species of robbery, inasmuch as he returns for it no suitable equivalent.

Every one will immediately recognize the validity of this reasoning as applied to the practice of gaming when conducted on an extensive scale. The vice is then universally censured; but when trifling

amounts of money only are involved, the same act undergoes, it would appear, a change of moral character, and loses the features which in the former instance are viewed with disapprobation and disgust. A gross error, however, is here committed. What is inherently wrong in the greater, cannot be right in the less; the obnoxious elements, which exist in an extensive system of gaming, pervade, in a proportionate degree, every modification of the practice, and convey a corresponding measure of criminality. If gaming is immoral in all its gradations, it must be in card-playing, which is one.

CHAPTER IV.

DANCING.

Blame, cynic, if you can, quadrille or ball,
The snug close party, or the splendid hall,
Where Night, down drooping from her ebon throne,
Views constellations brighter than her own.

COWPER.

EVERY one acquainted with this elegant amusement is aware that it presents to the lovers of pleasure the most powerful attractions. There is no scene in which pleasure reigns more triumphantly than in the ball-room. The assemblage of fashion, of beauty, of elegance, and taste; the music rising "with its voluptuous swell;" the elegant attitudes, and airy evolutions of graceful forms; the mirth in every step, and joy in every eye, unite to give to the spirits a buoyancy, to the

heart a gaiety, and to the passions a warmth, unequalled by any other species of amusement. What emotions of pleasure are like those which are felt when

> Upsprings the dance along the lighted dome,
> Mixed and evolved a thousand different ways;
> The glittering court effuses every pomp;
> The circle deepens; beamed from gaudy robes,
> Tapers, and sparkling gems, and radiant eyes;
> A soft effulgence o'er the palace waves.*

That it should, therefore, find many admirers and advocates is naturally to be expected, and he who declares himself an opponent of the gratification, and enters the lists against it, had need to be liberally supplied at once with courage, weapons, and address. The present discussion, however, involves a task, if not less difficult, at least less formidable; demanding rather sagacity and caution, than confidence and courage. Its design is not, at all events, to oppose, declaim against, and censure,

* Thomson's Seasons.

but to observe, investigate, argue, and decide. Prejudice may regard the effort with an evil eye, but intelligence and candour will meet it with civility and respect. If conviction can be obtained, that the amusement is harmless and pure, sanction for it will be cheerfully granted; and approbation will be withheld only on the ground of manifest and formidable injury or danger.

No sensible person, it is presumed, would think of maintaining, that dancing, when conducted under proper restrictions, is, in its own nature, criminal; some evil attendant circumstances can alone form the ground of objection. For young persons the amusement appears both suitable and desirable; as an art it is elegant, and as an exercise necessary for young people. To it they are instinctively led, and by it their health and growth are promoted. The flow of their animal spirits, and their gaiety of heart communicate a corresponding influence to the animal frame,

and dispose its ductile powers to active and vigorous motion. Dancing, especially in its relation to the female sex, appears to be admirably adapted to these phenomena of juvenile character and state. When not excessively practised, so as either to dissipate the mind, or injure the body by fatigue and exhaustion, the amusement is salutary. The discipline which the art secures is also valuable. It gives ductility to the limbs, gracefulness to their movements, and that elegance of carriage, which forms so pleasing and desirable an accomplishment. At the same time it must be admitted, that the dangers of the amusement are far from trifling. Fondness for dress, love of display, desire of admiration, and all the remaining concomitants of juvenile vanity are by it supplied with additional facilities of growth and developement. There is room also for the apprehension that a permanent taste for the amusement may be acquired, the gratification of which, in the estimation of many persons, ought to be granted only

to juvenile years. That these dangers can be avoided, and the advantages secured, is, with many parents, extremely questionable; and the amusement, therefore, has been not unfrequently altogether prohibited. By others, however, no scruple is entertained. They argue, that the objections which lie against teaching young persons the art of dancing, may, with equal force, be alleged against instruction in all other accomplishments. They have all, indeed, connected with them their peculiar temptations; but admission is refused to the opinion, that these temptations are supplied in addition to those which belong to a remove from polished life. If the accomplished mind is brought no nearer to the standard of virtue than the one which is destitute of refinement, it is certainly not placed at a further remove from it. If the former is met by temptations peculiar to its circumstances, on the other hand it is placed at a corresponding distance from dangers which are indispensable to the latter. In proportion

as the pleasures of taste and refinement are possessed, the desire of inferior gratifications declines; and, amidst the fascinations of taste, and the blandishments of elegant arts, the mind escapes at least the contamination of gross and vulgar pleasures. In the absence of correct and careful moral culture, every art and accomplishment will be productive of evil, and the character, in every situation and amid every scene, will be exposed to danger. The secret of safety appears to be the inculcation of good principles, supplying correct example, and carefully watching and checking the first developements of evil. In reference to dancing, for instance, let the design of the amusement be explained, its dangers pointed out, and the first indications of its abuse noticed and corrected; the hope may then be with safety entertained, that the evil apprehended will be avoided, and the advantages contemplated secured.

There is undoubtedly much that is

plausible in this representation; and probably some Christian parents will think the argument sufficiently solid to justify their adopting it. A fuller investigation, however, will, it is presumed, lead the more enlightened and cautious guardian of youth to a different conclusion; the truth and wisdom of which the young person, who has learnt submission to pure and correct moral discipline, will clearly perceive, and readily act upon. Not only what is in itself evil must be avoided; what has a tendency to evil, and is obviously hazardous in its results, must be shunned. The pursuit of any object in education, whether it be literary acquirements, personal accomplishments, or mental refinement, is criminal, when that pursuit plainly involves moral danger. Submitted to this test, the acquirement of the art of dancing must be forbidden. The whole history of the amusement, and the present practice of it in society, goes to prove that the early acquisition of the art is almost invariably productive of a permanent taste

for it. The dancing-room not only qualifies for the ball-room, but it inspires an almost irresistible desire of visiting it. The temptation may in some instances be overcome, but there are few who have not felt it, and generally the propensity has without scruple been indulged. Observation and experiment, it may be confidently asserted, abundantly confirm this maxim, that what may not be pursued as an amusement in after life, must not be taught in early years.

As suitable for *adult* persons the amusement next demands examination. It is evident that some of the reasons by which sanction for the amusement has been obtained for the juvenile circle, cannot be urged in its defence as the pursuit of riper years. The amusement supplies to youth appropriate and salutary exercise. This apology will not serve the adult. That flow of animal spirits which young persons experience, and which induces a corresponding activity of body, is not common to persons of maturer years. They do

not need, as young people do, the exercise which dancing supplies. In this circumstance we contemplate a wise provision of nature. In youth the mind is free from care, the spirits are elastic, and to the exercise, which at this period, the well-being of the animal system requires, there is an instinctive tendency. At a subsequent period, when severer pursuits employ the mind, and occupy it with thoughts of gravity and care, and when consequently the disposition to the volatile activity of youth is removed, the constitution no longer needs such exertion. Dancing, therefore, as an exercise, is not only not necessary to adult persons, but it is not natural; at this period of life there is an obvious discrepancy between such an amusement and the natural tendencies of the human constitution, so that an artificial excitement must be created before inducements to partake of it can be felt.

And while dancing is beneficial as an *exercise* only to young persons, its benefits

as an *accomplishment* also belong exclusively to the juvenile circle. As far as it contributes to give elegance to the carriage, it is beneficial only at that period of life when the manners are under discipline. Admitting that "they move easiest who have learnt to dance," it may surely be presumed that once to have acquired the art is sufficient, and that there is no need for its practice in after life in order to perpetuate the advantage.

Dancing, therefore, as practised by adult persons, is a mere amusement, and viewing it in this light, apart from every other consideration, it must be placed at a considerable remove from undisputed lawfulness. How far pleasure, which secures no advantage, either physical, intellectual, or moral, may be justifiably sought, is not easily determined. Happiness is a legitimate object of pursuit only when sought in subservience to the moral end of our being. Amusement, like sleep, is laudably indulged, as far as it is

necessary to recruit the strength, and to prepare the powers for new exertion. The amusements of life should be like the theatrical music, performed between the acts of the drama, forming no part of the representation itself, but agreeably occupying a necessary interval. Human life is a stage where none may trifle. Each has a serious part to sustain in the grand drama; his performance will secure him either applause or censure, and crown him with immortal honour, or brand him with eternal disgrace. Under this qualification, which ought ever to accompany pleasures in general, is the amusement of dancing commonly sought? Is the ball-room visited as the scene of recreation, and of relaxation from mental care, exhaustion, and weariness? Are not the generality of its visitants persons of professed leisure and luxury, gaiety and dissipation? As a place of recreation, the ball-room cannot be defended; it is never frequented as such; the nature of the amusement renders

it incapable of receiving this designation; it is too exciting, and too fatiguing.

> "Wild mirth! thou art a wasting power,
> Enlivening, but to leave more lonely;
> That is indeed a fatal hour
> To pleasure given, and pleasure only."

For proof of the doubtful nature of this and similar amusements, appeal may be made to the consciousness of the candid and reflecting participant. In those intervals—we do not say of animal fatigue, and mental exhaustion, producing dejection of spirits, and all the nameless miseries of *ennui*, and when a morbid imagination gives its corresponding gloomy colouring to thought—but in the moments of sober and philosophic reflection, what views are taken of the time which is spent in such pursuits? Is the conviction produced and firmly retained, that the time has been wisely employed? Are the reminiscences of the past enjoyment such as may be safely deposited amongst those moral stores, whence, in the absence of present

sources of gratification, and when the memory is forced upon the serious task of an impartial review of its history, the mind may supply its lack of enjoyment, and receive comfort and hope? Are not the recollections of duties conscientiously performed, of evil carefully avoided, and temptations successfully combated, far more pleasingly indulged? What stronger proof can be supplied of the uniform adherence of conscience to the grand moral maxim, that the great end of life is not pleasure but duty!

The painfully interesting memoir already referred to, and which bears on it throughout undoubted marks of authenticity, places this truth in a striking light, "I have had a merry life," observes the author of the Confessions of a Gamester, "without its being a short one, which too often happens. But the recurrence of those principles which my mother endeavoured to instil into my mind during my infancy, has been a continual annoyance. They

have urged themselves upon me at the most inconvenient seasons, nor have I been able to banish them. For many years I kept my apprehensions tolerably quiet, regularly taking the sacrament every Whitsunday, and thus balancing my accounts with the other world; but this has not completely answered my expectations, and as I advance in years, and more particularly desire confidence, it seems less satisfactory. It appears strange that a life spent in mirth and gaiety, should not afford pleasure in the review; but I find it so much the reverse, that I can rarely bring myself to reconsider it. I wonder, even at the present moment, how I have been induced to record so many particulars. The retrospect is continually reviving recollections far from pleasant, and renewing feelings which cause me to decline narrating many incidents which might prove amusing enough, if they were not connected with circumstances, the remembrance of which yields me no gratification. In fact, my situation is far from

enviable. To look forward is by no means inviting. I have survived most of my contemporaries, and cannot but expect that my life is drawing towards a close. I feel a sort of presentiment that I cannot continue much longer; and to die is something like taking a leap in the dark. I do not find much present enjoyment, and I cannot suppress a secret, undefinable horror of the future."

The amusements of the ball-room are further objected to by many on the ground of their direct moral danger. It is the scene where pleasure reigns with irresistible potency. Can it be the abode of safety, as it is of delight? Can the mind retire from it, and return to its severer duties with equal zeal, energy, and constancy?

What warre so cruel, or what siege so sore,
As that which strong affections do apply
Against the fort of reason evermore,
To bring the sowle into captivity?

Their force is firmer thro' infirmity
Of the fraile flesh, relenting to their rage;
And exercise most bitter tyranny
Upon the parts brought into their bondage:
No wretchedness is like to sinful vellenage.*

Amidst the strong excitement of the passions which is here produced, the powerful attractions which are presented, the almost magical fascination of the whole scene, must not virtuous principle be severely exposed? He who is not invulnerable to the shafts of temptation, who cannot pronounce himself too pure to receive contamination, is surely not safe amid this scene of blandishments, of dissipation, and of subduing pleasure. When passion's power is thus aroused, will it be less wild than vigorous, or less lawless than impetuous? Will its buoyant and turbulent billows both hear and heed the stern mandate of conscience, "Hitherto shalt thou go and no further?" Amid the intoxications of delight will our sensations

* Spenser's Fairy Queene.

be as pure as they are pleasurable, and shall we cherish no other associations than those which virtue admits and approves? Will no eye, but that of pure and innocent admiration, wander over the images of beauty, which pass wooingly along, and fix on forms of loveliness, which invite rather than shun the gaze, while

> Tender limbs
> Float in the loose simplicity of dress,
> And fashioned all to harmony, alone
> Know they to seize the captivated soul;
> . . . . . with smooth step,
> Disclosing motion in its every charm,
> They swim along, and swell the mazy dance? *

This objection is obviously delicate, and as such should be urged. It is one of experience and feeling; it submits itself to the bar of individual moral consciousness, and will be valid or inconclusive, according to the verdict it receives. That the ball-room presents the occasions of

* Thomson's Seasons.

unlawful feeling, cannot be denied; and what scene, it may be asked, either of pleasure or duty, can plead an exemption? The question, however, we shall be told, in the present instance, must be, is it the *tendency* of this amusement to create danger, and to supply, in any considerable degree, temptation to evil?

Without attempting to determine how far we may lawfully expose ourselves to temptation, in the pursuits of business or recreation, it is maintained, that the degree of danger, which must be necessarily incurred by participation in this amusement, can never be wisely or legitimately encountered. Aware of our constant exposure to danger, we may pray, "lead us not into temptation:" but let the visiant of the ball-room answer, would not every correct feeling of his nature be shocked, by a proposal to introduce the pleasures of the evening, with a direct and solemn preferment to the great Preserver of this rational and important petition?

The advocate of the amusement will probably reject as equally uncharitable and untrue this representation of its character and tendency, and feel yet more firmly convinced of its lawfulness by the very effort which he imagines has been unsuccessfully made to condemn it. His opponent, however, invites him to other ground in the argument, yet further to dispute with him the palm of victory. If the *vices* of the human heart are not cherished by the pleasures of the ball-room, it is certain that the *follies* of human character are here supplied with facilities for growth. Where is the mind that escapes the influence of some of the weaker feelings of our nature which it is the tendency of this amusement to elicit? That desire to please, which is natural to the human mind, which has been wisely bestowed by the Author of our being, and, when properly disciplined, accomplishes the most valuable purposes of human life, is here remarkably liable to undue excitement and perverted use; to degenerate, in fact,

into a pitiable modification of mental infirmity, namely, vanity.

For praise too dearly loved, or warmly sought,
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought;
And the weak soul, within itself unblest,
Leans for all pleasure on another's breast.
Hence ostentation here, with tawdry art,
Pants for the vulgar praise which fools impart.*

To secure notice and admiration is an object of high importance with every participant of the amusement; and that bosom beats highest with felicitous emotion, in which the consciousness of the greatest degree of success is found. And what are the qualities, which with so much solicitude are presented to observation? Are they not those, which, when justly considered, must be pronounced the most inferior of which an intellectual being can boast, and in which one has least of all occasion to feel complacency or pride? They are the charms, not of mind, but of

* Goldsmith's Traveller.

person; not of art, but of dress; not of a cultivated intellect, but gracefulness of form; not of amiable disposition, but elegant carriage.

In almost inseparable connexion with this undesirable quality, the yet more to be dreaded emotions of pride and jealousy appear. That fair form, whose beauty, elegance, and grace, render her the object of admiring attention to every eye, must possess very vigorous principle, and an intrinsically amiable heart, still to retain, amidst the consciousness of her powers, and the flattering relation she sustains to inferior candidates for distinction, that modesty, meekness, and humility, which furnish the sex with its brightest ornaments, and most durable attractions.

These evils, indeed, are not peculiar to the ball-room; they attend almost all the circumstances of social life. This concession, however, does not weaken the argument. The social circle must of

necessity be formed; its evils, whatever they may be, must be tolerated, and suffered to remain against a preponderating amount of advantages.

The advocate of the ball-room will be required by his opponent to produce evidence, either that the evils complained of are common to every drawing-room, what recreations soever are indulged in, or that this amusement possesses countervailing advantages peculiar to itself. The objector contends, that the ball-room is more than any other place, the theatre for *display*, where admiration is most sought, and attraction most studied; where the heart is rendered most gay, the passions most glowing, and the imagination most vivid; consequently where the charms of beauty and taste are the most attractive and influential.

The apprehended consequence of such pursuits on female minds is easily anticipated. It will be thought destructive of

that retiring modesty, which not only affords to the sex the safeguard of its virtue, but constitutes also the great charm of its loveliness. Like the sweetest flower of spring, which nature seems to have designed as the emblem of this virtue, privacy appears necessary to its very existence. Public notice and applause—the glare of a summer's sun—robs it of its freshness and fragance, and leaves it little more than the name, and the form of its worth. In this manner will not the fair visitant of the ball-room suffer? While displaying her charms, does she not *lose* them, and sink in esteem in proportion to the very solicitude felt, and the efforts employed to fix admiration, and to multiply applauses? No! custom has created a new law for her security, and fashion throws around her its omnipotent shield for her protection. The sensible and the manly will disdain the prudery and fastidiousness, which sees in all her proudest display, anything that tends to diminish her claim to regard. Her too imaginative

and romantic admirer, who pledges, in addition to the assiduous attentions, and flattering applauses which others have paid her, the higher sympathies of his heart, and the more serious professions of his lips, might, indeed, find occasion for regret, in the taste and habits of her, whose attractions have long been spread before others' eyes, with a solicitude to lay under tribute *their* admiration as well as his own.—He might entertain a doubt of finding, that she, who has been wont imperatively to sway the sceptre of beauty's power over *many* hearts, will feel it evermore enough to rule with a gentle and happy influence over *one*.—He might question her willingness to contract a solicitude to please, which has hitherto extended as widely as the sphere in which she has gaily and brilliantly moved, and to collect it in one blissful focus for him, who has to herself surrendered irreclaimably his freedom, and on her staked irrevocably his hopes and his happiness. In addition to the gratification to be derived from the

consciousness of having made all his own, the person of one whose attractions have not been oftener exhibited than acknowledged, and by whom he is able to exact a tribute, either of congratulation or envy from all around him, he might scarcely hope to experience those sacred and untold delights, enjoyed by him, whom gradual and timid approaches have brought into the confidence, esteem, and tender thought of the idol form of modest and unconscious worth, whose loveliness is more lovely because retired, and the more valued because discovered and not obtruded. But

> Beauty is nature's brag, and must be shewn
> In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,
> Where most may wonder at the workmanship.*

There is yet a further objection to the ball-room, which is deserving of attention. It is a maxim of high authority, whose

* Milton's Mask of Comus.

truth, moreover, is confirmed by daily observation, that "they that walk with wise men shall be wise." Designed for social existence, man is endowed with suitable properties. He possesses sympathy with his fellow-creatures; he notices, and unconsciously imitates them. His purposes are strengthened and confirmed, or enfeebled and restrained by their example. Insensibly he imbibes the principles and maxims of his associates, adopts their habits and practices, and receives for his character a complexion similar to their's

In their relation to close and permanent intimacies, these remarks are obvious and trite; their correctness, in reference, to more passing associations, is probably less apparent. Extraordinary sagacity, however, is not necessary for the discovery, that the example, not only of intimate friends, but also of transient acquaintances, is, to a considerable extent, influential. How re-

mote soever may be the assembly of a ball-room from a visitant's private acquaintance, he will by no means be removed beyond the reach of a powerful and important influence. The passing intercourse of a single evening, especially that of an assembly, or ball-room, where gaiety of heart, buoyancy of spirits, and the glowings of passion, render intercourse so full and unrestrained, is sufficient to give a complexion to the mind, and a tone to the feelings, neither transient, nor trivial. The scene is harmonious, and the effect is *unique*. One spirit animates all. The example, whether good or evil, is imposing and authoritative;—sympathy is strong; the feelings are softened and subdued; reason submits, and pleasure is the master-spirit of the scene. The tide, whatever be its destination, is strong and impetuous, and bears away, with irresistible impulse, the objects which float on its surface.

It will not be difficult to show, that the moral influence of the associations which are formed in this amusement, is more

than questionable. What is the prevailing character of a ball-room assembly? Does this place of fashionable resort present stronger attractions for the sedate, the sober, the virtuous, and the "wise," or for the gay, the thoughtless, and the dissipated? What qualities of mind, and what class of feelings constitute the prevailing spirit of the amusement, the sway of whose sceptre is so extensive and imperative? Can it be either safe or lawful to enter within the sphere of its attractions, to submit to its fascinating spell, and to indulge in the luxurious languishment of its soft enchantments? Will the candidate for wisdom's immortal rewards, here find companions to encourage, and competitors to stimulate his advances? Will he walk with "wise men," and thus become "wise?" If the converse of the sacred aphorism is true—if they that walk with those who are *not* wise, shall be themselves not wise, *their* conduct is justified and ought to be imitated, who avoid, as dangerous and unlawful, the amusements of the ball-room.

CHAPTER V.

NOVEL-READING.

Oh! leave novels, ye Mauchline belles!
Ye're safer at your spinning-wheel;
Such witching books are baited hooks
For rakish rooks, like Rob Mossgiel.
Your fine Tom Jones and Grandisons,
They make your youthful fancies reel;
They heat your brains, and fire your veins,
And then you're prey for Rob Mossgiel.

BURNS.

THE influence of reading in the formation of character, is so invariably admitted and so frequently referred to, that it requires, on the present occasion, neither elaborate proof nor extended illustration. Next to the society in which he mingles, the books which he studies form the cast of every

man's mind, fix his principles, determine his habits, and, in fact, make him what he is.

Works of fiction are peculiarly influential. The imagination is one of the most active and powerful faculties of the human mind, and, consequently, on the manner in which it is directed and controlled the structure of character will, in an important degree, depend. The rapid and excursive flights of fancy through the regions of thought, and the avidity with which it seizes and appropriates the objects of its taste, render it an active agent in collecting those ideas, sentiments and feelings, which form the fabric of intellectual and moral character.

The activity and capacity of the imagination are sufficiently discovered by the eagerness with which the productions of the poet and novelist are, by all classes of readers, perused, and the almost unbounded number of volumes of this de-

scription, which are annually issuing from the press.

That an indiscriminate perusal of novels is deeply mischievous, every one admits; at the same time it must be conceded, that, under certain restrictions, some of these productions may be perused without injury, and indeed with a measure of advantage. To assign suitable limits is, doubtless, a somewhat delicate and difficult task. The effort, however, is important; for should it prove successful, a danger of considerable magnitude will be avoided. The youthful mind will be taught to form its judgment, and to fix its decision respecting the forbidden indulgence. To place an unqualified interdict on all novels will hardly be found, as some suppose, an error on the safe side. In the estimation of a young person, possessing an ordinary degree of intelligence and spirit of inquiry, it will be difficult to exonerate from the charge of ignorance or undue severity, the sentiment,

that *all* novels must be forbidden because *some* are injurious. He will scarcely fail to treat the opinion with secret disapprobation, if not with open contempt. The self-confidence, which is almost inseparable from youthful inexperience, will induce him to embrace the first opportunity of overstepping the line, which he imagines absurd prejudice or timid caution has drawn, and to tread in the forbidden path, where, if dangers abound, they will employ his sagacity to discover, and his wisdom to avoid.

Some of the generally-admitted evils attending an indiscriminate perusal of novels require examination. The fact is too notorious to require proof, that many of these productions possess a direct immoral tendency. Erroneous and dangerous sentiments, unchaste associations, and polluting images, are presented in a form, which disguises them only to render them the more insidious, fascinating and fatal. Like the foe, who in the garb of a friend,

gains admittance into a besieged citadel, they effect an entrance into the unsuspecting heart, which, but for their treachery, might have remained secure both in purity and virtue. Could many such productions, which are generally deemed harmless, undergo a process of accurate analysis, it may with confidence be asserted, that some of their fondest admirers would be startled by a view of the deadly ingredients of which they are composed. It is impossible for language to convey the indignation which every virtuous mind will cherish against the authors of such productions. If the wretch is the mark of horror and execration, who prowls in midnight darkness along the lonely way, in search of the foe, whom rivalry, insult, or crime, has made the object of murderous hate, what feelings must be directed against these moral assassins, who, for paltry gain, or from barbarous wantonness, steal unsuspected on the fair form of virtue, and make a deadly pass at the heart of purity and innocence?

Hence! ye who snare and stupify the mind;
Sophists, of beauty, virtue, joy the bane;
Greedy and fell, tho' impotent and blind,
Who spread your filthy nets in truth's fair fane,
And ever ply your venomed fangs amain!*

To the youth whose eye may meet these pages, the words of friendly and affectionate admonition are addressed. As he values virtue, peace, and character; as he holds sacred and dear the interests of his moral being and immortal destiny, let him not lay hands on these pernicious volumes. As he would dread to recline on a bed of roses where scorpions have made their nest, let him not yield his heart to their guilty fascinations; let him not suffer an inexperienced and ardent fancy to follow in their flowery path amid images of unhallowed delight.

. . . . . For 'tis too late,
When on his heart the torrent softness pours;
Then wisdom prostrate lies, and fading fame
Dissolves in air away; while the fond soul,

* Beattie's Minstrel.

Wrapt in gay visions of unreal bliss,
Still paints the illusive form, the kindling grace,
The enticing smile———————
Beneath whose beauteous beams, belying heaven,
Lurks searching cunning, cruelty, and death;
And still, false warbling in his cheated ear,
Her syren voice enchanting draws him on
To guileful shores and meads of fatal joy.*

Purity of thought and feeling, let it be remembered, is the first element of virtue; and escape from the slightest degree of contamination should be an object of constant and supreme solicitude. Of all the evils that constitute the bane of virtue and happiness, a polluted imagination is the most to be dreaded. By its efforts a fascination is given to guilty pleasure, and a power to invite and seduce, when reason and conscience have united to pronounce their loudest warnings of peril and death. It is this faculty which creates a zest when sense would else have been satiated and palled;—that "decks with coverings

* Thomson's Seasons.

of tapestry, with carved works, and fine linen of Egypt, and perfumes with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon," the place where "many wounded" have been "cast down," and "many strong men have been slain." It multiplies, to an infinite degree, incentives to unhallowed passion, and creates, with a fearful omnipotence, an endless succession of new and ever-varied forms of allurement. Solitude forms no safeguard; virtuous love withers beneath the infection; every association is contaminated, and mingles with the surrounding elements of corruption. The soul, polluted in every thought, and debased in every faculty, is bound down to sense, and rendered the slave of lust, never more to be unloosed until that sense and that lust shall themselves be bound in the stronger bonds of death and the grave; and then, with all its defilement, "the spirit shall return to God who gave it," and learn, in the purity of his nature, the turpitude of its guilt, and in the frowns of his anger, the consummation of its misery.

Many novels, also, whose design and tendency are by no means obviously and directly inimical to virtue, will, on the score of moral effect, be found exceptionable. In too many instances there is evidently a study rather to gratify than to instruct, to colour a picture than to point a moral, and to stimulate the imagination than to cherish virtue or strengthen principle. Like the productions of the drama, they exhibit virtue and vice in other than their native attire, and give to both a colouring which is not their own. Their appropriate attributes have been exchanged, and their forms so modified, as to destroy the powerful contrast which they naturally present. Their respective colours, instead of standing in strong relief, have, like the hues of the rainbow, been inseparably blended. In most novels characters are so drawn as to exclude the class of excellencies which unequivocally designate genuine virtue, and are farthest removed from any of the qualties of vice. On the other hand, those attributes of

virtue which, from their nature, admit into connexion with themselves some of the specious qualities of human infirmity, are constantly exhibited. The most superficial observer can scarcely have failed to remark, that the class of virtues which, in consequence of their inseparable connexion with the religion of the New Testament, have been designated Christian virtues, seem to be of no service to the novelist in modelling his characters.* Of heathen virtues only, he appears to be able to avail himself. Meekness, humility, forbearance, self-denial, and other virtues of this order, to which the New Testament gives so decided a pre-eminence, cannot, it would appear, be advantageously embodied in a hero of fiction. With the

* Sir Walter Scott's readers will refer to "The Heart of Mid Lothian" for an exception to the above remark. Why has not this masterly hand been more frequently—for it surely has never been more successfully—employed in the production of models of Christian virtue, finished and exquisite, like that of Jeanie Deans?

improper passions of the human heart these qualities have no affinity; they cannot be so modified as to be inwrought with those traits of character which at once excite and indulge the reader. Other virtues admit this purpose. Some of their qualities, or at least their semblance, can be transferred to the secretly cherished infirmities of human character. Under the name of magnanimity may appear pride; under that of honour, revenge; and under that of tender passion, criminal desire.

——Anger, zeal and fortitude supply;
E'en avarice, prudence; sloth, philosophy;
Lust, thro' some certain strainers well refined,
Is gentle love, and charms all womankind.
Envy, to which the ignoble mind's a slave,
Is emulation in the learned or brave.*

On the youthful mind, where the affections are lively, and the sympathies strong, the faculty of moral discrimination imperfectly formed, and the virtuous principle immature, the injurious influence of these

* Pope's Essay on Man.

specious representations exceeds calculation. They must necessarily tend to weaken the feelings, which virtue and vice ought to inspire; to confound distinctions between them, which it is of the highest importance to preserve; to bewilder the moral traveller in his path, and seduce him to aberration and ruin. No correct observer will doubt, that the influence of such productions on youthful character materially assists to form the strong and settled aversion to the morality of the New Testament, which so many discover. Accustomed to admire and worship the meretricious form, which idolatrous hands have set up to represent the goddess of truth, it is no wonder that they should be repelled by the chaster aspect of the real divinity, and refuse her their homage and service.

Admitting, even, that the selection is strictly judicious, the youthful reader is by no means free from danger in the perusal of works of fiction. A taste for

Novel-reading is fraught with many evils. Its indulgence will consume more time than young persons can afford for this employment. Early life is the favourable period for storing the mind with useful knowledge, enlarging the intellectual capacity, and forming the character. To acquire solid attainments, should, with all young persons, be an object of chief regard. Novel-reading serves the purpose only of mental recreation, or at best, effects the embellishment of character. Materials for the structure itself should be first procured; those for its decoration may be sought at leisure; beauty, without stability, is both weakness and folly.

A disinclination, moreover, for the pursuits of solid literature, is the infallible consequence of an undue predilection for this class of reading. An effeminacy of intellect is produced. The youthful mind, thus nursed on fancy's lap, may indeed grow into grace and beauty, but its masculine character will be lost. From an

unfortunate preponderance of imagination, many a mind, gifted by nature with the requisites for successful and honourable advance in the path of science, has received that volatile character, which has ever hindered its success. Fancy's visions have absorbed the attention due to sober reason, and fiction has engrossed the time, which ought to have been employed in the discovery of truth.

A taste for novel-reading has a tendency, also, to unfit the mind for the ordinary duties and pleasures of life. A love of incidents is produced. This disposition is the fruitful source both of failure and disappointment. The imagination, thus improperly excited, will be frequently employed in identifying its own future history with those felicitous events which the novelist furnishes; hope, at length, embraces them, reason herself, forgetting that they are unreal, affords them a place in her sober calculations, and, when the false vision disappears, all the regrets of

rational disappointment are experienced. Nor must the amount of this evil be estimated merely by the temporary suffering which is thus occasioned. Disappointment, in whatever way it is occasioned, is the bane of exertion. If the youthful mind is so far led astray by the representations of its fancy, as to believe that the pleasing incidents which it contemplates, may actually occur in its own history, the danger is considerable, that the first palpable proof of the fatuity of its hopes will paralyze its exertions, and induce a despondency proportioned to its unwarrantable expectations. The history of the unhappy Rousseau supplies a striking illustration of these remarks. "Dans cette étrange situation," says he, "mon inquiète imagination prit un parti qui me sauva de moimême. Ce fut de se nourrir des situations qui m'avoient intéressé dans mes lectures, de les rappeler, de les varier, de les combiner, de me les approprier tellement, que je devinisse un des personages que

j'imaginois, que je me visse toujours dans les positions les plus agréable; selon mon goût, afin que l'état fictif où je venois à bout de me mettre, me fit oublier mon état réel dont j'étois si mécontent. Cet amour des objets imaginaires, et cette facilité de m'en occuper, achevèrent de me dégoûter de tout ce qui m'entouroit, et déterminèrent ce goût pour la solitude qui m'est toujours resté depuis ce temps-là. On verra plus d'une fois dans la suite les bizarres effets de cette disposition, si misanthrope, et si sombre en apparence, mais qui vient, en effet, d'un cœur trop affectueux, trop aimant, trop tendre; qui, faute d'en trouver d'existant qui lui ressemblent, est forcé, des alimenter de fictions. Il me suffit, quant à present, d'avoir marqué l'origine et la première cause d'un penchant qui a modifié toutes mes passions, et qui, les contenant par elles-mêmes, m'ont toujours rendu paresseux à faire, par trop d'ardeur à désirer. L'impossibilité d'atteindre aux êtres réels me jeta dans le pays des chimerès; et, ne voyant rien

d'existant qui fût digne de mon délire, je le nourris dans un monde ideal, que mon imagination créatrice eût bientot peuplé d'êtres selon mon cœur. Oubliant tout-à-fait la race humaine, je me fis des sociétés de créatures parfaites aussi celestes par leurs vertus que par leurs beautés, d'amis sûrs, tendres, fidèles, tels que je n'en trouvai jamais ici-bas, je pris un tel goût à planer ainsi dans l'empyrée au milieu des objects charmants dont je m'étois entouré, que j'y passois les heures, les jours sans compter; et perdant le souvenir de toute autre chose, à peine avois-je mangé un morceau à la hâte, que je brûlois ne m'échapper pour courir retrouver mes bosquets. Quand, prêt à partir pour le monde enchanté, je voyois arriver de malheureux mortels qui venoient me retenir sur la terre, je ne pouvois ni modérer, ni cacher mon dépit, et n'etant plus maître de moi, je leur faisois un accueil si brusque, qu'il pouvoit porter le nom de brutal. Cela ne fit qu'augmenter ma reputation de misanthropie, par tout ce qui m'en eût

acquis une bien contraire, si l'on eût mieux lu dans mon cœur."*

* TRANSLATION.—"I cherished for myself," says he, "the situations which had interested me in my reading. I recalled them, varied them, and so appropriated them, until I became one of the persons whom I imagined—until I saw myself in the situation most agreeable to my taste—until, in fine, the fictitious state into which I came, caused me to forget my real condition with which I was so discontented. This love of imaginary objects, and this facility of occupying myself, occasioned me disgust of all that surrounded me, and formed that taste for solitude which I retain to this day. The reader will often observe in the sequel, the singular effects of that disposition, so misanthropical and gloomy in appearance, but which, in fact, resulted from a heart too affectionate, too loving, too tender; which, in the absence of existences resembling itself, was compelled to subsist on fictions. It is sufficient for the present, to have marked the origin and first cause of an inclination, which has modified all my passions, and which, retaining them by means of themselves, has always rendered me slothful in performance, by too great ardour of desire. The impossibility of finding real beings adapted to my taste, threw me into a chimerical world, and seeing nothing of positive existence, which was worthy of my delirium, I cherished it in the ideal

Such an excitement of the imagination, as the constant perusal of novels produces, has a tendency also to weaken the sympathies which are necessary to active benevolence. Amongst the numerous victims of suffering, which intercourse with

world, which my creative imagination very soon peopled with beings adapted to my taste. Forgetting altogether the human race, I created for myself a society of perfect creatures, celestial, as well by their virtues, as by their beauty—of friends sure, tender, faithful, such as I have never found them on earth. I took such delight thus to hover in this imperial abode, amongst the charming objects by which I was surrounded, that I passed there hours and days without number; and losing the recollection of every thing else, hardly had I eaten a hasty morsel, than I longed to escape, and run to find my bower. If, when about to go into the enchanting world, I saw arrive any unfortunate mortals, who came to retain me on earth, I could neither moderate nor conceal my ill-humour, and being no more master of myself, I gave them a reception so rude, that it might justly be called brutal. Thus was increased my reputation for misanthropy, by the very means, which would have acquired me an opposite character, had I been better known."—Les Confessions de J. J. Rousseau, Partie i. Livre 1., and Partie ii. Livre 9.

society would bring before such an individual, how few would be found, whose character and history presented a picture half so interesting, as that which fiction is wont to exhibit! What sympathies would be felt with yonder suppliant, whose tattered garb and emaciated form bespeak him to be "misery's child," indeed, but in whose uncourtly mein, and broken tale of common-place woe, there is nothing to identify him with a hero of romance? Few persons, it is apprehended, who have imbibed an excessive fondness for fiction, would not be prepared to acknowledge, that the tendency of such a taste is to a morbid sensibility, which disqualifies for the active duties of benevolence. Sympathies of the most exquisite kind, it is true, have been awakened, but only by such objects as have excited them uselessly. Benevolent feeling has flowed, not through the cultivated soil, where thousands might benefit by the stream, but through the barren waste, where freshness and verdure never appear, to

reward its munificence. How often has it happened, that while the young and amiable heart has been wrought up to tenderness, over a tale of fictitious woe, the neighbouring abode of real distress has remained unvisited, and poverty, and sickness unnoticed, as worthy, neither of sympathy nor aid; and even when some suffering form of humanity has presented itself for pity and succour, that sensitive heart has felt only disgust, and, like the priest in the parable, has "passed by on the other side," leaving to grosser feelings the task of the good Samaritan, to "bind up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine!"

The early formation of the habits of active benevolence is of incalculable importance, and that which checks the growth of this principle, or gives to it a morbid character, must be considered a serious evil.

"That philanthropy is of little avail," observes The Journal of Health, "which

exhausts itself in aspirations after the happiness of our fellow-creatures, without its assuming a tangible and practical character. General expressions of regret at misfortunes, are easily enunciated by persons who would not, themselves, have encountered the slightest trouble towards their mitigation. We have thousands of sentimentalists of the school of Sterne, for one possessing the active benevolence of Howard—thousands who discourse most eloquently on the privations of the deaf and dumb, and yet not one of them to imitate the patience and unwearied zeal of de l'Epée and Sicard, in order to enable these unfortunes to hold communion with their families and friends.

"It would be doing, however, signal injustice to human nature, were we to suppose, that the quality of benevolence is so rare, and necessarily barren in its fruits, in the majority of mankind. There is certainly no small difference in the degree with which men are primitively endowed

with this sentiment; but, making all due allowances for these varieties, we are constrained to admit, that the cause of its imperfect display in the progress of life, is deficient early cultivation. The sentiments, to be useful to their possessor, and profitable to society, must be put in action, and their beauties and benefits can only be taught by showing them in action. We can learn geometry and mathematics, and the elements, at least, of most of the sciences, by conventional signs, which directly appeal to, and are only appreciated by, the intellect: but an exclusive appeal to this latter, in morals and religion, is responded to by the most wretched sophisms in *utilarian* philosophy, as it has been often miscalled. Charity cannot be taught like political economy, nor valued by weights and figures. It ought not to be inculcated by appeals to vanity, nor associated with motives which, though seemingly congenial, are really foreign and inadmissible. When a young person, at the suggestion, or by the command of

his parent, relieves a poor and squalid being, a return is too often made, in terms of unmeasured flattery, and numerous benedictions and prophesyings of future worth. From this time, vanity becomes, in this young person, the exciter to charity; and he is led, also, to entertain, by the contrast with the other's suffering and poverty, exaggerated notions of his own importance and worth. But if, in place of coldly giving alms to the passing beggar, the child be taken to the dwelling of this unfortunate being, and made a witness of the state of his miserable hovel—his want of fuel and bed-clothes—and the hunger, and half nudity of his little ones, an entirely different class of emotions is excited from those brought into play, in the first case. The sight of all these things naturally creates, in the juvenile visiter, a painful impression—a fear of the like happening to himself—pity, in fine, for the sufferers. Now is the moment to point out the means of relief, and to show him, that, by giving clothes and food, he confers comfort; and

if he is persuaded to give away his pocket-money, in order to enable the poor creatures to purchase food for the morrow, and other obvious necessaries, the first lesson of charity is made complete. Here, the evident pleasure given to others, more than soothes—it gratifies his feelings, and is a requital for the self-denial in parting from money, with which, perhaps, the little visiter had previously determined to purchase a toy, or some other means of amusement. The intercourse thus commenced, may be allowed to go on at the discretion of the parent, or guardian, of the juvenile party. Succeeding visits will enable this latter to see and learn how far the misery of the poor man is kept up by bodily infirmity, and disability to work, or is the result of idleness and bad habits. If it be discovered that drunkenness is at the root of the evil, the young person who has acted as almoner, will be more forcibly impressed with the enormities of this vice than by the most eloquent dissuasives by his tutor or father. Even in after years,

he will not be misled as to its true nature, if he should see, at the festive board, a man of wit and genius rapidly drowning his faculties in wine, and who, by the time that he has succeeded in amusing and instructing the company, has thoroughly imbued himself with the spirit of future melancholy and final ruin. The youthful observer will learn, that however much wealth and luxurious refinements may modify the display of vice, its nature is not changed, nor the penalty for its commission materially prolonged or mitigated.

"By making them spectators of the varied scenes of human misery, whether it proceed from poverty, disease, the infirmities of age, or sudden bereavements of any kind, the young acquire a knowledge of the wants of their fellow-creatures; and thus familiarized with the causes of suffering, and their benevolence adequately excited, they are able to devise, not only means of relief in the present case, but measures of prevention against the oc-

currence of similar ills. It may, in fine, we think, be laid down as an axiom in practical charity, that, for a man to discharge his duty to the distressed, in mind, body, or estate, he must have served an apprenticeship, not of personal suffering, but of observation and familiarity with scenes of distress. He ought, in fact, to acquire that kind of experience demanded for giving efficiency to philanthropy, which a physician finds to be essential for enabling him to relieve the bodily ailments of his fellow-men. Both ought to be familiar with symptoms, and able to distinguish the accidental from the characteristic; both ought to have observed well the causes, and both with manly frankness, tempered with discretion, point out the means of relief. An empiric in charity, is nearly as reprehensible a being as an empiric in medicine. It is true, the former can plead, with more plausibility, his good motives, but his blunders are not the less prejudicial. Ignorance of the causes of the

misery of his fellow-citizens, which are not evident within his own contracted circle, and an egotism never at rest, furnish the only allowable excuse of him who sneers at every scheme for bettering the condition of mankind, the projectors and supporters of which, may have neglected to propitiate his vanity, by giving him place and office among themselves.

"Let parents take their children with them in their visits of mercy, and make the latter, on occasions, their almoners, and they will have the double delight of more effectually solacing the miserable, and of nurturing the seeds of charity and benevolence, in the young visiter, into a rich harvest of good works, in the mature man. They will contribute greatly, by such means, to prevent disease, and render unnecessary the visits of the physician, always commanded, it is true, by even the most wretched; but, in the nature of things, not always productive of the hoped-for cure."

But the most serious evil attending a taste for novel-reading, consists in its tendency to convey false and dangerous sentiments and feelings, in reference to the moral character of human existence. The present state is one of moral trial. It is a scene of spiritual conflict, the result of which is infinitely interesting. Immortal honours reward the victor, and eternal infamy awaits the vanquished. With this condition of our being, every thing around us corresponds. The vicissitudes of life, its transitions of prosperous and adverse events, the singular, and apparently incongruous mixture of pleasure and pain, of anxiety and repose, of sorrow and joy, are all tending, under the superintendence of a moral Governor, to make the virtuous more virtuous, and their ultimate happiness secure, complete, and durable. The part of wisdom, therefore, is to direct our views towards this felicitous consummation, and to identify with it our best expectations and wishes. Every one who is familiar with novels is aware, that their

effect is to produce a class of feelings inimical to this object. Not only do they confine the views to the present sphere of being, and create an undue degree of interest in its transitory and unsatisfactory objects, but they invest the realities of life with a false colouring, and convert a scene of eventful probation into a theatre of artificial splendour, high-wrought incident, and ideal felicity. Can familiarity with such representations have any other effect on the youthful reader, than that of lowering his aims, misguiding his judgment, inflaming his passions, causing him to identify his chief good with the precarious and delusory honours and pleasures of a passing existence, and leading him on, through toil and weariness, to faded joys, disappointed hopes, and final wretchedness?

That these are the evils attending an inordinate indulgence in this species of gratification too many witnesses can vouch. How many hearts, once warm with wishes,

beating happily with hope, and braced by confidence to manly and honourable exertion, now lie chilled and blighted in disappointment, chagrin and disgust, by means of those romantic hopes, unearthly visions, and over-wrought sensibilities, to which novels and romances have given birth! The canker-worm preys on the root of enjoyment, robs the heart of its peace and its gladness, the spirits of their buoyancy, the eye of its light and its loveliness, the cheek of its bloom, and the whole frame of its freshness and vigour. Disappointment, incurred only by extravagant expectations, vanished hopes, which have disappeared only because they were too bright to be real, have sunk into despodency a heart, which no future success could inspire with confidence, and no meed of praise awaken into hope.

But the intimation has been given, that, under certain restrictions, some novels may be harmlessly and profitably perused. An explanation is necessary.

The imagination, injurious as are its operations under improper control, when correctly disciplined, contributes, in no inferior degree, to the improvement of character, and the advance of happiness. The virtues of the heart are favourably modified by this faculty.

A well-regulated imagination heightens benevolent feeling. That in the exercise of benevolence there is exquisite pleasure, none but those who are destitute of this virtue, will be disposed to deny. In proportion to this pleasure, desire for the cultivation of the virtue will be increased. Imagination contributes to this object. The productions of the novelist illustrate this position. The picture of distress is here finished, and the reader is informed, not only of the fact, and the cause of the misery he contemplates, but also of the sentiments and feelings of the sufferer in reference to his situation. In ordinary life we see only the naked outline, and the impression is consequently slight. But,

by the aid of imagination, we supply the incidents wanting, and furnish the scene. Suppose two individuals; the one possessing an active imagination, and the other deficient in that faculty. An object of distress presents itself to their notice. Both are benevolent, and they mutually contribute to the wants of the sufferer. The one, who is destitute of imagination, feels pleasure in having it in his power to do good and here the pleasurable feeling terminates. The other, by an easy and delightful effort of fancy, pictures to himself the probable scene of the object of his charity, entering his home of wretchedness and presenting to the raptured view of the partners of his poverty, the boon of benevolence. He will see, with fancy's eye, the smile of joy, and the tear of gratitude mingled on every face; and, while he contemplates the picture, so exquisite and touching, he will experience, in a degree to which his phlegmatic companion is utterly a stranger, "the luxury of doing good."

"I have been often inclined to think," says Mr. Professor Stewart, "that the apparent coldness and selfishness of mankind may be traced, in a great measure, to the want of imagination. In the case of misfortunes, which happen to ourselves, or to our near connexions, this power is not necessary to make us acquainted with our situation, so that we feel of necessity the corresponding emotions. But without the exercise of a lively imagination, it is impossible for a man to comprehend completely the situation of his neighbour, or to have any idea of a great part of the distress which exists in the world. If we feel, therefore, more for ourselves, than for others, the difference is to be ascribed, at least partly, to this, that in the former case, the facts, which are the foundation of our feeling, are more fully before us, than they can be in the latter."*

* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind. Vol. i. chap 7.

On the same principle the imagination subserves the interests of friendship. This faculty affords to the mind an increased susceptibility of attachment. It will be frequently employed in inventing circumstances and incidents, such as serve to exhibit the best virtues of the object beloved, and to develope, in every varied and attractive form, the admired traits of its character. Thus, amid the monotony of every-day incidents, and common-place life, where the same qualities of excellence, modified by no changing scenes, or altered circumstances, would almost cease to appear excellencies, from their very uniformity, all the attachment, which new admiration and fresh delight can elicit, is preserved in tenderness and vigour.

The desire of the mind for novelty renders the imagination eminently subservient to personal happiness. The contemplation of present objects, and reflection on those which are passed, cannot be long satisfactorily indulged. The field of

visible realities, however extensive, varied and rich, is too limited for the soul's unwearied flight and boundless curiosity. The aid of imagination, therefore, is engaged, which, with a hand as potent as ingenious, forms a new creation, on whose enchanting scenery the eye reposes with delight—scenery which soon loses its beauty indeed, but loses it only in the rival charms of a newer landscape.

> Fancy dreams
> Of sacred fountains, and Elysian groves,
> And vales of bliss: the intellectual power
> Bends from his awful throne . . . . .
> And smiles: the passions, gently soothed away,
> Sink to divine repose, and love and joy,
> Alone are waking.*

The mind not only seeks novelty, but it loves perfection. In real life there is the perpetual intervention of circumstances, which interrupt a succession of agreeable incidents; and the benevolent Author of

* Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination.

existence seems to have provided, amongst other sources of relief, the power to call off the mind from a state of real imperfection, to the ideal perfections which itself has created. The ills of life are often complicated and severe, and it is the part of wisdom, as much lawfully to avoid them, as to meet them with fortitude, when they cannot be escaped. He is at once to be envied and imitated, who has learnt to forget his present sufferings in the anticipation of supposable felicity;—who, while gazing on the lovely form of imaginary happiness, can smile away the tear which sorrow has shed; and, when real existence presents, throughout the dreary scene, no object on which hope may fix, with complacency, her regards, can rise, on imagination's wing, above the dark and troubled horizon, and dwell undisturbed amid brightness, beauty, and repose.

The individual, indeed, who is placed below the mediocrity of mental state—whose life has been exclusively occupied

in the undisturbed pursuits of sensible objects,—who has hardly known an imaginary want, because he has scarcely a *mind* to want, can experience but little of the pleasures of imagination. But, ask the unhappy exile, who has endured the dissolution of every tie of social tenderness, and is destined to long expatriation and total solitude—ask *him*, what are the blessings of imagination? He can tell how often, like a ministerial angel of mercy, it has visited his lonely retreat, chased away the gloom of his dreariness, illumined, with its radiant presence, his listless eye, conducted him back, as it were, to the scene of his dearest enjoyments, there to experience for a moment, all the raptures of a real return, and all the ecstasies of recovered possession. Ask the mariner the question, who, while an almost measureless ocean rolls between him and his native shore, still finds himself at home *in thought*, and, while winds and waves assail his fragile bark, has his heart entwined by a thousand lively and tender

thoughts, the more lively and tender from the very distance which separates, and the danger that threatens.

. . . . . Ask the faithful youth,
Why the cold urn of her, whom long he loved,
So often fills his arms; so often draws
His lonely footsteps, silent and unseen,
To pay the mournful tribute of his tears?
Oh! he will tell thee, that the wealth of worlds
Should ne'er seduce his bosom to forego
Those sacred hours, when, stealing from the noise
Of care and envy, sweet remembrance soothes,
With virtue's kindest look, his aching breast,
And turns his tears to rapture.*

Such is the relief which imagination is wont to afford to solitude and sorrow; and, next to the supreme consolations of religion, there is, perhaps, no more efficient antidote for the ills of life, than that which an active and well-regulated imagination supplies. But why not except the qualification? For surely the most animating pleasures of religion itself are deduced

* Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination.

from the power which the mind possesses, to picture its moral prospects of perfect and endless felicity. The pleasures which fancy affords are, indeed, unsubstantial and fleeting; but they are pleasures still, and they are innocent pleasures; they are like the soft and chastened lightning, which sports in the horizon of an autumnal sky, which is as beautiful as transient, and as harmless as beautiful.

So far, therefore, as works of fiction serve to cultivate the imagination, they possess considerable value. They will assist its creative powers, multiply its images, and correct and refine its conceptions. They will tend to produce that refinement of sentiment, delicacy of taste, elevation of feeling, and glow of affection, which form the polish of the heart, the finish of mental character, and the best elements of personal and social happiness.

In prescribing suitable limits for the perusal of works of this description, it is

to be remarked, that young persons cannot, with safety and advantage, be introduced to this department of literature, until they have arrived at the later stages of their education.*

The mind must be to a considerable extent cultivated, the judgment informed, the principles fixed, and the character matured, before a reader will be prepared to derive the advantages, which such productions are intended to communicate. At an earlier stage of mental culture, there cannot be properly in exercise the faculty of discrimination, which ought invariably to accompany such a pursuit. Neither

* It will be understood, that, in the above remarks, the higher order of fiction is referred to. Such books as Robinson Crusoe, and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, may with advantage be put into the hands of a child as soon as he is able to read them. The excitement and stimulus which the infant mind will derive from such productions, is harmless in itself, and beneficial in its results. See Knox's Essay "On the best Method of exciting in Boys the Symptoms of Literary Genius."

will the intellectual pleasures of this description of reading be enjoyed. If it is not enough that the plot is understood, and the incidents followed with interest; if it is necessary that the writer's descriptions and delineations should be studied, *his* sentiments tried, and his practical lessons received, no one, who is not, in a measure, qualified for the exercise of mind requisite to embrace this purpose, should be introduced into this department of literature.

The mental constitution, also, should be consulted. Some minds are naturally imaginative and romantic. Young persons of this temperament, should, with extreme caution, be suffered to read works of fiction. They ought to be limited to the chastest and soberest order of imaginative productions. They should read to *correct* rather than to *gratify* their taste, and should study, in their author's productions, the imaginations of others, only with a view to regulate their own. On the other hand, where there is obviously an opposite cast

of mind—where the mental habit is phlegmatic, or has too great a tendency to abstract thought or dull calculation, the productions of fiction may, with important advantage, be perused. "A considerable vigour of imagination," observes Mr. Foster, "seems necessary in early life, to cause a generous expansion of the passions, by giving the most lively aspect to the objects by which they ought to be interested. There are some young persons, who seem to have only the bare intellectual stamina of the human mind, without the addition of what is to give it life and sentiment. They give one an impression similar to that made by the leafless trees, which we see in winter, admirable for the distinct exhibition of their branches, and minute ramifications, so clearly defined on the sky, but destitute of all the green, soft luxury of foliage, which is requisite to make the perfect tree; and even the affections, existing in such minds, seem to have a bleak abode, something like those

bare, deserted nests, which we have often seen in such trees"*

It should be observed, moreover, that a small portion of time only, ought, in general, to be devoted to this employment. Of the books, which form the companions of our studious hours, the proportion, which volumes of this description should sustain to those of an opposite class, cannot well be too inconsiderable. They should be regarded as the *dessert* of the intellectual repast. The maxim is a good one—never allow the earlier portion of the day to be occupied in the perusal either of poetry or novels. Such relaxation, at a time when the mind is naturally best prepared for serious pursuits, and vigorous exertions, cannot be indulged in without considerable injury.

It will scarcely be expected, that in the

* See Essay "On the Application of the Epithet Romantic."—Letter 1.

course of the present remarks, there should be found a specific reference to any particular authors in this department of literature. The general observations, which have been offered, must serve for a guide in the task of selection. Popular interest, however, has been so universally drawn to the productions of a writer whose deserved fame has been equalled only by the unprecedented and astonishing number of his volumes, that there can be nothing invidious in any observations, which may be exclusively confined to these celebrated publications.

Unquestionably the author of Waverley is by far the best novel-writer. The beauty, richness, and felicity of his language, his exquisite talent at description, his intimate knowledge of human nature, his unrivalled powers of delineating character, the vast store of knowledge which he exhibits, and, on the whole, the purity of his moral sentiments, combine to render his volumes no less instructive than fascinating, and

entitle him as much to the gratitude as to the applause of his readers. After these general commendatory remarks, it is presumed a few observations, in the form of slight qualification, may, without offence, be submitted.

It is the obvious misfortune of these distinguished productions, in common, though to a less extent, with all novels, that the imperfections, which *belong* to the character portrayed, are so artfully blended with the highest excellencies, that they appear not only to form an essential part of them, but to furnish the *éclat* to the character, and to complete the effect which it produced. Let any intelligent reader, who has perused Sir Walter Scott's first production, inquire from his own consciousness, whether, in its application to this interesting work, the present observation is not correct? Waverly, the youthful and most fascinating hero of this tale, is at once thoughtless, volatile, rash, and imprudent; and yet, so singularly are these

exceptionable qualities interwoven with the most lovely dispositions and dignified virtues—so excusable do his widest aberrations appear—so spontaneously and innocently to arise out of his characteristic goodness, or out of the peculiar circumstances in which he is placed—and so happy are they in the incidents to which they lead, that to have been free from these improprieties appears impossible if desirable, and undesirable if possible. To have represented him less wild, incautious, and susceptible, would have been to render him less interesting to his readers, and apparently less happy eventually in himself. This serious evil attends many of the admirably drawn and highly instructive characters produced by this masterly hand, and it will demand from the reader considerable sagacity and caution.

On the subject of his politics, it must on all hands be admitted, Sir Walter has laid himself open to the severest animadversions. He has incessantly endeavoured

to poison the truth of history, to cast ridicule and opprobrium on men, who, with all their faults and extravagancies, were some of the noblest spirits that have ever adorned our nature, and, above all, to whitewash the tyrannic and worthless Stuarts, whose memory can escape oblivion only to receive the odium and execration of all who possess the smallest love of liberty, or hatred of oppression and arbitrary power. For so strange an obliquity in the character of this virtuous and amiable writer it is not easy to account. It certainly forms a dark spot in the sun of his glory, and exhibits an humiliating truth in connexion with human nature—how inseparable is infirmity from man; how prejudice has power to warp the finest judgments, and to sully the purity of the most amiable hearts.

With these views of the nature and tendency of novels in general,* as well as

* The writer regrets that the limits of the present

on some other accounts, the opinion is, without hesitation, expressed, that the productions of the poet rather than those of the novelist are to be recommended. Poetry appears to be the purer offspring of the imagination, at least it is the more intellectual. The object of the novelist is to interest by a series of felicitously combined incidents. On these the mind of the reader is likely to be so much fixed as to lose sight of the moral of the tale. The design of the poet, on the other hand, is to impart vividness, brilliancy, and force, to sentiment; a higher order of imagery is employed, and the gratification is more pure and intellectual. The productions of the novelist, moreover, must

chapter forbid him to enter into a projected discussion on the subject of religious novels. If, without stating his reasons, he may be allowed to advance an opinion, by no means formed without deliberation, he will say, that these productions belong to a very questionable class of reading. It is to be feared that they engage on the side of religion, feeling rather than principle, and substitute sentimental for practical piety.

be more or less dangerous from the circumstance of their embodying so constantly those incidents of human life, which, however natural and conceivable in their individuality, can, in their series, have no counterpart in the history of the reader.

If a recommendation may be allowed, we will venture the assertion, that there is no poet who has a stronger claim to attention on the part of youth, especially of the fair sex, than the amiable Cowper. Without ranking him among poets of the first order, he may be justly pronounced, in some respects, inimitable. As long as simple elegance of language, chaste imagery, manly spirit, and pure sentiment, are sufficient to give any poet a claim to general esteem, so long will the author of "The Task" continue to be read with admiration and delight; and his memory will be cherished with gratitude and honoured with praises, when more illustrious names shall have perished from the records of fame, and the laurels which grace far loftier brows shall have faded and fallen.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

What conscience dictates to be done,
Or warns me not to do;
This teach me more than hell to shun,
That more than heaven pursue.

POPE.

HUMILIATING as may be the concession, it cannot be withheld, that to convince and to persuade are essentially different, and by no means necessarily connected. The judgment may be led irresistibly to a conclusion, which the heart refuses to embrace, and the inclination perversely prescribe and pursue a course, which reason disapproves and conscience condemns. "To perceive the good and approve it, but to choose the evil," is the strange though common inconsistency of

the human mind, and it affectingly marks the sad derangement which the moral constitution has suffered.

How firm soever, therefore, may be the conviction of the correctness of the statements which in the foregoing pages have been advanced, a lamentable ignorance of human nature would be betrayed by indulging the expectation, that all to whom they are submitted will be led to a practical recognition of the conclusions to which they conduct. The utmost that rational expectation would justify is the hope that, in some instances, the candid inquirer may be seasonably directed, the wavering confirmed, the feeble fortified, and the careless and indifferent led to salutary thought and timely reflection. Under anxious solicitude for the manner in which the foregoing sentiments will be received, and for the practical effects of which they will be productive, the inducement is felt—and every candid reader will approve the attempt—to add

exhortation to argument and remonstrance to proof.

The topics discussed are not those of barren speculation; they are not merely of secular interest or of temporary importance; they identify themselves with moral character and with moral prospects; their results are related to a spiritual existence, and to an eternal destiny. To treat them, therefore, either with levity or indifference is pre-eminent folly. It is to be reckless of interests the most sacred, and of destiny the most awful; it is to trifle amid a career of probation, which not only the wise and virtuous of the human race, but the whole universe of intelligent existences, contemplate with intensity of interest; it is to be the careless inhabitant of a world, which has become a theatre for the most stupendous exhibitions which both heaven and hell have afforded. Here has the great infernal Spirit concentrated his deepest designs of malice, confederated the legions of his power, and wrought his

deadliest mischief. To sever man from his Maker, to reverse his high and happy destiny, to detach him from the honours and joys of a blissful eternity, are objects of his supreme ambition, restless solicitude, and unwearied exertions. Here, too, a yet mightier Being has employed his wondrous and merciful agency. The Son of God, an Almighty Saviour, prompted by wondrous love, has foregone the repose and felicity of a celestial world, laid aside the splendours of deified nature, assumed the humblest form of humanity, and, by a life of unexampled humiliation and suffering, toil and privation, terminated by a cruel and ignominious death, has repaired the ruins of hellish mischief, traversed its plans of universal ruin, overcome its mighty power, scattered in the track of its wide devastations the seeds of sure-springing and imperishable bliss, and given to a dark and miserable world the light of life and the joys of immortality. To pursue, therefore, a path which inclination prescribes, or to which momentary gratification

invites, careless of the inquiry, what is its nature, or whither it tends, is surely consummate infatuation as well as flagrant criminality.

With a view to the avowed object of the present remarks, the question is proposed to the votaries of fashionable amusements in general, whether no scruples as to the lawfulness of these pursuits are already experienced? Does the conviction remain entire that they are strictly innocent, and that they may, without danger, be indulged? Does judgment, in the moments of deliberate thought and candid inquiry, undoubtingly give them its suffrage? It ought not to be forgotten, that in the absence of an unhesitating opinion, that moral progress and ultimate welfare are in no way impeded or endangered by these pursuits, the obligation to avoid them is as powerful as the laws of duty can render it; and whatever may be the nature and destination of the path itself, a formidable danger is presented at its very entrance.

An attempt has not unfrequently been made, to avoid the imputation of criminality to these pleasures, by the plea, that *they* are not pursuits, which would be voluntarily selected, but, as the indispensable concomitants of fashionable life, they cannot be relinquished.

The moral obliquities of the human mind are never more conspicuous than in its attempts to offer one sin as an apology for another. This is remarkably apparent in the present instance. The excuse presents both degrading weakness and flagrant wickedness. It involves a state of pitiable and contemptible moral debasement—the voluntary surrender of privileges, which constitute the grand dignity of man, namely, those of forming his own moral judgments, and of acting in conformity to the dictates of his conscience. It is the profane bartering of a spiritual birth-right. To transfer from our own control to that of others, opinions and practices which involve a moral interest, is slavery of the

very worst description. The indolent and mean-spirited man, who, to avoid the exertion or danger of timely resistance, crouches beneath his oppressor's power, is alike unworthy of the liberty he loses, and the life which he saves. And is the miserable victim of this spiritual bondage less deserving of contempt?—He who can unresistingly see the rights, not of an earthly, but a heavenly denizenship outraged?—who can submit, not his limbs, but his conscience to fetters?—who brings a free-will offering of reason and conscience, of virtuous joys and heavenly sanctions, to the shrine of a capricious and degrading fashion? We have contemplated, with alternate feelings of compassion and disgust, of grief and execration, that horrid traffic in human blood, which still disgraces and curses mankind. Our hearts have bled, as, in imagination, we have beheld some hapless victim of violence and rapine, whose nature claims kindred with ours, and whose bosom has been blest with the same sympathies, even the warmest and

fondest, which have glowed in our own, suddenly torn from all that is sacred and dear, forced from the land of his birth, and the home of his heart, to drag out a miserable existence in degradation and toil, in sorrow and pain. This spectacle of woe, however, is faint and unimposing, when compared with the miserable condition of thousands, even in this happy land of light and of freedom. The slave is but corporeally a slave; his soul no fetters can bind, no tortures subdue. "Still in thought as free as ever," he contemns the tyrant's power, which dooms his body to bondage and toil. A few sad days of degradation and suffering will drag through their weary way, and then that body will forego its labour and pain, repose quietly in death, and slumber peacefully in the grave; while the spirit shall assert its free-born rights, take its unmanacled flight to its native skies, and return to him, who has indignantly marked its wrongs, and has vengeance in store for its guilty oppressor. But the tyranny of

fashion is not thus limited and temporary. It is not "dressed in a little brief authority;" it is tyranny of mind, of heart, and of soul. It urges on its votaries, with all the unrelenting cruelty of a task-master, in the round of wearing dissipation, palling splendour, and sickening gaiety. It goads him forward, amid satiety and disgust, compunction and self-reproach, terror and apprehension, along the gaudy path, which conducts to moral and eternal ruin.

To such the voice of friendly and affectionate admonition is addressed. Let them learn to contemn the spiritual oppressor, arouse themselves to timely exertion, and burst the bonds by which so ignobly they are bound. "Begin, be bold, and venture to be wise." Fear not "the world's dread laugh." Allow neither its example nor its persuasion, its smiles, nor its frowns to lead to practices, which God and conscience condemn. How tremendously fearful would be the final discovery, that, while enjoying the friendship of the world, and living

beneath its smiles, the approbation of the Supreme Being has been totally withheld—that he has pronounced the whole series of our conduct to be a course of rebellion against himself; that time and talents have been employed in forming and maturing a character, every feature of which presents a fearful contrast to the perfections of his own, and which has prepared us for the very reverse of his complacency and regard!

The effort, be it remembered, is not more needful than honourable. It will secure the approval of conscience, the approbation and applauses of the wise and virtuous, and the admiration even of the very persons whose ridicule and censure are apparently incurred. There is a dignity in independence, which commands the secret respect and silent applauses of the very tyrant who seeks to crush it. The coward is every where contemptible, and no where more so than in the estimation of the wretch, before whose oppressive

mandate he shrinks. How painful soever may be the sacrifices which the line of conduct recommended involves, the reward will be ample. The very consciousness of freedom is infinitely pleasurable. Of all the exhibitions of human character, moreover, the displays of moral courage are the most splendid. If there be an object on earth, which the pure spirits above, and the Great Eternal himself, contemplates with complacency and delight, it is surely that man, who, under the conviction that the sentiments which he embraces are true, adheres to them with a firmness, which no combination of circumstances can destroy, and no efforts of inferior motives relax ;—who rises superior to the most formidable opposition, and, while attacked on every side by sophistry and ridicule, remains alike in dignity and strength; like the majestic rock, which, amidst the foam and the roar of the ocean's storm, stands motionless and unheeding, and bears on its lofty summit, in spite of the warring elements by which it is as-

sailed, a steady light, to guide the anxious mariner through the darkness and dangers of his way.

It is further submitted, whether these amusements constitute the source of pure satisfaction and genuine happiness? What feelings soever may be entertained in reference to the former question, the present cannot be dismissed as unworthy of regard. Happiness is the primary object of human pursuit, and the desire of it urges our weary steps in the pilgrimage of life. To reject, therefore, the proposed consideration, involves the violation of nature's first law. Have all the scenes of gaiety and mirth, of beauty and splendour, by which the gaze has been fixed and fascinated, supplied enjoyment, either equal to the expectations, or worthy of the wishes of an intellectual and moral being? Amid the mazes of pleasure's enchantment, has not the sickening appetite often refused the enjoyment, and the fainting heart, like some fair tree, whose branches have been

mandate he shrinks. How painful soever may be the sacrifices which the line of bloom and luxury, [illegible] involves, the reward wretchedness, receiving around it [illegible]ness of light of beauty in vain, putting forth no leaf of hope, and no blossom of joy? Or if, under the immediate excitement, enjoyment is felt, has not the pleasure been succeeded by other and opposite feelings? If, at the magic touch of the master-spirit of the scene, the soul has thrilled with the ecstasies of delight, has it not been left to sink into deeper listlessness, to be corroded by multiplied cares, and pierced by more poignant regrets? The evanescent nature of such gratifications is fully adequate to produce this effect, for

> Pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow-falls in the river,
> A moment white—then melts for ever;
> Or like the borealis race,
> That flits ere you can point their place;
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
> Evanishing amid the storm.*

* Burn's Tam O'Shanter.

Observation and experience abundantly confirm the truth of the paradox, that pleasure is not happiness. Every votary of pleasure knows it. The varied forms of fascination by which he has been wooed, have successively, in their very embrace, surprised him by the concession, "happiness is not in me." The thousand images which fancy creates have not satisfied him, but have left in his soul a painful vacuity, and a distressing sense of poverty. The moral constitution of his mind precludes any other result of these pursuits. He was designed for a higher destiny, and for nobler joys. He possesses a principle, whose origin is not of earth, and whose sympathies rest not on earth; whose kindred elements are not found in worldly objects, neither in honour nor splendour, refinement nor luxury, revelry nor mirth, beauty nor taste. It seeks, with restless desire, the unseen and spiritual existences of a distant world, aspires to happiness which immortality only can give, and will know neither rest nor joy, until it shall

have heaven for its home, and sit for ever beneath the smiles of that gracious Being, who is at once the Author of its existence, and the source of its felicity.

As solid happiness, therefore, is valued; as escape from wearying toil, withering disappointment, painful compunctions, and disquieting apprehensions, are desired, "quit the gay delusive scene." Its empty pageants have already disgusted, its giddy mazes have long perplexed, its sickly joys have satiated and palled the heart, while the spiritual nature solicits release, and an introduction to kindred pleasures, to holier and happier joys. What though the syren's song has long ravished its victim, and led him so widely astray, yet may he not pause, reflect, and return?

If the wanderer his mistake discern,
Judge his own ways, and sigh for a return;
Bewildered once, must he bewail his loss
For ever and for ever? No—the cross;

There, and there only (tho' the Deist rave,
And Atheist, if earth bear so base a slave,)
There and there only is the power to save;
There no delusive hope invites despair,
No mockery meets you, no deception there;
The spells and charms, which blinded you before,
All vanish now, and fascinate no more.*

Yes, religion will secure peace, and safety, and hope. Thousands have proved it. Many a hapless voyager on life's wide ocean, who had long pursued uncertain and perilous wanderings, borne onward by the fluctuating tide of incidents, or sported with by the fickle winds of inconstant purposes; urging a mad and fearful career before the wild storm of passion, or floating, thoughtless and gay, with the current of pleasure, to the distant vortex; has by this heavenly guide, been rescued from misery and peril, taught to recover the track which his high destiny prescribed, and, under auspicious gales and celestial convoy, has pursued a prosperous course

* Cowper's Progress of Error.

to the distant land of his home, his repose and felicity.

From the blandishments of ruinous dissipation, therefore, the votaries of pleasure are invited to the genuine enjoyments of piety. Here alone will be found repose, satisfaction, and enduring pleasure. Let the sublime doctrines and virtuous precepts, which the oracles of truth inculcate, engage their attentive study and practical regard. The sentiments here exhibited will present a striking contrast to the spirit, maxims, and pursuits of the gay world. To detach the mind from the associations of the latter, and to imbue it with the spirit of the former, is unquestionably a task of no inconsiderable difficulty. Contact with sacred truths must be close and constant, that the mind may receive their complexion, and frame its habits of thought and feeling on the sacred model. The word of God must be believed; it must, moreover, be reverenced and loved. In the same proportion the influence of

worldly maxims and examples will become weakened, a taste for gay pleasures destroyed, and the bias of the mind rendered serious and devout.

Such a revolution of moral habits, on the score of present happiness even, will be found infinitely desirable. The pleasures of a religious life are indescribably exquisite. The elevated duties of piety, its dignified motives and purifying influence; the salutary restraint which it imposes on the passions, the tranquillity which it imparts to the conscience, the bright and enduring prospects which it offers to hope, the sovereign antidote which it supplies to the afflictions of life, render the inspired declaration emphatically true: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." "I appeal to you," observes the pious and intelligent Henry Kirke White, in a letter to a correspondent, "whether the grace of God is not a source of the most exquisite enjoyment. There is indeed an indescribable

pleasure in the service of God. His grace imparts such composure in the time of trouble, and such fortitude in the anticipation of it, at the same time it heightens our pleasures by making them innocent, that the Christian, regarded either as militant in this troublesome scene, or as a traveller, who is hastening by a difficult but short journey to a better country, will appear a most enviable and happy character."*

To the task of forming a religious character, a painful incompetency is not unfrequently experienced. The views and sentiments which are necessary to supply the requisite motive to exertion, are so imperfect and transient, the better feelings of the heart are so evanescent, its laudable purposes are so feeble, and its virtuous resolutions so fragile, the recol-

* An elegant volume, written by the Rev. H. F. Burder, A. M., entitled, "The Pleasures of Religion," is strongly recommended to our readers.

lection of frequent failures so dispirits and dissuades, that to lead a religious life, how desirable soever it may appear, seems altogether impossible. To such persons the question is submitted, what agency has been employed in effecting the desired object? Have any other than native powers been engaged? If not, the cause of the failure is apparent. Superior aid must be sought. Recourse must be had to that gracious Spirit, whose mysterious agency is employed on the human mind, to re-create its moral powers, and remodel its virtuous affections; to correct the bias of the mind, control its passions, fortify its weakness, refine its taste, and elevate its desires. Relying no longer on the fickle purposes and fruitless exertions of imperfect nature, engage the merciful aid of Almighty Power. It may be obtained; humble and fervent application at the footstool of the Deity will prove successful. Live in the habitual performance of this sacred duty. It will soon become easy, and in time delightful. It will be

found a timely resource in the moment of pressing temptation, of suspended purpose, of conscious weakness, or of unfortunate failure. Virtue will finally triumph, and principle become matured, consistent, and permanent.

But it is possible that the reader of these pages may not have arrived at that period in his history, to which, in common with all the lovers of pleasure, he must eventually come; when he will be rendered intimately familiar with the sacred aphorism, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." On the bright ocean of pleasure his newly-launched bark rides prosperous and gay, a stranger to the ills of its destiny, heeding no storm, and fearing no wreck. His heart, buoyant with hope, and vigorous with passion, beats true and unlanguishing to pleasure's wildest excesses, giddiest dissipations, and most exhausting raptures. Could the hope be entertained, that on the minds of such, a salutary thought might be fastened, or

even a transient impression produced, the cutting irony of the royal preacher would be suitably employed: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Your days of vanity are brief, your pleasures are "but for a season." Soon nothing will remain of all that now dazzles and delights; every thing of earth will pass into the oblivion of the grave, save the responsibility of your probationary career. And will these pursuits of pleasure conduct to a happy issue?

Is this the rugged path, the steep ascent,
That virtue points to? Can a life thus spent
Lead to the bliss she promises the wise,
Detach the soul from earth, and speed her to the skies?*

What sentiments are entertained in reference to the state of future blessedness?

* Cowper's Progress of Error.

What is the nature of that final felicity to which hope is directed? Is it a sensual paradise, where the elements of present gratification, in a state of higher modification, will be found? Renounce then the Christian's creed and adopt that of the Mahommetan. The heaven to which the New Testament directs the believer is a spiritual paradise, removed as far from the gross conceptions of sensual minds as from their aims and wishes. A passing reference merely to those descriptions of celestial happiness, which are contained in the pages of inspiration, is sufficient for the conviction, that heaven cannot be an appropriate abode for the votaries of worldly pleasure. Let the mind be abstracted for a moment from the elements of its present enjoyments—sensual gratification, beauty, gaiety, fashion, revelry and mirth, worldly honour, riches, pageantry, and applause. Survey next the essences of moral and eternal felicity—the perfections of the Divine Being, the splendour and harmony of his attributes, the consciousness of

possessing his moral likeness, and consequently fitness for his service and friendship, fuller discoveries of the wonders of his moral government, together with all the imaginable concomitants of that world of bliss and glory to which the virtuous are destined. With the inhabitants of this spiritual abode has the man of pleasure any sympathies? For a joyous existence in it is he not totally disqualified? Where then can he, with consistency, fix his future hopes? Where, in the whole realms of endless space, will he find his heaven? When the immaterial substance, which now animates the corporeal frame, dissolves its connexion with materiality, and is far and for ever removed from the sources of earthly felicity;—when forms of beauty shall no longer captivate the eye, nor sounds of melody any more ravish the ear;—when the sensitive frame shall no longer thrill with the soft sympathies of delight, nor the animal passions again renew their wonted raptures;—when the soul, a disembodied and spiritual substance,

shall have access only to kindred spirit, and be susceptible of no other emotions than those which are purely intellectual and moral, where will it find an eternity of exalted and unmingled happiness? For

> Its innate sense,
> When stript of this mortality, derives
> No colour from the fleeting things without,
> But is absorbed in sufferance, or in joy,
> Born from the knowledge of its own desert.*

What provision is made in the moral economy for a spiritual process, either at the hour of death, or in the future state, for that mighty mental revolution, which a qualification for heavenly happiness involves? Will the immortal principle, which, through the whole of life, has been conversant only with objects of sense, and which, by a lengthened series of habits, has fixed and matured a sensual character, become at the moment of dissolving its base alliance, a fit candidate for a world

* Lord Byron's Manfred.

of pure and virtuous intelligences, and be prepared with them to minister before the throne of that awful Being, "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."

These considerations, both rational and weighty, may escape the notice, and consequently fail to impress the gay and the thoughtless. In the ardent pursuit of immediate gratification, the unseen existences of another world may be unheeded or trifled with; but let it be remembered, that a period is approaching when these objects will press themselves on observation with importunity, and create an interest commensurate with their importance;—

> There comes a time, a dreary time,
> To him whose heart has flown
> O'er all the fields of youth's sweet prime,
> And made each flower its own.*

When his part in the drama of life shall have closed, and he shall be commanded

* Moore's Melodies.

to retire from the busy and brilliant stage of present being;—when some malignant disease, the unwelcome harbinger of dissolution, shall arrest his frame, and lay him on the bed of death;—when the chamber of gloomy quiet, and the silent hours of lonely watchfulness shall facilitate solemn thought and reflection;—when the gay pursuits of a thoughtless life shall no longer demand the physical and mental energies;—when the fascinations of sense shall no longer allure, nor a delusive fancy any more throw around him her visions of enchantment;—when the deadly malady shall make its unchecked advances, baffling skill and extinguishing hope;—when the lingering spirit shall be urged to "the tremendous verge" of life, and be compelled to look out on an awful eternity; then will conscience, which had so long reposed in apparently unheeding slumbers,

Start from the down on which she lately slept,
And tell of laws despised, at least not kept;
Show, with a pointing finger, but no noise,
A pale procession of past sinful joys;

All witnesses of blessings foully scorned,
And life abused, and not to be suborned.
Mark these, she says, these, summoned from afar,
Begin their march to meet thee at the bar:
There find a judge, inexorably just,
And perish there, as all presumption must.*

These pages, perchance, may meet the eyes of some on whom these terrific considerations produce not the slightest impression, because they have learnt to disbelieve them. That sacred volume, whose sanction these doctrines claim, is pronounced "a cunningly devised fable," and the names of virtue and vice, and the idea of future joys and sufferings, are denounced as the inventions of priest-craft.

If these bold and venturous sentiments are entertained as indisputable truths, an attempt to establish either the unlawfulness or danger of any description of pleasures, would be both futile and absurd. If there be no hereafter, no future state of

* Cowper's Hope.

existence, where virtue will be rewarded and vice punished; if our present being ceases when animal existence is no more, then it is wisdom's maxim:—

"Live while you live, ...
And catch the pleasures of each passing day."

But is it certain that these sacred doctrines are not true? The unbeliever dares not assert this: the highest ground which he professes to occupy is that of scepticism; his boldest assertion is, "I doubt." How then can he justify a line of conduct pursued in direct opposition to the most positive and solemn injunctions, the legitimacy of which he at farthest only *questions?* Has he forgotten, that nothing less than indisputable evidence of the claims of Scripture to divine authority being groundless, can justify that disregard to its enunciations, which he obstinately and proudly observes? He should remember, that on the very ground which he occupies, and on which he so defyingly stands, he tramples

under foot obligations scarcely less sacred and binding, than those which the firmest believer is accustomed to recognize. Admitting, even, that his opinions are honestly and conscientiously embraced, so far from being released from all obligations to a regard of scriptural injunctions, he is bound to their observance by an authority which none but a madman could either question or reject, namely, the possibility of his opinions being erroneous.* His very scepticism supposes that there are *some* evidences in favour of revelation; and in proportion to their number and weight in his mind, he is chargeable with palpable inconsistency and criminality, in acting towards these records either with irreverence or disregard. He cannot be ignorant, that the sacred volume withholds entirely the intimation, that the absence of the most cordial faith will, under any circumstances, be regarded either as justifiable or venial. It admits of no apology for any modification

* See Bishop Butler's Analogy.

of scepticism. It assumes unreservedly the fact, that the evidences of its divinity are sufficient, if not irresistible. Its imperative and uncompromising edict has gone forth, "he that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned," and in the face of all the doubts of the sceptic, cavils of the objector, and scoffs of the infidel, it points, with steadiness and sternness, to a day, when "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, and the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son."

THE END.