ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE NOVEL.

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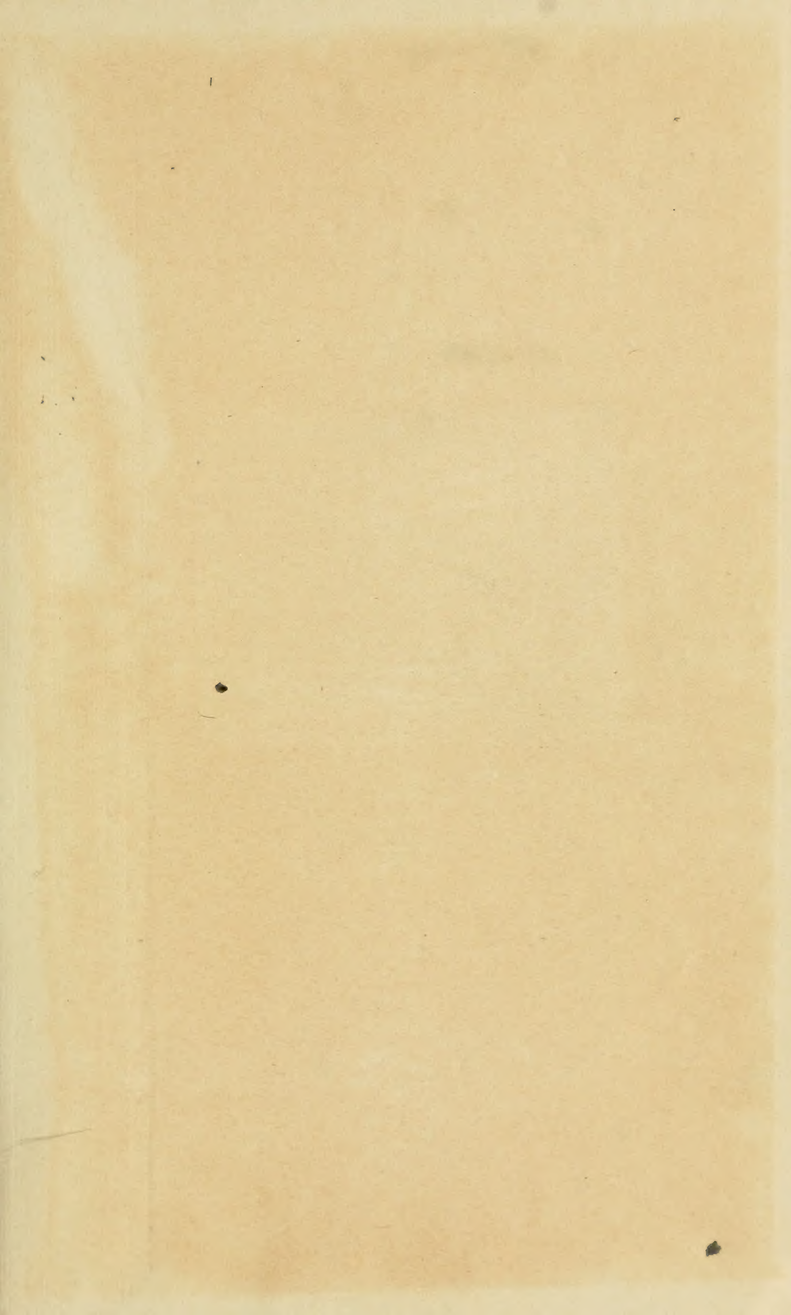

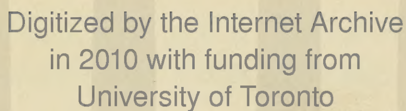
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THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE NOVEL

The Ethical and Religious Value of the Novel

BY

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Author of "Some Social and Political Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century," "The Bible from the standpoint of the Higher Criticism,' etc.

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PREFACE

The various chapters in this little book were originally given as Sunday evening discourses to my congregation in Cape Town. They were prepared with the object of showing that ethical and religious teaching concerning such grave questions as Sin, Heredity, Will, Atonement, and the spiritual destiny of man should be universal in its scope, and that it should not be confined, in its illustrations and subject-matter, to the experiences of the Jews and the early Christians, or, in other words, to Biblical literature. Ethical and religious problems face us every day and hour of our life. They may be illustrated from the best literature of every age, but especially from literature which brings us into close contact with the conditions of modern thought and life. Fundamentally,

ethical and religious problems, the relations of man to the Infinite, are much the same for every age. They differ mainly in their appeal to our differing temperaments, to our strength or weakness of will, our varying knowledge, our spiritual experience, and our courage in the realisation of our aims and ideals. The call which came to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, and to Jesus, comes also to the thoughtful modern mind, differing only in form, in circumstance, in strength and insistency.

The novelist sets himself to deal with these various problems as they manifest themselves in human life and character. Like the poet and the dramatist he is a critic and an interpreter of life. He stands between the poet and the philosopher. He tries to hold the mirror up to Nature, and the greatest novelists—Meredith, Tolstoi, Thackeray, Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot—show us life, not only as it is, but as it might be. That too,

is the aim of the preacher. But I am inclined to think that the novelist and the dramatist exercise a much wider influence than the preacher. It is no use burking the fact that the vast majority of the people, in many countries, are falling away from organised religious worship and no longer go to Church. Of those who do, only a proportion listen attentively to sermons, and of that proportion a considerable number forget all about the sermon in a few days or a few hours. Very frequently, indeed, the theme of the sermon has to do with matters which lie far away from the every-day interests of the worshipper. On the other hand, the novel, in some form or other, appeals to most thoughtful, and to many thoughtless, people. It deals with incidents, situations, feelings and circumstances, in which we have a real and lively interest. It takes hold of us, fascinates us, and often leaves a lasting impression upon the mind and feelings. In describing the clash of Will, Soul, and

Circumstance, it shows us the dread or the joyful result, and, in moving us to higher or to lower levels of life and feeling, exercises a more or less powerful spiritual influence upon us. It moves us by pity, by fear, by joy, or by sorrow, as the case may be.

The novel has also an advantage over the didacticism of the pulpit, and even over other forms of art, in that it is more universal in its appeal. It appeals more directly to our ideas and feelings than does the frequently dry literalism of the pulpit, or than music or painting do, for these require for their appreciation educated and cultivated emotions. The mind is more open to receive moral impressions from a picture of life in the concrete as we find it in the novel, than from abstract representations of beauty as we find these in music and painting. The novel is really a parable. Hence the necessity for some kind of moral selection or rejection by the novelist of the material with which he works. The great novelist seizes

by instinct, by the insight of genius, upon the strongest forces and elements in human nature—heredity, emotion, passion, will—and shows them to us as they manifest themselves in strong or weak personalities. Whether he intends it or not the effect of his work, in so far as it is good work, is distinctly ethical. Those who preach the theory of Art for Art's sake, who say that the artist must depict life as he sees it simply to please and to give enjoyment, without any thought of any ideal purpose, forget that the world of real life is always in process of being transformed by the ideal, always in process of becoming something other, and, let us hope, something better than it was and is. It is that process which the great novelist helps forward, and he helps it forward by illustrating this great principle which runs through all human life: that in so far as our life is not guided by, and subordinated to, great ideal ends, or in so far as we pursue our ends at the cost of the well-being of others, in so

far does our life become ignoble and evil in its influence, and tend towards disaster and moral ruin. Meredith, Tolstoi, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, all illustrate this great principle. Dickens and Thackeray show us the man and woman of the early Victorian era in the street, the cottage, the drawing-room, and in fashionable society, exaggerated types perhaps, types which repel and types which attract us, and insensibly our sympathies rise to the higher level. Meredith and George Eliot show us the psychological development of the self-centred man and woman—a Willoughby Patterne, a Tito Melema, a Grandcourt, or a Bulstrode—but they show us also the development of a Richard Feverel, an Evan Harrington, a Dorothea, a Romola, or a Farebrother, and again we rise by admiration and love of the higher. The great novelists preach with a purpose indeed, and their preaching is all the more effective in that the purpose is concealed. This, I think, should be the test

of every novel: Does it make us better, stronger, for having read it? Does it make us think more? Does it enlarge and deepen our sympathies? Does it make us more deeply indignant and impatient with injustice? Does it cause us to modify or suspend judgment where we have been too ready to condemn? If it does these things it serves its purpose as well as or perhaps better than the most eloquent sermon, because it has a more lasting influence.

The supreme value of the best type of novel then lies in this—that it raises us above the sordid and the common in life; it introduces us to a larger world than our own; it shows us how that larger world is viewed by a higher mind than our own. These bundles of sensation and experience which we call the "soul" or "personality" consist of vague indefinite yearnings and desires, of passions and emotions more or less undisciplined and raw. It is the function of the novelist, by the portrayal of a

multitude of experiences working on character or personality, to give definite shape and direction to these blind and almost unconscious emotional forces, to widen and deepen feeling, to link us to the larger life of humanity and of the universe, and so give a definite meaning and purpose to our life. And that is religion.

The aim of the preacher, fundamentally, is the same as that of the great novelist, the poet, and the philosopher—to give us deeper insight, and, with deeper insight, greater courage, and strength of will, and more abundant life. Why, then, is the influence of the preacher waning while the influence of the novelist is increasing? It would be both short-sighted and unjust to blame the preacher alone for the present widespread falling-off from public worship. There are many causes at work. But the preacher, and the ecclesiastical organisations which order and control the life of the preacher, must bear their share of blame. There

cannot be the least doubt that the average preacher and the average sermon are often hopelessly out of touch with the realities of life. To listen to them must frequently be a weariness both to the spirit and to the flesh. To read them is impossible. They deal, not with a Kingdom of Life and God, but with a Kingdom of dead and dying things. To remedy this state of things should be the earnest endeavour of everyone who has the cause of religion at heart, for the Church should be the most powerful spiritual influence in every country. It cultivates and strengthens the instinct of fellowship in ways the novel cannot do. True, there is an awakening going on, and there are signs that the best men in the Churches, ministers and laymen alike, are anxious to make religion a more widespread living force in individual and social life than it is at present. But there is much leeway to make up. The pulpit and the theological college must be free—free to follow Truth whithersoever it

may lead, free as the Drama, without any Lord Chamberlain in the shape of wealthy local landowner, capitalist, or tradesman to veto the utterances or the social activities of the minister. The training of every minister should include a course of study in ethics, economics, politics, literature, and philosophy, especially in their relation to modern developments.

Not only this. There must be a considerable alteration in the conditions of the minister's life and work. Let the reader consider for a moment the many calls which are made upon a minister's time. In addition to attending to the spiritual and ceremonial needs of his flock—marriages, baptisms, funerals, visitation of the sick, etc. —he has the oversight of all the various institutions in connection with his Church— the Sunday School, Literary Society, Young People's Guild or Class, League of Helpers, Temperance Society, etc. He is also expected to represent his congregation at all

civic functions. If he takes an interest in social politics, as he ought to do, he has to sit on various educational, temperance, and charity committees. He is expected to lecture occasionally for neighbouring Churches and societies, and his time, at any hour of the day, is naturally at the disposal of any member of his congregation who is suffering any particular hardship through illness, poverty, misfortune, unemployment, or the like. In addition to all this, much of which requires considerable time for preparation, he is expected to keep abreast of modern thought and literature, and to prepare two sermons a week! Is it any wonder that instead of taking up the great masters of literature, or looking up the necessary material for dealing with some ethical or social problem in which his hearers are interested, he turns to his commentary and hastily prepares an out-of-date sermon on the exploits of Samson or the prophecies of the Book of Daniel—things which have as much

to do with the struggles, cares, and anxieties of our modern life as have the legends of the Hindoos or the folk-lore of Iceland. The multifarious work of a town minister in charge of an institutional Church is a hindrance to good and thoughtful preaching, if indeed it is not rapidly becoming a physical impossibility. In addition, the life of the minister is made a burden by financial worries, for in thousands of cases his salary is lower than that of the skilled artisan. I shall be told that the Master chose a life of poverty and had not where to lay his head. True, but on the other hand, it must be remembered that the Master had no family to bring up, and that the conditions of modern life are very different from those of pastoral and hospitable Palestine of eighteen hundred years ago. Most ministers are prepared to suffer hardship at call, but not to suffer hardship perpetually, or to live under conditions of worry, anxiety, and nervous strain which make life a burden, and which

deprive them of the time and capacity for doing their best work. I shall be told that mortality statistics show the clergy to be a long-lived class. That may be true of the leisured country clergy, but I doubt whether it is true of the town clergy. And even if it be, it is not length of life but quality of life that matters. I should like to know the proportion of town ministers who are incapacitated at sixty or earlier, the brain past work and the body-machine slowly running itself out automatically—a condition worse than death.

But from the point of view of religion the spiritual and intellectual freedom of the minister is the most urgent question of the hour. The college and the pulpit must be free, for behind freedom lies the greater thing—Sincerity. To square modern thought with ancient creeds has become a thing impossible for many. I look forward to a time, though it will certainly not be yet, when the salaries of ministers will be paid by an

interdenominational Board, which will rise above all local narrowness, ignorance, bigotry, and tyranny, and which would thus make the position of every duly-accredited minister secure so long as he could retain the support of a decent-sized contributory congregation. Such a Board would leave each denomination, and indeed each congregation, if need be, to formulate its own articles of faith, and frame its own ceremonial and order of worship, recognising that the life of the Spirit is of greater importance than the intellectual interpretation and formulation of its relation to the Infinite, seeing that this interpretation, at best, can embrace but a microscopic fraction of the whole. After all, the intellectual interpretation of things always comes lagging behind the spiritual experience of them, to confirm the "ventures" of faith and experiment, and such interpretations should always be held subject to revision.

That the reader may not imagine that

these remarks are animated by any personal motive let me say that the members of my own congregation are tolerant, and more than tolerant of my views, and that I am indebted to them in more ways than I can say for their kindly considerateness.

In the following chapters I have not confined myself in every case to the greatest novels. Still, those that I have dealt with have won a recognised place for themselves in the world of imaginative literature. I selected those which seemed to me to lend themselves most usefully to the illustration of the spiritual struggles of men, or to the emphasising of certain important aspects of moral and religious thought and life.

R. B.

CAPE TOWN.

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THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE NOVEL

INTRODUCTORY

Literature and Religion

From the time when the art of writing was invented, the thoughts and the doings of the wise, the good, and the brave among men have been embodied in literature. Nay, before the art of writing was invented, we may be sure that the thoughts of the wise and the deeds of the brave were stored up in the memory of men and women, and passed on, often to children at their mother's knee, from generation to generation, afterwards taking form in those old sagas, myths, and legends which form no inconsiderable part of literature to-day. As civilisation

advanced however, life, and therefore literature, became more refined, more subtle, more complex, dividing itself as it were into great areas or departments of thought and activity—industry, art, science, philosophy, religion, war. The priest, the prophet, the poet, the historian, the artist, the man of science, arose to point the way which Humanity must follow if it would attain to higher and nobler life. Literature, along with life, took on this infinite enlargement, until now it embraces the whole world of past and present thought, life, and deed, in so far as these are worthy to endure in the mind of man. Such parts of this literature of the past as has dealt with man's religious hopes, aspirations, and strivings, has been called "sacred" literature, but, in reality, all literature is sacred in so far as it ministers to man's highest hopes and yearnings, and helps him to do or to endure, or gives him quietness, strength, steadfastness, and purpose with which to meet the vicissitudes of

life. Hence, as Carlyle so finely says: "Literature, so far as it is Literature, is an 'apocalypse of Nature,' a continuous revelation of the God-like in the Terrestrial and Common. The God-like does even, in very truth, endure there; is brought out, now in this dialect, now in that, with various degrees of clearness. The dark stormful indignation of a Byron, so wayward and perverse, may have touches of it; nay, the withered mockeries of a French sceptic—his mockery of the False, a love and worship of the True. How much more the sphere-harmony of a Shakespeare, of a Goethe; the cathedral music of a Milton! . . . What built St. Paul's Cathedral? Look at the heart of the matter, it was that divine Hebrew Book—the word partly of the man Moses, an outlaw tending his Midianitish herds, four thousand years ago, in the wildernesses of Sinai! . . . The noble sentiment which a gifted soul has clothed for us in melodious words, which brings melody into our hearts,

is not this essentially, if we will understand it, of the nature of worship? There are many, in all countries, who in this confused time, have no other method of worship. He who, in any way, shows us better than we knew before that a lily of the fields is beautiful, does he not show it us as an effluence of the Fountain all Beauty; as the handwriting, made visible there, of the great Maker of the Universe? He has sung for us, made us sing with him, a little verse of a sacred Psalm. Essentially so. How much more he who sings, who says, or in any way brings home to our heart the noble doings, feelings, darings and endurances of a brother man! He has verily touched our hearts as with a live coal *from the altar*. Perhaps there is no worship more authentic."

There are three great mysteries around which the thoughts of men, and therefore the great literature of the world, have perpetually surged. First, the mystery of the relation of man to the Invisible and the

Infinite, that Infinite Spirit from which he emerges, to which he ever "draws again home." Second, the mystery of sin and evil, branching out into the connected mysteries of Fate and Heredity—the battle of the individual soul with circumstance and destiny. Third, the mystery of the after-life and the Beyond, the Spirit-realm, that bourne from which, it is said, no traveller returns. The Bible, and indeed all the great Scriptures and religions of the world deal especially with these great mysteries, but, as a matter of fact, nearly all great literature, and certainly all great drama and poetry, is concerned with some phase or aspect of one or other of these mysteries.

Let us take an illustration of the first from one of the old Sagas of the world—that literature which seems to have been built up, no one knows how or by whom, out of the old folk-tales and legends which sprang out of the fresh morning air of the world when life was rude in its simplicity, individuality and

character colossal in their proportions, and incident direct, dramatic, and thrilling, to a degree that stirs the blood and thrills the nerves—an age when the childish mind of man was struggling towards the light. Carlyle, with something of the Norseman in him, tells how the great Norse giant Thor, with one or two companions, set out on an expedition to Utgard, the central seat of Jötunland. "They wandered over plains, wild uncultivated places, among stones and trees. At nightfall they noticed a house; and as the door, which indeed formed one whole side of the house, was open, they entered. It was a simple habitation, one large hall, altogether empty. They stayed there. Suddenly in the dead of night loud noises as of thunder alarmed them. Thor grasped his hammer; stood in the door prepared to fight." But their alarms were groundless, "for lo! it turned out that the noise had been only the *snoring* of a certain enormous but peaceable giant, the Giant Skrymir, who lay peaceably

sleeping near by." Thor, however, did not like Skrymir, had his suspicions about him though it was the first time he had seen him, so "he determined to put an end to him as he slept. Raising his hammer, he struck down into the Giant's face a right thunderbolt blow, of force to rend rocks. The Giant merely awoke; rubbed his cheek, and said, Did a leaf fall? Again Thor struck, so soon as Skrymir again slept; a better blow than before; but the Giant only murmured, Was that a grain of sand? Thor's third stroke was with both his hands, and seemed to dint deep into Skrymir's visage; but he merely checked his snore, and remarked, There must be sparrows roosting in this tree, I think; what is that they have dropt? At daybreak Thor and his companions journeyed on and Skrymir went with them, but at the gate of Utgard, Skrymir went his ways. Thor and his companions were admitted; invited to take share in the games going on. To Thor, they handed a drinking-horn; it

was a common feat, they told him, to drink this dry at one draught. Long and fiercely, three times over, Thor drank; but made hardly any impression. He was a weak child, they told him: could he lift that cat he saw there? Small as the feat seemed, Thor with his whole godlike strength could not; he bent up the creature's back, could not raise its feet off the ground, could at the utmost raise one foot. Why, you are no man, said the Utgard people; there is an Old Woman that will wrestle with you! Thor, heartily ashamed, seized this haggard old woman; but could not throw her. And now, on their quitting Utgard, the chief Jötun, escorting them politely a little way, said to Thor: 'You are beaten then; yet be not so much ashamed; there was deception of Appearance in it. That Horn you tried to drink was the *Sea;* you did make it ebb; but who could drink that, the bottomless! The cat you would have lifted, why, that is the *Midgard-snake,* the Great World-

serpent, which, tail in mouth, guides and keeps up the whole created world; had you torn that up the world must have rushed to ruin. As for the Old Woman, she was *Time*, Old Age, Duration: with her what can wrestle? No man nor no god with her; gods or men, she prevails over all! And then those three strokes you struck,—look at these *three valleys*; your three strokes made these!' Thor looked at his attendant Jötun: it was Skrymir; it was the old chaotic rocky *Earth* in person. But Skrymir vanished; Utgard with its sky-high gates, when Thor grasped his hammer to smite them, had gone to air; only the Giant's voice was heard mocking: 'Better come no more to Jötunheim!'"

What is this old legend from the childhood of mankind but what all the scriptures, poets, and prophets of the world have taught us—that this world of Earth and Nature is but a show, an appearance, a phenomenon lasting for each one of us but sixty or seventy years, a moment in the vast abyss

of Eternity, and that behind it all there is something real, something Divine, to which we have to render our account. All great literature is instinct with that note, from the Bible and the Eastern Scriptures down to Shakespeare and Tennyson. It was our forefathers' simple reading of the great mystery of Life and the Universe. And because it was true, and still contains a truth, it has lived. It meets us everywhere—at birth, at death, in hymn and psalm, in scripture and philosophy. "The whole world before Thee is as a little grain of the balance." "The Eternal turneth to man and sayeth, Return, ye children of men. Thou carriest them away as with a flood ; their life is as a dream ; they are like grass which groweth up in the morning, in the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth." "Man that is born of woman is of few days and is full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down ; he fleeth also as a shadow and

continueth not." "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." "Lo, these are but the skirts of His ways, and how little a portion do we know of Him!" The Hindoo Scriptures, much of the best philosophy, Shakespeare and our modern poets—all sound the same note :

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of."

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time ;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

"But vain the tears for darken'd years,
As laughter over wine,
And vain the laughter as the tears,
O brother, mine or thine.

For all that laugh, and all that weep,
And all that breathe are one
Slight ripple on the boundless deep
That moves, and all is gone."

It is great literature, and literature is a reflection of Life.

But, as though to correct the balance, Life and Literature have another note—a note, too, which comes strongly out of those old Norse and Greek legends—the note that man, too, has something divine in him, that, amid this world of appearances, he is here to struggle, to endure, to do. It is the note of courage, valour, bravery, the indispensable and everlasting duty to be brave and to quit ourselves like men—against what? against evil. Though our efforts are but as a ripple on the boundless deep, or, like the thunder-strokes of Thor, leave but the faintest dint on the world's surface, yet, they make our *Self*.

"Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are."

Our deeds build up our Selves and lead us to the heavenly Hall of Odin, or into the base and slavish realms of Hela, the death-goddess. Here we are brought to the second great mystery around which the great literature of the world surges—the mystery of Sin and Evil. It is with that mystery that these discourses will be mainly concerned. The Bible, as you know, is full of it—from Moses and the prophets to Jesus and Paul, it is one long philippic against sin and evil. Yet how variously it is dealt with! Note the attitude of Jesus towards the sinner as distinct from the sin. Everytime I think of His attitude I am filled with wonder. There is only one kind of sinner with whom He becomes wroth, that is, the hypocrite. With all others He is patience, gentleness, love itself. The most hardened, the most abandoned, He takes by the hand, makes friends with them. He will forgive unto seventy times seven. It is as though He had plumbed, by instinct, our modern theory of

heredity, and said: "Yes, these children of the Spirit are in the grip of spiritual forces which we cannot measure. Let us give to them our patience, our pity, our love, and ask ourselves whether we, without their frightful moral ailments, are as decent, good, and brave as we might be."

As a matter of fact, even to-day, we have not yet solved this problem of sin. We have not even carefully defined it. I am inclined to think that the far greater part of what we call sin, in the world, is not so much deliberate and wilful wickedness, but rather, unconscious spiritual darkness. The best definition that I have seen is, that "sin is selfishness." Sin is selfishness, but not always conscious selfishness. We wrap ourselves around, or rather are wrapped around, by blood, temperament, and heredity, with prejudices, antipathies, tastes, tempers, ideals, which are more impenetrable than thickest granite, and within these darksome caves we live our self-life, sometimes even resenting the entry of a

few gleams of light, until, one day, our cavern walls are shattered by some dread calamity and we cry out in our contrition and despair: "Oh, that we had known!" It is here that great literature helps us. Œdipus, Medea, Orestes, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear—these are types. It is here, too, that the modern drama and novel help us—*if they are really great*; for there is far too much novel-reading of a superficial and sensational kind. But a really great drama or novel, which truly holds the mirror up to our human nature, shows us some struggling life or personality in the grip of Destiny or of great spiritual forces, and coming out of the struggle nobly or basely as the case may be. We shall see this illustrated in this series of novels with which I intend to deal. We shall see illustrated also, the great spiritual verities—retribution, sacrifice, forgiveness, reconciliation, atonement. How foolish to suppose that these things are bound up only with some particular form of religion or some particular class of religious literature!

They meet us and challenge us every day of our life.

I know, indeed, that literature cannot do everything for us. Something within ourselves is needed, and the benefit we derive from great literature will depend upon the inner spirit we bring to its interpretation. After all, experience is the greatest teacher. But literature may help, or Bibles, dramas, poems, romances, histories, would never have been written. I should like to see the minds of the children in all our schools gradually brought into contact with the great literature of the world, adapted to their simple and slowly widening intelligence and consciousness. There is so much that is really noble and brave in the story of mankind to which the minds of the children naturally leap and cling. The Greek and Roman myths and legends; the old Norse Sagas; the stories of the Holy Grail; of Faust; of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table; of Parsifal, Tristram and Isolde, Brunhilde,

Roland, Tannhauser, Lohengrin, Beowolf, Robin Hood, and all the wealth of historical and dramatic romance and story—how much there is here to which the mind of the child would leap with natural and noble instinct towards the right and the true; and, spread systematically over nine years of school life, how much it might learn of these!

Of the literature of Science, and Poetry, and Art, I have not space to write. At its best it is one with the great religious literature of the world. What indeed are the trumpet-notes of Shelley but a reverberation of the clarion-tones of Isaiah ringing down the ages from two thousand five hundred years ago! What are the divine tenderness, and pity, and compassion of Wordsworth, and Dickens, and Thackeray, but a manifestation of the Spirit which moved Jesus and John! What are the despondency of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough, and the pessimism of Thomas Hardy and James Thomson but a reflection of the despondency

of Ecclesiastes and the agnosticism of Job! It is these spiritual thought-forces which are really the moving, dominating, vitalising forces in our life, and if we cannot discern these forces in modern literature we read to very little purpose, for, of all forms of Art, it is in literature that life beats in fullest measure.

Literature then being so largely the embodiment of religious ideas, will, rightly studied, give us a vision of the great and essential truths of life. And such truths, taken into our minds and hearts will, as Mr. Stopford Brooke says, " set us into the keenest activity in the world for the bettering of the world; making every work full of a spiritual and a social passion, weighty and dignified by spiritual and social thought. They will free us from every shred of exclusiveness, so that not one of the doctrines and rites of religion shall shut out any man whatever from union with God, because these essential truths of life must be as

universal as God himself, and their application to men as universal." Such a view of life and religion, growing out of a study of the master-minds of all ages, would touch our common life at a hundred points, because it at once informs, exalts, and ennobles life, and calls upon each one of us to help in the work of further exalting and ennobling it. It was the view of all our great nineteenth-century teachers—Shelley, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Emerson, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Ruskin, Dickens and Thackeray, Meredith, George Eliot, William Morris; nay, with varying phase and mood, it is the view of nearly all the great masters of human thought. These stand on the mountain tops, beckoning us poorer mortals in the valleys towards the Promised Land of the Spirit. And only when we enter into the treasuries of their thought, when we are lifted, even in aspiration, to the level of their spirit, when the beauty of their ideals shall enter into our hearts and minds, and,

germinating and fructifying there, shall realise a new ethic and a new life, only then will the great teachers and prophets of the world enter into their full spiritual inheritance, and their sacred words will create ever new conceptions of thought and beauty which will mould our growing life into harmony with the Divine Ideal.

OF THE NOVEL

I.—George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and the Supreme Moral Law.

It has been said that each one of George Eliot's novels might have as a frontispiece the figure of Justice holding a pair of scales and a sword. That is true. In all George Eliot's novels we see or feel the slow, sure workings of an invisible spiritual law in and with which our lives are bound up. There is no other writer of the Victorian age, except, perhaps, George Meredith, who depicts with so masterly a hand the deeper forces, motives, and instincts which rule our human life and destiny. She deals not merely with men and women as distinct individualities; she deals also with that nameless something by which our life is

ruled, moved, uplifted, or depressed, and which we call by the various names "soul," "spirit," "character," "personality," as it bears itself in the conflict with earthly circumstance and destiny. It is not without significance, that, although her general intellectual attitude may be termed purely agnostic, she created some of the most beautifully spiritual natures to be met with in the range of modern fiction. In all her work there is a deep vein of what, for want of a better word, I may term spirituality; and in such creations as Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* she conveys a lesson which is much needed by many of our modern teachers, both orthodox and heterodox—the lesson, namely, that our moral life cannot be shut up to a spick and span theory of the universe, either negative or positive. These spiritual forces which rule our lives are part of the constitution of the universe. They cannot be ignored or explained away. They are facts, or factors, which we have to

reckon with. They clothe themselves in various forms and are dignified or otherwise by various names—"The Eternal, not ourselves," "The Unknowable," "The Absolute," the "Moral Law," "Spirit," "God," —all being mere names for the ever-varying manifestation of the wondrous Power which lies hidden, in its reality, from our vision. It is this reality which, in its higher aspects, George Eliot strives to illustrate by the delineation of character, and the development of those moral and spiritual forces which move the human soul in its struggle with itself and Destiny. Theology has its own way of approaching these mysteries, and it uses a different kind of language from that of the novelist, yet I think we shall find that both theologians and novelists deal with experiences and spiritual forces which, at bottom, are very much the same.

The story of *Adam Bede* is a very simple one, probably known to most of my readers. It is not so much in the dramatic power of

the story as in the slow evolution and development, of moral personality, that George Eliot shows her peculiar genius—a genius which ranks her far above any other female writer of the nineteenth century. For the benefit of those who have not read the book let me briefly give its main outlines, in so far as they are necessary to my purpose.

Adam Bede is a village carpenter in the Midlands of England—honest, straightforward, plain-speaking, robust, though somewhat "peppery" in character. He is in love with Hetty Sorrel—Hetty, the village beauty, somewhat vain and shallow, perhaps, and yet with the makings of a good woman in her. But Arthur Donnithorne, the Squire's son, just home from college, is struck by Hetty's beauty too. Arthur is by no means a bad fellow, nay, he is a very good fellow, kind, generous, impetuous, warm-blooded. He prides himself that he can never do anything mean, dastardly, or cruel. If he has any faults they are the faults of

impetuosity and youth. "No," he says to himself, "I am a devil of a fellow for getting myself into a hobble, but I always take care the load shall fall on my own shoulders." Unhappily, as George Eliot says, "there is no inherent poetical justice in hobbles, and they will sometimes obstinately refuse to inflict their worst consequences on the prime offender, in spite of his loudly-expressed wish." How often do we cry out "Oh, that the result of our misdoings could fall only upon ourselves!" Arthur, enchanted by Hetty's beauty, makes love to her. He is not *in* love with her, but *makes* love to her. He means nothing by it. It is only the fault of impetuous youth. Hetty, her head turned by the thought of having the young Squire as her lover, meets him frequently, at first by accident, then by appointment, until her heart is entirely lost to him and she almost forgets the existence of Adam. In this state of affairs Adam comes upon them together in the wood. The truth

is out, and Adam challenges Arthur to fight. Provoked by Adam's scathing language Arthur fights, but is soon laid senseless on the sward, and Adam looks at his fallen foe only to realise what sickening futility fighting and violence are in such a case. "What was the good of it?" he now asks himself. "What had he done by fighting? Only satisfied his own passion, only wreaked his own vengeance. He had not rescued Hetty, not changed the past—there it was just as it had been, and he sickened at the vanity of his own rage."

Still, the quarrel had one good effect—it brought Arthur to his senses. Under the moral compulsion of Adam's entreaties he agreed to write to Hetty, breaking off all connection with her, at the same time promising to be her friend and asking her pardon for any sorrow his action caused her. Marriage, of course, he said, was impossible between them. This letter was like a stab to Hetty. All her dreams of the life of a fine

lady, all her castles in the air, vanished at a single stroke. Shortly afterwards, however, she gave way to Adam's pleadings and became betrothed to him. But, alas! ere long she found that she could be honourably betrothed to none but Arthur. Driven to despair and almost to suicide by the terrible consciousness of public shame, she felt that she must see Arthur again. He had left home, glad to get away, to take up his duties as Captain in the Loamshire militia. He was at Windsor, scores of miles away, but Hetty felt that she must perform the journey. She travelled, partly by coach and cart, partly on foot, to Windsor, only to find when she arrived there, worn out, that the Loamshire militia had been transferred to Ireland! Hetty faints at the news, and a kindly innkeeper and his wife take charge of her. When consciousness and strength return she finds that she must make her way back as best she can to her home in Hayslope. There are few more impressive

chapters in modern fiction than those two or three chapters: "The Journey in Hope," "The Journey in Despair," the prison chapter, describing Hetty's hopeless condition, her sorrow, her misery, her attempts at suicide, the desertion of her child, which she leaves half-buried with leaves in the wood, and the continual return of the mother in anguish to the spot. "Poor wandering Hetty," says George Eliot, "with the rounded childish face, and the hard, unloving despairing soul looking out of it—with the narrow heart and narrow thoughts, no room in them for any sorrows but her own, and tasting that sorrow with the more intense bitterness! My heart bleeds for her as I see her toiling along on her weary feet, or seated in a cart, with her eyes fixed vacantly on the road before her, never thinking or caring whither it tends, till hunger comes and makes her desire that a village may be near. What will be the end?—the end of her objectless wandering, apart from all love, caring for

human beings only through her pride, clinging to life only as the hunted wounded brute clings to it? God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery!"

But what has become of the magnanimous, gentlemanly Arthur all this while? He is returning home from Ireland full of glad anticipations of the future. The old Squire, his grandfather, has died, and he is coming home to inherit the estate. The future is rosy before him. Generous, large-hearted, he will be a true esquire to the villagers and farmers on his estate, he will befriend Adam and Hetty, increase the vicar's salary, and put life into all the village institutions. A new vista of life opens out before him in which he is the centre figure bestowing happiness and prosperity on all around. And lo! the first letter that he opens on reaching his old home is that letter of the vicar, which has been waiting for him some days, concluding with the simple but scorching words:

"Hetty Sorrel is in prison, and will be tried on Friday for the crime of child-murder." It is the impeachment of Nathan to the great King of Israel: "Thou art the Man."

Arthur, half-mad with the violent emotions which this letter arouses, immediately saddles a horse, and, like a hunted man, gallops off to Stoniton, to the jail there. Let the reader take up again the ensuing chapter where Hetty confesses her crime to Dinah Morris, the Methodist preacher. Next morning, as the fatal prison cart, containing the doomed Hetty and Dinah, proceeds slowly to the gallows amid the vast multitude which, out of a morbid curiosity or a love of sensation, usually attended such scenes, a great cry is heard, and a horse, hot and foaming from desperate spurring, and its rider's eyes glazed as by madness, gallops on the scene. The rider holds something in his hand as though it were a signal—it is Arthur Donnithorne, "carrying in his hand a hard-won release from death."

"Release from death—" and yet to something worse than death, for reprieve in those half-barbarous days meant simply life-long imprisonment. And what of Arthur—the magnanimous, impetuous, gentlemanly Arthur, who, but a few months before had prided himself that he would never do anything mean or low, and that if he did get into a hobble he "always took care that the load should fall on his own shoulders?" As the Prodigal only "came to himself," his better self, when he was fain to eat of the husks which were thrown to the swine, so Arthur only "came to himself," his better self, when he saw that his careless, selfish gratification of light inclinations had brought a fellow-creature, a young girl who had trusted him, near to death, and to life-long imprisonment and ruin. No, it is not true that the results of our words and deeds fall only on our own shoulders. "We are members one of another." "No man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself." The Supreme

Moral Law, or one aspect of it, is this, that every thought we think and every deed we do affects for good or ill, not only our own life—it affects, through ourselves, through our radiating personality, innumerable other lives; nay, it affects that invisible spiritual ocean of Life in which we live and move and have our being, tainting or purifying the atmosphere as the case may be. As George Eliot puts it: "Mens' lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe; evil spreads as necessarily as disease." That is why, through whatever temporary moral decline, through blindness, through passion, through remorse, through repentance, through contrition, through forgiveness, we have to find our way to that reconciliation, that at-one-ment with the Divine Law, in which *only* we can find rest and peace. And we can do this with least pain to ourselves and others only by cultivating a wide and deep spiritual imagination which will teach us to put ourselves in others'

places. To do unto others as we would have others do unto us were we in their place means that—it is only another way of expressing the Supreme Moral Law. But before we can carry out that rule we must have the spiritual imagination which will enable us to put ourselves in the place of another, with all the deficiencies, the disadvantages, the shortcomings which that place may imply. Do you think Arthur Donnithorne would have treated Hetty Sorrel as lightly as he did had he thought of her as a dear companion, or the sister of a dear friend? No. We must get, I say, the spiritual imagination which will teach us to look beyond the personal to the impersonal, beyond the narrow circle of petty personal interests, desires, and pleasures, to that invisible sovereign rule of right to which all our personal longings and desires should be subordinate. To keep this sovereign rule in mind, to distinguish it from mere accidental cravings and desires which feed only the

lower part of our nature, to recognise that there is something within us which is indissolubly bound up with the observance of that rule, and that this something, our true nature, must have opportunity for development and realisation, and must not be hindered or thwarted in its growth by the selfishness of others—that, surely, is the Supreme Law of Life.

And forgiveness? Yes, Adam forgave Arthur, and doubtless Hetty forgave him too. He was repentant enough. He was kind and generous to Adam, kind and generous to Hetty's people, and he himself left his old home and went into voluntary exile because of the misery and sadness he had wrought. But let us never forget that forgiveness, human and divine, though necessary to our peace and spiritual progress, cannot wipe out the past. As Arthur himself says in taking farewell of Adam: "You told me the truth when you said to me once —'There's a sort of wrong that can never

be made up for.'" What's done is done. Nothing that Arthur could do could bring back Hetty's innocence. Nothing that Hetty could do, no contrition, no repentance, could bring back the life of her child. It is this awful irrevocability of Fate, this "terrible coercion in our deeds," this mystery surrounding the apparently undue apportionment of moral guilt and retribution, which should make us all the more sensitive to the needs and claims of others, and even more sensitive still to that invisible something—the Law of Right—the Will of God—which perpetually claims our allegiance. Sometimes, indeed, where desires and ideals are low, we have to wound; but let us take care that we wound and suffer silently ourselves, rather than increase the centres of moral evil and passion in the world. George Eliot brings this out in many ways. She brings it out in the Methodist, Dinah Morris, when she makes Dinah say: "The true Cross of the Redeemer was

the sin and sorrow of this world—*that* was what lay heavy on his heart—and that is the Cross we shall share with him, that is the cup we must drink of with him, if we would have any part in that Divine Love which is one with his sorrow." And she brings it out in the momentarily Agnostic Romola when she cries out in strength born of despair: "If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the Cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes they shall seek the forsaken." It is another aspect of the Supreme Moral Law which exercises a spiritual compulsion upon us and binds us together in an atoning brotherhood, the bonds of which we see now only "as through a glass, darkly," but which, some time, we shall see and feel as clearly as the day.

This then is the special value of books like *Adam Bede*, and indeed, of all George

Eliot's works—we not only *feel* better, we *think* better, we see more clearly, for having read them. We see the naked development of the life of the soul, and the keenness of our perception and the accuracy of our thought thereby helps the purification of our feelings and the guidance of our moral life. That is, we are helped to see more clearly the great truth that there is a reign of Law in the moral as well as in the physical world, and that this Law can never be broken with impunity. Where there seems to be *no* punishment, where the sinner *seems* to escape, nothing can prevent his swift degeneracy towards moral and spiritual death unless he turn to the better way. "As a man soweth so shall he also reap"—"Retribution waits upon injustice"—"He that loveth his life shall lose it." The abnegation of the lower self, as she herself put it, is a necessity of the soul, "to which it must again and again return, that its poetry or religion—which is the same thing—may be

a real, ever-flowing river, fresh from the windows of heaven and the fountains of the great deep."

And lastly, the perception of this Law brings with it a deepening sense of the sacredness of our human relationships and human responsibilities. For if we are the heritors of the ages, we, in our turn, bequeath our heritage to children of the after-time. Our lives make a moral tradition for our individual selves, as the life of mankind at large makes a moral tradition for the race. "The growing good of the world," she says in *Middlemarch*, "is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." And so, in George Eliot's view, life, by its very limitations, becomes transmuted into something sacred and holy. Purified by its experience, and transformed by its longings and aspirations, it is slowly

but surely educated into deeper conceptions of what life really means. And so,

> "Presentiment of better things on earth
> Sweeps in with every force that stirs our souls,"

and our vision widens, and our thought mounts to those "plains of Heaven" towards which all our great prophets and teachers seek to guide us.

II.—Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and the Law of Retribution.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is admitted by all competent critics to be a work of strange and peculiar genius. It deals with a subject which is common to both sacred and so-called profane literature; but it deals with it in such a way that the language of the theologian seems cold and unreal beside the remorseless analysis of feeling, motive, and character which is characteristic of all Hawthorne's works. Both his subjects and his language—and no man knew better than he how to throw the glamour and weirdness of suitable language over his subject-matter—are what is called eerie. He has a phrase which he often

uses—"the moonlight of romance"—which well expresses his peculiar gifts. This "moonlight of romance" is thrown over all his writings. Sometimes it is warm, full, rich, mellow, like the floods of light which a full harvest moon pours over a beautiful landscape rich in fruit, herbage, and flowers; sometimes it is cold, still, ghostly, deathlike, like a winter moon which lights up bare trees, and icy peaks, and a frost-bitten earth. His very words bear with them an influence as of sable, ghostly, trailing garments sweeping along through the deserted chambers of the dead. His subject-matter is also of the same kind. It is eerie. It deals with the ghostly subject of heredity—with those invisible influences which lay their unseen hands upon us—upon our spirit, our temperament, our moods, our instincts, our desires, our passions—and which make silent and secret war upon our wills, creating within us those spiritual conflicts and struggles which lead us on to our eternal destiny. It deals also with those

purifying, liberating influences—retribution, remorse, contrition, repentance, confession—which lead, let us hope, to the pure fresh uplands of spiritual life.

The Scarlet Letter bears, on every page, the subtle influence of this atmosphere of the "moonlight of romance." It takes us back to the old Puritan times of New England, and shows us what life meant to our grim Puritan forefathers. The chief characters in the story are Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester Prynne is the daughter of an English family, the child of a revered father and a loving mother, whose lives have been brought to poverty and want by a series of misfortunes. At a time when they know not where to turn for help, an old scholar and physician, deformed in body, but of great wealth as well as great learning, offers Hester a share in his home and his wealth—offers, that is, to take her as his wife and so repair the family misfortunes. The temptation is too great for the parents, and

Hester, in the full bloom of early womanhood, is virtually forced to enter the prison-house of a loveless marriage. She protested to the old scholar that she had no love for him, but, impelled by some strange passion, he forces on the marriage and carries his young wife off to his continental home, far away from her parents and friends, to live a lonely life in a lonely and loveless home. Then, owing doubtless to the political exigencies of the time, the old scholar decides to leave his old home and, with other Puritan emigrants, to cross the Atlantic, and establish himself in Boston, New England. He sends Hester on before, remaining behind to attend to his books and other necessary affairs and promising to rejoin her later. But many months, nay, nearly two years pass away, and the old scholar is not heard of. Hester settles in Boston. She meets there the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, a young clergyman fresh from college, of rare spiritual gifts, and scholarly acquirements, and noble nature.

What wonder that Hester, with all the possibilities of love deep and strong within her, should begin to hate the fetters which bound her in her loveless union! What wonder that the change from the cramped and narrow atmosphere of a home which she hated, to the freer, warmer, nobler air which the young clergyman seemed to carry with him wherever he went—what wonder that the change should stir the seedlings of love in her heart! What wonder that Arthur Dimmesdale, attracted by the grace and nobility of her nature, should curse the Puritanic laws which prevented her union with him! In those days the laws against such love were severe indeed—the dungeon, branding with a hot iron, or even the scaffold. Hence the secrecy of their love—a secrecy which Hester vowed to keep, eternally, if need be.

But the secrets of love will out. Hester was cast into jail. But in consideration of the uncertainty attending her husband's

fate—the fate, that is, of the old scholar—instead of the extreme penalty of the law being inflicted, she is condemned to a period of imprisonment; instead of being branded with a hot iron, she is ordered to wear the *Scarlet Letter* A publicly on her breast in token of her shame; and she and her babe are to be exposed publicly, on the raised scaffold or pillory in the market-place, to the ignominy of the public gaze and to the stabs of public contumely. There is a dramatic scene on the scaffold when the Governor of the province, and the aged clergyman who acts as chaplain at the ceremony, adjure her to reveal the name of the partner of her sin, so that he, too, might be made to bear his just punishment. But Hester resolutely refuses to divulge her secret. Then the elder clergyman appeals to the younger, to the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, as the one who has been the spiritual guide and pastor to the sinner, to add his entreaties and try to soften the

culprit's heart to confession. The young minister is taken aback, but urged on by the Governor he addresses Hester in a voice rich, deep, and tremulous with emotion: "Hester Prynne," he says, "I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him. What can thy silence do for him, except to tempt him to add hypocrisy to sin? Take heed how thou deniest to him the bitter, but wholesome cup that is now presented to thy lips! Speak out the name."

"Never," replies Hester, looking into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. "And would that I could endure his agony as well as mine."

"She will not speak," murmured Mr. Dimmesdale. "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart!"

There she continued to stand on her pedestal of shame—recalling her past life, her happy childhood in England, her

loveless marriage, her voyage to New England, her love for Arthur Dimmesdale, her public shame. As she stood there she saw on the edge of the crowd a travel-stained man, dressed in peculiar garb. He was small in stature, of thin and furrowed visage, and deformed in body—it was the old scholar and physician, her husband! As a glance of recognition passed between them his face darkened with some powerful emotion, and "a writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them." Hester, overcome by the public exposure and the long nervous strain, was taken back to jail. She was ill and over-wrought, and the chief jailer calls in the old physician to prescribe for her. There, in a secret interview with her in her cell, he—her husband—demands the name of her guilty partner, which she still resolutely refuses to give. "Thou shalt never know," she says. "Never, sayest thou?" he rejoined. "Thou wilt not reveal

his name? Not the less he is mine. Let him hide himself in outward honour, if he may! Not the less he shall be mine . . . Here, on this wild outskirt of the forest, I will pitch my tent, and devote myself to my purpose." Then he made Hester swear that she would never reveal their relationship. He would drop his old name, and be known to this new world in which he now settled as Roger Chillingworth, the old physician.

Shortly afterwards Hester was released from her prison, and, settling in a small cottage on the outskirts of the town, she began to earn a living for herself and her child by needlework. She had still to wear the Scarlet Letter as a badge of her shame, and the townsfolk held as little intercourse as possible with her. Her little one, Pearl, grew into a strange, elfin, sprite-like, lovely child, whose nature seemed compounded of sunshine and shadow.

But the greatest sufferer during all this

time was the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Sunday after Sunday he had to ascend the pulpit and preach the pure word of the Gospel, urging his flock to live the Christian life and to put all sin away from them, when he, the preacher himself, had given way to the gravest of sins—and whose whole life was now tainted with the deep sin of hypocrisy, of pretending to be that which he was not. Is it any wonder that so spiritual and sensitive a nature should suffer, and his health give way under the strain? His spiritual power—indeed, his eloquence, his vivid descriptions of the pollution and the horror of sin, his hungering, yearning aspirations for the heavenly life, his tender sympathy, like that of Christ, for the sinful among men—all this seemed to increase, and his congregation, young and old alike, regarded him as a miracle of holiness, whose enfeebled emaciated frame was already preparing to set free the soul for its flight to the courts of heaven. Oh! how he longed to reveal

the real state of affairs! How he longed to speak out from his own pulpit at the full height of his voice, and tell the people what he really was, and say: "I, whom you behold in these black garments of the priesthood—I, who ascend the sacred desk and turn my face heavenwards to hold communion with the Most High—I, who have laid the hand of baptism upon your children—I, who have breathed the parting prayer over your dying friends, to whom the Amen sounded faintly from a world which they had quitted—I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!" More than once Arthur Dimmesdale had gone into the pulpit with this purpose; and yet—and yet—his courage failed him, and brought upon him a still deeper self-loathing.

So enfeebled and broken in health did Mr. Dimmesdale become, that the influential members of his congregation suggested that the old physician, Roger Chillingworth, should take up his abode under the same

roof with him, in order to keep a daily watch upon his health and attend to his physical needs. The arrangement was soon made, and from that hour the minister's state of mental unrest and torture was made tenfold worse. The old physician began to suspect something ; he probed deeply into the suffering minister's heart and conscience, and became convinced of some secret guilt or sin which burdened his stricken soul. Noticing that whenever the minister became agitated he placed his hand upon his breast, the old physician determined to ascertain the cause of this peculiar habit. One afternoon he administered to Mr. Dimmesdale, as an ordinary medicine, a powerful sleeping draught ; and while the minister was under its influence the physician drew back the vestment from the drugged sleeper's bosom, and lo ! with wonderment and ecstasy he beheld there a raw, flaming wound in the very shape of the Scarlet Letter on Hester Prynne's breast—traced there, probably with

some sharp instrument, by the minister himself, as a penance for his sin.

The minister, now, is in old Roger Chillingworth's power, and his life becomes a nightmare to him. Filled with an unnatural thirst for revenge the old scholar tortures his victim to the verge of madness, and keeps him ever on the rack. Hester, in a secret interview with Mr. Dimmesdale, proposes that they should flee to some foreign land. The minister agrees, but his religious instincts are too strong within him to allow him to carry out such a step. On the day of the election of the Governor, which was followed by a religious service, a procession, and holiday-making, the *dénouement* comes. The Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale preaches the sermon —a sermon which tries his failing strength to the utmost, a sermon more eloquent than he had ever preached before—"it was as the voice of one with the foreboding of untimely death upon him, as if an angel, in his passage to the skies, had shaken his bright wings

over the people for an instant, at once a shadow and a splendour, and had shed down a shower of golden truths upon them." The sermon over, the procession, with all its dignitaries, leaves the Church and winds into the old market-place. There, amidst the crowd, is Hester Prynne and her child. As the minister draws near to them he cries aloud in a piercing voice:

"Hester Prynne, in the name of Him, so terrible and so merciful, who gives me grace at this last moment to do what I withheld myself from doing seven years ago, come hither now, and twine thy strength about me . . . Come, Hester, come! Support me up yonder scaffold!"

The crowd was in a tumult. The Governor and the civic dignitaries turned with surprise. Everyone saw that something extraordinary was about to take place, as the wretched minister, leaning on Hester's shoulder and followed by little Pearl, ascends the scaffold; and a great hush falls upon

the assembly as they see him stand there, as at the bar of Eternal Justice.

"People of New England!" he cried, in a voice high, solemn, and majestic, "at last! at last! I stand upon the spot where seven years since I should have stood, here, with this woman, whose arm sustains me at this dreadful moment. Lo, the Scarlet Letter which Hester wears! Ye have shuddered at it. But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered. . . . Now at the death-hour he stands before you! He bids you look again at Hester's Scarlet Letter! He tells you that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and that even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart! Stand any here that question God's judgment on a sinner? Behold! Behold a dreadful witness of it!"

With a convulsive motion he tore away the vestment from his breast, and lo! the

long-hidden secret was revealed to all. But the strain and effort following the long years of mental anguish and enfeebled health was too much. He sank down on the scaffold. Hester partly raised him and supported his head upon her bosom. With a few broken words of farewell the long-tortured soul of the poor minister passed away—let us hope, to a juster, holier realm.

What is the lesson? It is the lesson of the Law of Retribution. There are some who say that God reserves his penalties and his punishments until some far-off day of Judgment. Not so. Every day is a day of Judgment. "Retribution," as Emerson says, "is swift as the lightning." Every thought we think, every word we utter, every deed we do, has its effect upon the soul, and leaves its impress—light or grave, as the case may be—on the inner spirit. "They that are in sin are in the punishment of sin."

> "Our brief hours travel post;
> Each with its thought or deed, its why or how.
> But know each parting hour gives up a ghost
> To dwell within thee,—an eternal Now!"

The faintest speck of rottenness, invisible at first, in the apple or the pear spreads rapidly, in obedience to law, through the whole fruit from core to rind. So it is in spiritual things also. The laws of the spirit work here and now, universally, unhasting but unresting. No secret sin can escape them. For secret sins too have their retributions, sometimes in enfeebled health, sometimes in a seared conscience, sometimes in some hidden taint in the soul which infects the whole life. They, too, have their required moral penances and satisfactions to something higher within us and without us. Arthur Dimmesdale felt that he must make confession and satisfaction, not only to his own conscience but to the community and to God, because he had set himself up before the community as something which he was not. Sincerity,

sincerity, sincerity—that is the first and last word in religion.

There are others again who would say that the soul of the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, though punished so terribly by retribution and remorse here, was yet in danger of an eternal retribution of agony and woe in the after-life. Not so. There is a hell indeed, let us not forget that—there is a hell indeed for each one of us, a hell of our own making—a hell of selfishness, of passion, of evil temper, of vice, of remorse, of contrition, of sorrow and anguish, but not an eternal hell. Retribution itself is part of the law of Love—it is the means of purification; for, as Plato says, punishment is the medicine of the soul, and if we escape punishment for a time we only prolong our disease. Contrition and remorse are our punishment. They purify us. They prepare our spirits for a diviner air. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "It was meet that

we should make merry and be glad, for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost, and is found."

But what shall we say of those who seem incapable of feeling contrition and retribution, whose consciences have become seared and hardened, and who go gaily on their way as though scorning the invisible laws of God? Are not these in the worst case of all? Do they not deserve our pity even more than our condemnation? To be deaf to the calls of the spirit, to be dead to its finer instincts, aspirations, and yearnings—is not that to be in a living, earthly hell, from which we may well pray to be preserved? And will not God, in that invisible spiritual realm whose heights and deeps we cannot measure or fathom, have some way, somewhere, some time, somehow, of bringing to these darkened, blinded souls, through whatever breaking up of the deeps within them, some gleams of a diviner light and life?

But what was the great error—if error is not too mild a word—of the sorely-stricken Arthur Dimmesdale? It was the error each one of us so often makes. In Dante's "Divine Comedy," in the Purgatorio, the great Italian poet places three steps which the sinner must ascend ere he can pass through the great gate of Justification. These three steps are—confession, contrition, satisfaction. Confession, contrition, satisfaction—that is, before the soul can win purification and forgiveness, it must turn away from the evil thing it has done; it must confess, publicly if need be, its fault; its inner life must be so quickened that its wrong-doing becomes a trouble and a sorrow to itself; and it must render such satisfaction as it may to the person or the community wronged, ere it can be reconciled to the Supreme, the giver of all Spiritual Law. Confession—but how few of us are willing to make confession when we have done wrong! From the days of our childhood,

when, in childish obstinacy, we have gone tearful and troubled to our little bed, knowing that something was wrong, knowing that we have not deserved our mother's kiss, and have sunk into fitful sleep with some burden on our minds, to the days of our manhood and our womanhood when we say: "Oh! we will try to make things right in some other way;" or, worse still, when we shift and palter and begin to use words in a double sense through all our life, confession is the step we find hardest to get over. It means that we must be honest with ourselves, with the world, and with God, and be known truly for what we are. As Hawthorne himself says: "Among many morals which press upon us from the poor minister's miserable experience, we put only this into a sentence—'Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred.'"

There are many other deep problems

connected with this interior life of the soul on which I have not space to dwell. There is the problem as to how far sin is bound up with sheer moral blindness, with incapacity to *see* the right, and, therefore, as to what extent moral responsibility is incurred. And there is the further problem as to how far the customs and ideals of one age, customs and ideals which may be harsh and cruel, and which may be succeeded by truer and purer ideals of right—there is the problem, I say, as to how far these should be allowed to determine our retributive punishments. It always seems to me that our judgments should incline, as did those of Jesus, towards mercy and compassion, after taking care that the safety of society is not imperilled, and that the sinner is given opportunity to enter the better way. For the rest, let us remember the words of the great Apostle: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." The whole matter

is summed up in the fine words of the homely poet who had himself known both sin and remorse:

"Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman,
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far, perhaps, they rue it.

Wha made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord, its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute
But know not what's resisted."

OF THE NOVEL

III.—Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and the Law of Atonement.

Victor Hugo wrote three great novels designed to illustrate the tragic conflicts of human life—first, *The Hunch-back of Notre Dame* which illustrates the conflict of man with Destiny ; second, *Les Misérables* which illustrates the conflict of man with humanity, or the half-barbarous laws and customs of humanity ; third, *The Toilers of the Sea*, a magnificent description of the conflict of man with the powers of Nature. It is with *Les Misérables* that I wish to deal in this chapter. Robert Louis Stevenson says : " There are few books in the world that can be compared with it.

It is the moral intention of this great novel to awaken us a little, if it may be—for such awakenings are unpleasant—to the great cost of this society that we enjoy and profit by, to the labour and sweat of those who support the litter, civilisation, in which we ourselves are so smoothly carried forward. People are all glad to shut their eyes; and it gives them a very simple pleasure when they can forget that our laws commit a million individual injustices, to be once roughly just in the general; that the bread that we eat, and the quiet of the family, and all that embellishes life and makes it worth having, have to be purchased by death—by the death of animals, and the deaths of men wearied out with labour, and the deaths of those criminals called tyrants and revolutionaries, and the deaths of those revolutionaries called criminals. It is to something of all this that Victor Hugo wishes to open men's eyes in *Les Misérables;* and this moral lesson is worked out in

masterly coincidence with the artistic effect. The deadly weight of civilisation, to those who are below, presses sensibly on our shoulders as we read. A sort of mocking indignation grows upon us as we find Society rejecting, again and again, the services of the most serviceable; setting Jean Valjean to pick oakum, casting Galileo into prison, even crucifying Christ." *Les Misérables* is the story of a lost soul, "the incarnation of all the social misery of its time" thrust down into the deeps of hell, time after time, by society itself, yet rising by its native worth and grandeur towards the purity of the heavenly life.

The chief character in *Les Misérables* is, of course, Jean Valjean—a creation whom Victor Hugo has made as widely known as the greatest characters of drama and romance. Jean Valjean was the child of a poor forester. Orphaned while yet a boy, he is taken into the home of a married sister and cared for by her. But the

husband of the married sister dies, and there are seven children to provide for. Jean acts both as brother and as father, and toils unweariedly, before dawn till after dark, to supply the bare necessaries of life for the family. But the wages of a forester are small—sixteen sous a day—the children clamour for bread, and Jean often goes without food that the little ones may be fed. The winter of 1795 came early. The cold, frost, and snow seemed pitiless. Work fell off, and Jean and his sister were faced with a starving household. Passing one night through the village, dumb and bitter with despair and pain, he suddenly beholds bread in the window of the village baker. He breaks the glass with his fist, and takes a loaf of bread from the window. The baker runs out, seizes the thief, and Jean Valjean is brought before the court and charged with burglary. Found guilty, he was sentenced to five years at the galleys. While the bolt of his iron collar was being

riveted he cried like a child, and raised his hand seven times as though touching seven little heads—from which it could be guessed, that whatever crime he had committed, he had done it to feed seven children. Thrust down into the lowest deeps of society, dressed in a red jacket, and with a chain on his neck, his very name becomes blotted out and he is known as No. 24601. Driven to desperation by his prison life, in his fourth year of imprisonment he attempts to escape. He is recaptured, and three years are added to his sentence. He escapes again, and five more years are added ; again, and another term is imposed. In October 1815, after nineteen years, he was liberated ; he had gone in in 1796, for breaking a window and stealing a loaf—a crime, if such it can be called, resulting from too warm a heart. He came out with a heart steeled and bitter against human kind, with the brands of the prison in his very soul.

On his release from the galleys he

journeyed on foot towards his old home. But he did not journey far. The hand of every man seemed against him. His torn blouse, his coarse calico shirt, his stockingless feet, his close-cropped hair, excited suspicion. He had to shew his passport everywhere. Landlords refused to give him lodgings; ordinary householders refused him food and even water to drink. At the town of D—— he was especially badly treated. He could not get a lodging anywhere. Hungry, weary, footsore, and desperate, he sat down to rest on a stone bench in the Cathedral Square and shook his fist at the Cathedral. An old woman, passing and having pity on him, directed him to the Bishop's residence. He went there. Luckily, it was the good Bishop Myriel. Jean Valjean was admitted. Rough, bold, desperate, with a fierce light in his eyes, he told his business, nothing extenuating.

"Look here," he said, "my name is Jean

Valjean. I am a galley-slave, and have spent nineteen years in the prisons. Here is my passport. It reads: 'five years for robbery with house-breaking, and fourteen years for trying to escape four times. The man is very dangerous.' I have tried everywhere and no one will take me in. I am very tired and frightfully hungry; will you let me stay here?"

The good bishop, to the consternation of his domestics, turned and said:

"You are welcome. You need not have told me who you were; this is not my house, it is the house of Christ. This door does not ask a man who enters whether he has a name, but if he has a sorrow; you are suffering, so—be welcome. And why should I want to know your name? I knew it before you told me—you are my brother."

Jean Valjean was dazed, bewildered, stupefied.

"You have suffered greatly," said the bishop.

"Oh!" he replied, "the red jacket, the

cannon-ball at your foot, a plank to sleep on, heat, cold, labour, the set of men, the blows, the double chain for a nothing, a dungeon for a word, and the chain-gang. The very dogs are happier."

"Yes," said the bishop, "you have come from a place of sorrow. But listen to me: if you leave that mournful place with thoughts of hatred and anger you are worthy of pity; if you leave it with thoughts of kindliness, gentleness, and peace, you are worth more than any of us."

That night Jean Valjean was lodged as he had never been lodged before. But in the middle of the night, he awoke. The old hatred, harshness, and bitterness which the prison life had driven into his soul rose up within him. He had noticed the silver forks and spoon on the table at supper. He arose, found the plate basket, put the plate in his knapsack, and fled. The next day he was captured by the gendarmes and brought into the presence of the bishop.

"My friend," said the bishop, "I am glad to see you. But I gave you the candlesticks, too, which are also silver. Why did you not take them with the rest of the plate?" Turning to the gendarmes he said: "There is some mistake. Release your prisoner. These things are a gift from me," and going to the mantelpiece he fetched the two silver candlesticks and placed them in Jean Valjean's hands, saying,

"Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. I have bought your soul of you. I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and give it to God."

Jean Valjean was in a state of stupor. He left the bishop's house a free man once more, but he walked as though ill or drunken, not seeing whither he went. A new thing was striving within him. It was as though angels and demons were fighting for his soul. He had begun his atonement. Three things he had to help him—a great

heart, the strength of four men, and a mind of marvellous inventive genius.

Not long after this time a stranger settled in the town of M. *sur* M. This stranger had hit upon the idea of substituting gum lac for resin in the manufacture of beads and bracelets. He built up with great rapidity a new industry, and in a few years had amassed a fortune of over half-a-million francs in Lafitte's bank. He used his money so generously that he soon became widely known as a philanthropist. Yet he would take no public honours, and resented any public recognition of his work. He called himself Father Madeleine. There was only one man in the town who had his suspicions about Father Madeleine. That was Javert, the lynx-eyed inspector of police. He had seen Father Madeleine lift, with his own unaided strength, out of a slough in the roadway a loaded cart, which was in danger of crushing a peasant who was repairing it beneath it. "There is only

one man in France capable of doing a thing like that," said Javert to himself, "and that man was Jean Valjean, the convict. Who is this Father Madeleine?"

Yes, Father Madeleine the philanthropist was Jean Valjean. To one unfortunate young woman in M. *sur* M. he was particularly kind. This girl, Fantine, had been discharged from Father Madeleine's works unknown to him, and she had fallen into a lingering consumption. As soon as Father Madeleine hears of the case he has her specially cared for, and promises the dying girl that he himself will fetch and adopt her little child, Cosette, who has been left in charge of an innkeeper and his wife at Montfermeil. But before he can do this a strange thing happens. A peasant named Champmathieu has been arrested at Arras for a trifling theft. Three convicts recognise Champmathieu as an old fellow-convict, Jean Valjean. Champmathieu, a dull stolid man, denies the identity, but the three convicts swear to it and say

that they were with him at the galleys. Father Madeleine, otherwise the real Jean Valjean, hears of the case. The temptation is a tremendous one. If Champmathieu is convicted as Jean Valjean, Father Madeleine will be freed from all anxiety as to the future. But if Father Madeleine allows the case to go on and says nothing—and it is such an easy matter to keep silence—an innocent man will go to the galleys. If, on the other hand, Father Madeleine denounces himself and gets the old peasant off, he, Father Madeleine, otherwise Jean Valjean, must go back to the horrors of the galleys. Again the angels and the demons strive for his soul. That night, however, he hires a chaise, drives post-haste to Arras and arrives next morning, just in time. The trial of Champmathieu is already going on. Father Madeleine asks to be heard as a witness. It is noticed that his hair has turned white, and his voice seems to chill the heart. He faces his old fellow-convicts. He tells them, to their astonishment, of

the brands and marks on their bodies. He proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is a case of mistaken identity.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "acquit the prisoner. Monsieur le Président, have me arrested. The man you are seeking is not he, for—I am Jean Valjean."

The judge, jury, and spectators feel as though a great light were shining in the room. The court had at first thought Father Madeleine mad, but the proofs are too clear. In the court there were now neither judges, accusers, nor gendarmes; there were only fixed eyes and heaving hearts. But the record against Jean Valjean is a bad one—escaped convict. He is wanted, too, for the robbery of the Bishop's plate, for the good Bishop Myriel is now dead, and can no longer intercede for him. The law, which was very much of an ass in those days, must take its course, and Jean Valjean is sent back to the galleys. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

In the autumn of the year, 1823, a man-of-war entered the harbour of Toulon for repairs. One morning the crowd which usually gathers in the docks about a man-of-war witnessed a thrilling incident. A sailor on the upper corner of the main-top-sail lost his balance. He dropped from the dizzy height, but as he dropped he caught hold of the foot-rope of the mast, and a moment afterwards hung dangling to the rope and in danger of falling from a terrible height into the sea. The man was rapidly becoming exhausted, but he was in such a position that none could or would endanger their life by going to his assistance. Even the sailors trembled and recoiled. The crowd held its breath to see what would happen, when a convict was seen to ask permission of the chief officer to go to the assistance of the doomed man. With one blow of a hammer he struck the fetters off his ankle, climbed the main-top sail, let himself down the dangling rope, hoisted the

exhausted sailor up with one hand and a rope he had brought with him, then with amazing strength and agility climbed the dangling rope again, and amid the plaudits of the crowd placed his man in a place of safety. The spectators waved their hats and cried: "Pardon for that convict!" He was then seen to descend to the lower yards of the vessel, but as he went along he seemed to stagger from exhaustion and fall into the sea. But it was not from exhaustion—it was for liberty. The spectators thought he was drowned. But he swam under water until he was out of sight of the crowd, then further away still to a deserted part of the shore. He was a free man. That convict was Jean Valjean, otherwise Father Madeleine.

Free once more, and now thought to be drowned, Jean Valjean made his way to Montfermeil, to the house of the innkeeper, Thénardier, who had charge of little Cosette,

the daughter of Fantine. He found the Thénardiers, both man and wife, unscrupulous, cruel, brutish. They had made Cosette, a child of eight or nine, into a little slave. She was cowed, half-starved, and black and blue with bruises. Jean Valjean appears on the scene like a guardian angel. It was Christmas-time. The forlorn little shoe of Cosette, placed trustingly by the chimney-piece in expectation of Santa Claus, is an incident which, as Stevenson says, "grips us by the throat." Next morning Cosette finds a golden coin in her shoe and lives in a heaven of delight. Paying the Thénardiers for their trouble far more generously than they deserved—for he had taken care to draw his fortune from the bank before his last arrest, and secrete it in a forest—he carries Cosette off to Paris. There he gets a situation in a convent as a gardener, and places Cosette in the convent school. Immured in the convent, he lives a happy life with Cosette for several years, safe from the eyes

of the police, but doing good everywhere by stealth. But school-life does not last for ever. Jean Valjean has to leave the convent and make a home for himself and Cosette. But the lynx-eyed Inspector of Police, Javert, has also been transferred to Paris. The two meet; Javert again has his suspicions aroused, and Jean Valjean lives in perpetual dread of the galleys, and of the dread also that Cosette may learn that he, her guardian-angel, is an escaped convict. Worse still for him, Cosette, now verging towards womanhood, falls in love with a young aristocratic revolutionary leader, Marius Pontmercy. The only being that he loves in the world is likely to be taken away from Jean Valjean, and he begins to hate Marius, and talks of removing to England. But, noticing how Cosette droops at the proposal, he again renounces himself. The revolutionary riots of 1831 break out, and Marius is appointed to take charge of the chief barricade. The heroic defence of that

barricade is a chapter worth reading many times. Jean Valjean hears that Marius is in danger. He goes to the barricade, offers his assistance, and is accepted. Inside the house which stands behind the barricade he finds Inspector Javert, bound hand and foot. Javert has penetrated the barricade as a disguised spy, has been found out by the revolutionaries and condemned to death. Jean Valjean is charged with his execution. He leads him outside the house to the corner of a side street, shoots his revolver into the air, cuts Javert's bonds, and sets the astonished Inspector free. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his"—enemies.

Jean Valjean returns to the barricade. He seems to live a charmed life. He does not kill anyone, but defends the others, especially Marius, and tends the wounded. Soon Marius is struck down, unconscious, by a bullet. Valjean carries him away to the side street, lifts with his enormous

strength the iron grate of a main drain, drops down, taking the unconscious Marius in his arms, then replaces the grating. He finds himself in a dark, bricked, slimy, subterranean tube—the main sewer of Paris. Following it in its gradual descent he knows he will reach the river bank. Sometimes, where the bricks are broken, he sinks up to his neck in filth and slime, holding the unconscious Marius above his head. Shivering, filthy, bloodstained, exhausted, he reaches the outlet at the river bank, and the first man he meets there, for it is a resort of thieves, is—Inspector Javert! But Javert has had enough of this; he cannot understand a man, an escaped convict, who lives the life of a Christ. He drives both Marius and Jean Valjean home in a cabriolet—Marius still unconscious; and goes his ways—commits suicide, indeed, because he has transgressed the law in letting an escaped convict go free.

Marius and Cosette are married. Jean

Valjean informs Marius who he really is, and explains that it is hardly fitting that he, an escaped convict, should frequent the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy. What he really wishes is to avoid bringing any scandal or blemish on Cosette's name. Marius agrees that it will be better that they should see as little of each other as possible, and Jean Valjean, excusing himself on the ground of illness, remains away from them, heart-broken. But when Marius learns, as he does learn shortly afterwards, what Jean Valjean has done—that he is the famous Father Madeleine, the philanthropist; that he is the convict who saved the life of the sailor on the man-of-war in Toulon harbour; that he saved the life of Marius himself at the barricade; that he carried him, at great risk of his own life, through the main sewer of Paris; that he saved Javert, his enemy, from death; that, with his large fortune, he has done good by stealth in hundreds of ways—learning this, he and Cosette fly to

Jean Valjean's humble lodgings, but, alas! almost too late. The old man is dying. Falling on their knees beside him they beseech his forgiveness for their neglect and thoughtlessness.

"My children," he said, "there is nothing to forgive. It is good of you to come to me. I am going away. Remember, God is above. He sees all. He knows all. Remember God is Love. There is the Great Martyr," pointing to a crucifix. "Think of me a little. I know not what is the matter with me, but *I see light*."

And the great soul passed away.

What is the lesson again? Surely these things are an allegory. The good bishop is the apostle of God to win men to Christ. Jean Valjean is a soul converted to the Christ-Spirit to show to men the way of Life, the way of reconciliation, of self-renouncement, of Atonement. Javert is the representative of the stupid, iron machinery

of unsaving Law. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear"—"to him the clarions of the battle call."

What is this way or Law of Atonement? We have been told that there was only one atonement—at a particular time and a particular place, in the world's history—the sacrifice of the blood of an innocent being to propitiate the wrath of an angry God. Not so. That is a creed formed in half-barbarous ages. The law of Atonement is a universal law. It affects each one of us. It includes in its scope and working the moral and spiritual forces—confession, contrition, repentance, forgiveness, sacrifice, and salvation—the spiritual birth into the new Life. It is not merely personal. It does not look for mere personal salvation. It says rather—"I will not be saved myself until I see others saved—here and now as well as hereafter, for we are members one of another, a mighty brotherhood." The moment Jean Valjean enters into this new Life, his bitterness and

hatred of humanity are changed into love. He will not take life; he will save it. He will not cause suffering; he will himself suffer first. His fortune, his strength, his life are placed at the service of others. Was not that the Christ-Spirit? And before we can attain unto it it is imperative, and a matter of spiritual law—the law of at-one-ment, that is, of being *at one* with the Supreme Spirit—that we must strive to live it. All, all are bound together by this spiritual Law. Jesus and the Cross are the eternal type of it—not as the propitiation of an angry Being, but as the type for each one of us to follow. That Cross raised the spiritual *task* of humanity—it lifted it to a higher plane of struggle and achievement; it makes us morally bankrupt, because it shows us how little we have done and how much we have yet to do. It speaks to us now, as symbol, through the ages, pleading with us to take our share of humanity's load; to drink our cup and not pass it on to others; to crucify our lower

self—that lower self which lives in each one of us—that the higher self may enter on a new life in the Spirit of Christ. It is a progressive age-long work—the work of a suffering, redeeming Christ-spirit in humanity, lifting it, by sacrifice, to the higher levels of the Spirit. All, all may enter into this great salvation, because all are "children of the Spirit, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; *if so be that we suffer with him*, that we may be also glorified with him."

There is this peculiarity, also, about this Law of Atonement—that it makes its demands on us from ever higher circles of spiritual being as we ascend, and while we are in the lower circles we are often unconscious of the higher. This is a great mystery, and should make us afraid of our lower self—afraid of the deeps of misery into which it may lead us. Just as the hard and Pharisaic Judaism of pre-Christian days was in the main dead to the higher spirit of

Christ, so we also are sometimes dead to its higher reaches because it is infinite in its ever-ascending range. For Jean Valjean, that high and great thing because the call came to him; for you and me, this small and simple thing—and yet often hard in its simplicity—our daily duty in the Spirit of Christ.

This law has its social implications too, for the great task of being *at-one* with God covers the whole range of human and spiritual life and duty. Matthew Arnold gives a most beautiful poetic interpretation of this great spiritual law in his poem, "Rugby Chapel," where he pictures his father, Dr. Arnold, leading a band of pilgrims over Alpine heights. A few struggle through roaring torrents, and over rugged passes, and across mountain chasms until they arrive at the mountain wayside inn; and as the host receives them he asks: "Where are the others? whom have you left in the snow?" "Sadly we answer: 'We

bring only ourselves—we lost the rest in the storm!'" Then Arnold goes on—

> "But thou wouldst not *alone*
> Be saved, my father! *alone*
> Conquer and come to thy goal,
> Leaving the rest in the wild.
> We were weary, and we
> Fearful, and we in our march
> Fain to drop down and to die.
> Still thou turnedst, and still
> Beckonedst the trembler, and still
> Gavest the weary thy hand.
>
> If, in the paths of the world,
> Stones might have wounded thy feet,
> Toil or dejection have tried
> Thy spirit, of that we saw
> Nothing—to us thou wast still
> Cheerful, and helpful, and firm!
> Therefore to thee it was given
> Many to save with thyself;
> And at the end of the day,
> O faithful Shepherd! to come
> Bringing thy sheep in thy hand."

"Thou wouldst not *alone* be saved!" That is the Law of Atonement—we are all bound together. We must save others as well as ourselves—until all, the great and the lowly, the wise and the ignorant, friends and enemies, are *at one* with God. That was the spirit of Christ—and the spirit of Jean Valjean. "Greater love hath no man than this—that he lay down his life for his"—*enemies*, in order to bring them into oneness with God.

IV.—Mrs. Lynn Linton's *Joshua Davidson* and the Law of Sacrifice.

Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, is an illustration of the Law of Atonement—the transformation and reconciliation of man's lower nature to such a point of spiritual development that his whole being becomes *at one* with the law, or the Spirit of God. Mrs. Lynn Linton's *The True History of Joshua Davidson* is an illustration of the Law of Sacrifice—of the giving up of something in our life, something precious, perhaps even earthly life itself, that we may win, through struggle and sacrifice, that larger spiritual life which is the outcome of all moral struggle. The book takes us back

not only to the many ethical and social problems involved in the Sermon on the Mount, and the practicability of the principles laid down in that great utterance—or series of utterances,—it takes us back also to the great and fundamental problems of speculative religion, and makes us wonder at times, whether, as the writer of Ecclesiastes says, all is not "vanity and a striving after wind."

The book seems to be founded on fact, but fact mingled probably with fiction. Joshua Davidson was the son of a village carpenter, born in the small hamlet of Trevalga, in Cornwall, in the year 1835. He was a quiet thoughtful lad "with a face almost like a young woman's for purity and spirituality. He was so beautiful that some ladies and gentlemen staying at the Vicarage noticed him during church-time, and said he looked like a boy-saint." There was a great scene in the village Church one Sunday after afternoon catechism. At the close of the catechism, which was conducted by the

vicar, Mr Grand, Joshua stepped out from the other children, just in his rough country clothes as he was, and said very respectfully to the Vicar :

" If you please, sir, I would like to ask you a few questions."

" Certainly, my lad, what have you to say ? " said Mr. Grand rather shortly. He did not seem over well pleased at the boy's addressing him ; but he could not well refuse to hear him, because there were several ladies and gentlemen present.

" If we say, sir, that Jesus Christ was God," said Joshua, " surely all that He said and did must be the real right ? There cannot be a better way than His ? "

" Surely not, my lad," Mr. Grand made answer ; " what else have you been taught all your life ? What else have you been saying in your catechism just now ? "

" And His apostles and disciples, they showed the way too ? " said Joshua.

" And they showed the way too, as you

say ; and if you come up to half they taught, you'll do well, Joshua."

The Vicar laughed a little laugh as he said this ; but it was a laugh, Joshua's mother said, that seemed to mean the same thing as a "scat"—our Cornish word for a blow—only the boy didn't seem to see it.

"Yes ; but, sir, it is not of myself I am thinking, it is of the world," said Joshua. "If we are Christians, why don't we live as Christians ?"

"Ah indeed ! why don't we ?" said Mr. Grand. "Because of the wickedness of the human heart ; because of the world, the flesh, and the devil !"

"Then, sir, if you feel this, why don't you and all the clergy live like the apostles, and give what you have to the poor ?" cried Joshua, clasping his hands and making a step forward, the tears in his eyes. "Why, when you read that verse, 'Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from

him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' do you live in a fine house, and have grand dinners, and let Peggy Bray nearly starve in that old mud hut of hers, and widow Tregellis there, with her six children, and no fire or clothing for them? I can't make it out, sir! Christ was God; and we are Christians; yet we won't do as He ordered, though you tell us it is a sin that can never be forgiven if we dispute what the Bible says."

"And so it is," said Mr. Grand sternly. "Who has been putting these bad thoughts into your head?"

"No one, sir. I have been thinking for myself. Michael, out by Lion's Den, is called an infidel; he calls himself one; and you preached last Sunday that no infidel can be saved; but Michael helped Peggy and her base child when the Orphan Fund people took away her pension, because, as you yourself told her, she was a bad woman, and it was encouraging

wickedness ; and he worked early and late for widow Tregellis and her children, and shared with them all he had, going short for them many a time. And I can't help thinking, sir, that Christ, who forgave all manner of sinners, would have helped Peggy with her base child, and that Michael, being an infidel and such a good man, is something like that second son in the Parable who said he would not do his Lord's will when he was ordered, but who went all the same—"

"And that your Vicar is like the first?" interrupted Mr. Grand angrily.

"Well, yes, sir, if you please," said Joshua, quite modestly but very fervently.

There was a great stir among the ladies and gentlemen when Joshua said this ; and some laughed a little, under their breath because it was in church, and others lifted up their eyebrows, and said, "What an extraordinary boy!" and whispered together ; but Mr. Grand was very angry, and said in a severe tone,—

"These things are beyond the knowledge of an ignorant lad like you, Joshua; and I advise you, before you turn questioner and reformer, to learn a little humility and respect for your betters. I consider you have done a very impertinent thing to-day, and I shall mark you for it!"

"I did not mean to be impertinent, sir," said Joshua eagerly; "I want only to know the right of things from you, and to do as God has commanded and Christ has shown us the way. And as you are our clergyman, and this is the House of God, I thought it the best plan to ask. I want only to know the truth; and I cannot make it out!"

From this time onward the Rev. Mr. Grand was the greatest enemy of Joshua. He is the representative of the Pharisees.

Joshua grew up a simple and earnest Bible Christian—that is, he tried to follow the Bible literally. On one occasion he took up a viper in his hand, quoting the

passage : "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them." But the serpent stung him, and he was ill for days after. On another occasion he ate a handful of poisonous berries, and almost died in consequence. Yet he had handled the viper and eaten the berries in sincere and earnest faith.

But he found that this would not work, and he profited by his experience. It was a bitter struggle, and brought great anguish of soul. That the Bible is not to be accepted literally, or, in other words, that the word of God—Divine Truth—is to be found *in* the Bible, but that the whole of the Bible is not Divine Truth, being a mixture of human error with Truth—this almost shipwrecked the faith of Joshua, as it has shipwrecked the faith of many others. But Joshua's faith was of a too deeply religious nature to be entirely overthrown. At first, indeed, he was like "an unpiloted vessel." He tried the High Church party,

then the Evangelicals. Finding satisfaction in neither, he joined some science classes and began to interest himself in politics and social questions. At last he formed his conclusions, or, at least, such conclusions as seemed to him justified by his new knowledge and riper experience. He gave up belief in miracles, in the old form of the doctrine of the atonement, in the Deity of Jesus. Religion, he said, like everything else, was subject to the law of development, of evolution. Christ was a new starting-point in religion—from that starting-point we must work onward and upward. Sin was not merely spiritual evil; it was economic and social evil, and often had its roots in poverty and ignorance. Here we must regard Christ as our master and follow his example. "Let us," he said, speaking to the comrades whom he had gathered round him: "let us then strip our Christianity of all the mythology, the fetichism that has grown about it. Let us abandon the

idolatry with which we have obscured the meaning of the Life; let us go back to the Man, and carry on His work in its essential spirit, in the direction suited to our times and social conditions. Those of you who still cling to the mystical aspect of the creed, and who prefer to worship the God rather than imitate the Man, must here part company with me. You know that, as a youth, I went deep into the life of prayer and faith; as a man I have come out into the upper air of action; into the understanding that Christianity is not a creed as dogmatized by Churches, but an organization having politics for its means and the equalization of classes as its end. It is Communism. Friends! the doctrine I have chosen for myself is Christian Communism —and my aim will be, the Life after Christ in the service of humanity, without distinction of persons or morals. The Man Jesus is my master, and by His example I will walk."

So he did. He went to London, taking one or two of his friends with him, got a situation at his trade, and went to live in a stifling court—Church Court it was called—surrounded by thieves, drunkards, gutter children, lost women, the very dregs of society. "Children swarmed like rabbits," he says, "and died like sheep with the rot. It was sore to see them, poor, little, pale, stunted, half-naked creatures, playing about the foul, uncleansed pavement of the court, from the reeking gutter of which they picked up apple-parings, potato-peelings, fish-heads, and the like, which I have seen them many a time wipe on their rags, and eat." He opened a night-school there and held class meetings, giving simple lessons in cleanliness, health, the good life, always trying to make his hearers feel the Presence and the Power of God. Many came out of curiosity, some laughed, some jeered. On two people at any rate Joshua seemed to make an impression. One, Joe Traill, a

thief and a drunkard who fell away time after time, but who always came back and was welcomed; the other, Mary Prinsep, an unfortunate, whom Joshua reclaimed and took as his housekeeper, and who turned out to be as refined gold. But this friendship with unfortunate women got him into trouble. One day his workmates hustled and hooted him on the subject, calling him "canter and hypocrite." "Mates," he said, turning on them mildly enough, "did our great Master receive Mary Magdalene and all sinners, or did He not? And if He did—as you may find for yourselves—am *I* too pure to help them?"

In time great philanthropists, ladies and gentlemen, hearing of Joshua's work, came down to see him and to offer their help, but they, too, drew back when they heard of Joshua's association with unfortunate women. Joshua had made matters worse by taking into his home the reformed burglar and drunkard, Joe Traill. Joe had given up

burgling, but still had occasional drinking bouts. "We must draw a line," said one of the eminent philanthropists to Joshua. "How can I ask my poor, honest pensioners, or my respectable workmen, to receive a convicted thief among them? You cannot touch pitch, Mr. Davidson, without being defiled."

"Christ lodged in the house of Simon the leper," retorted Joshua. "Mary Magdalene loved Him, and He her. I want no other example, sir. What the Master did, His followers and disciples may imitate. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us, unto seventy times seven."

It was no use. Joshua's aristocratic friends gradually fell away from him. His workmates shunned him, complained to their employer about him, and actually got him discharged for associating with immoral women and convicted thieves. "Birds of a feather flock together," said the employer

sententiously as he discharged him. Joshua was reduced almost to starvation, fell seriously ill and was nursed by Mary Prinsep, but luckily managed to get another situation and keep his little community together. Through all their struggles he preached courage and patience. Once, Mary lost hope and protested that she must sink back into the slough from which Joshua had raised her.

"No," said Joshua, "while we have a home, you have one, too. Remember, you are our sister. Only have faith, and, as I said before, courage and patience, and beware of the first step back."

"Ah! Joshua," said Mary, "you are an angel."

"No," he answered, smiling, "I am only a man trying to live by principle."

And the biographer adds: "Tears are in my eyes, rough man as I am, when I remember Joshua Davidson, his life and works, and what the world he lived but to

better said of him and did to him. I have known swindlers and murderers more gently entreated. Twice have I seen him left for dead in the rough monarchical towns where he held his meetings. Of a truth, the age of martyrs has not passed away, as any one may prove in his own person who will set himself to enlarge the close boroughs of thought, and to rectify the injustice of society."

About this time the war between France and Germany broke out, and the German army soon made its way towards Paris. The Paris Commune was established, and Joshua went over from England to give what little help he could. "Paris was mad—mad with despair, with famine, with shame, disease, excitement. Gaunt frames, hollow cheeks, wild eyes met you at every turn, and yet," says Mrs. Linton, "never had Paris been so free from crime as during the administration of the Commune—never so pure. All the vice which had disgraced the city ever since the congenial Empire had existed, was swept

clean out of it. . . . One of the brightest pages of modern history is that wherein the artisan government of '71 wrote its brief but noble record on the heart of Paris."

Mary Prinsep followed Joshua to Paris, travelling part of the way on foot. When she saw him, she sank down in a heap, fainting, at his feet. "Purified by love, she looked as if she might have come out of a convent." Joshua got her a place as nurse at one of the hospitals, but shortly afterwards, towards the close of the fighting, she was shot through the heart in the street. Joshua was stricken down by illness. The Commune came to an end, beaten down by sheer numbers, many of its leaders dying on the barricades. Joshua returned to England, and started on a lecturing tour, explaining and defending the principles of the Commune. Nearly everywhere he was received with suspicion and distrust. His very name—Communist—offended men. At Lowbridge, a place at which he had arranged to lecture,

a particularly hostile audience gathered to meet him. In the front row was the former clergyman of Trevalga, Mr. Grand. As Joshua rose to his feet he was received with a tumult of hisses, yells, cat-calls, and whoopings. Not a word could be heard, but Joshua stood quiet and dignified, waiting his time. Then Mr. Grand rose and stood on his chair, and appealed to the audience not to hear Joshua. "I have known him from a boy," he said, "and I can bear my testimony to the fact that he has been an ill-conditioned, presumptuous, insolent fellow from the first. He led an infamous life in London, and kept a disorderly house there. Loose women, thieves, burglars, all the scum of the earth, have been his chosen companions, and, to crown all, he went over to Paris at that awful time of the Commune, and joined himself to that band of miscreants there. . . . And now he has the audacity to come before you, honest and sober men of Lowbridge, loving your Queen and country, abiding by

the laws, and fearing God as I hope you all do. . . . Give him your minds, my men ; and let him understand that Lowbridge is not the place for a godless rascal like him at any time, and by no means the place for an atheist and a communist!"

In a moment a dozen men were on the platform. Joshua was dragged down into the body of the hall amidst indescribable tumult. Someone turned the lights down. Beaten, kicked, he fell or was dragged to the floor. Hideous thuds and blows were heard; and as the madness of the crowd passed away, and a space was cleared, and the lights turned up, Joshua was found pale and senseless on the floor, with blood streaming from his lips. He had borne his Cross.

The author finishes her story with the words: "My heart burns within me, and my mind is unpiloted and unanchored. I cannot, being a Christian, accept the inhumanity of political economy and the obliteration of the individual in averages;

yet I cannot reconcile modern science with Christ. Everywhere I see the sifting of competition, and nowhere Christian pro tection of weakness; everywhere dogma adored, and nowhere Christ realised. And again I ask: 'Which is true—modern society in its class strife and consequent elimination of its weaker elements, or the brotherhood and communism taught by the Jewish carpenter of Nazareth? Who will answer me?—who will make the dark thing clear?'"

It would take me too long to touch upon all the points raised by this interesting book. I must confine myself to only one or two, and particularly to that great Law of Sacrifice which is a condition of human existence, nay, of all existence. It is not only a law of Nature, it is a law of spiritual progress also. Through that invisible cell-life of which the microscope tells us, up through the plants, the insects, the animals, man, this law is unceasingly at work—the law that the old

shall die that the new may live. But in the realm of ideas, in the realm of spirit or consciousness, it brings about tragic conflicts—the terrible conflict in which the old sometimes rises up against the new and attempts to trample it out of existence. The crucifixion is a type of such sacrifice, and the story of Joshua Davidson is simply a modern version of the story of the Life which culminated in the Crucifixion. Christ himself and the early Christians were treated as badly, nay worse, than Joshua Davidson. But let us remember—for if we forget this we lose the true meaning of the word Religion—let us remember that these repetitions of the tragedy of the Crucifixion are not merely isolated facts in the world's history, they are the outward symbol of a universal and age-long struggle. As Mazzini said: "There is an Eternal Christ-Spirit, ever living in the heart of humanity, which is being eternally sacrificed for humanity's salvation." That is true not only of humanity as a whole, it is

true of all of us individually, here and now. For is there not in each one of us a lower, selfish, contracted, half-blind animal self which is continually warring against the higher self within us, that higher self continually moving upward "working out the beast," and letting "the ape and tiger die?" Does not the freeing ourselves from the bonds of that lower self—from its temptations, its ignorance, its blindness, its narrowness, even in ideas—does not that mean struggle, pain, sacrifice? Even our very diseases, which frighten us by their unseen and mysterious power—even these are due to the sin or the ignorance of that blind lower self, I don't say sin or ignorance always or altogether within ourselves, but somewhere, sometime, in the far-off past; and of every greatly suffering one in humanity we may say as was said of the prophet Jeremiah of old: "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him;

and with His stripes we are healed." For it is by that suffering that we are bound together in a holy brotherhood ; it is by that suffering, if we have any manhood or womanhood in us, that our higher self leaps to the call and seeks light, purity, knowledge, expansion, and renunciation of personal aims and ends, in the one aim and end of the Supreme Will. Theologians call it the work of Redemption—the Redemption of the lower self of Humanity from its blindness, its ignorance, and its sin. Each one of us may help in that work of Redemption; each one may help, like Simon of Cyrene, to carry the Cross of the world's suffering up the hill of Calvary; each one may—nay, must—sacrifice the lower, contracted self within him, that the higher self may develop and live. "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

And the second point I wish to dwell upon is this: Was Joshua Davidson's way

the right way of approaching these moral and social problems which everywhere face us? Now I feel that it is not for me to criticise in this matter such great personalities as Leo Tolstoi and Joshua Davidson, whose shoe-latchets I feel unworthy to loosen, when they say that the truest way to follow Christ is to live exactly as Christ lived. It may be that one life, lived in that way, may have more influence for good than thousands of humdrum lives like ours. I can only say that to me the true way of approaching these problems is through association with our fellows. It is through association, education, co-operation, organisation, and especially the organisation of the State, that we humbler folk can increase and strengthen the Christ-Spirit in the world. The reader may say that that is a shuffle. He may say that I, a minister and follower of Christ, stand self-condemned as a Pharisee and a moral coward in refusing to live exactly as Christ lived. That may be so;

sometimes I feel myself that I am not quite sure that it is not so. And yet—the world is so different now from what it was 1800 years ago. The problems of commerce, industry, capital, finance, are world-wide and international, and cannot be localised. All these have to be penetrated by the Christ-Spirit, and it seems to me that that can best be done through the agency of the State. Then, too, there are the schools—is there not a great work to be done there also, a work which can only be done by perfecting the organisation of the State? I do not wish to dogmatise about these various ways of social service. I will only say that, for those who do accept and follow this easier way, there lies a heavy obligation to see that their hands do not slacken in the work, to see that some portion of their time, their thought, their energy, and their material means, are devoted to this work of penetrating and permeating all our customs and institutions—commerce, industry, finance,

schools, councils, and the State itself—with the spirit of Christ. Something has indeed been done since the time—more than a generation ago—when Mrs. Lynn Linton wrote *Joshua Davidson.* There is a fairer and a juster spirit abroad. All classes have been penetrated by a desire to help. But we want the seeing eye, and the understanding heart, and the strength, the courage, and the sacrifices of the self-renouncing will, ere the immortal Love with which God dowered humanity shall triumph over moral selfishness and sin.

V.—Dickens' *Hard Times* and the Law of Service.

"*Hard Times*," says Mr. Ruskin, "is, in several respects, the greatest work which Dickens has written." Dickens, like many other novelists, occasionally spoils the effect of his work by over-exaggeration and caricature, "but," continues Mr. Ruskin, "he is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions." That dictum, coming from a master of literature like Ruskin, comes with all the force of authority. There have been greater novelists

than Dickens, but there has not been one who has brought more of the Christ-Spirit into his stories, pictures, and delineations of human life. Where, in modern literature, shall we find more of that spirit than in the Christmas stories—*The Christmas Carol, The Cricket on the Hearth*, and in *Bleak House, David Copperfield, Martin Chuzzlewit, The Old Curiosity Shop*, and many another?

There are four or five books which might be read along with *Hard Times*, in order to get a true and vivid picture of certain aspects of English life in the first half of the nineteenth century. These are Kingsley's *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, Disraeli's *Sybil*, George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, and Carlyle's *Chartism* and *Past and Present*. These books were all concerned, directly or indirectly, with one problem—the problem of bringing a higher righteousness, a deeper and more truly Christian spirit into industry, commerce, education, politics, and all our social life and institutions.

The scene of *Hard Times* is laid in Coketown, a typical manufacturing town in the north of England. "It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. . . . It had an atmosphere of its own, which seemed impervious to the sun's rays—a blur of soot and smoke. . . Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and pailings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam-engines

shone with it, the dresses of the factory-hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoon, but instead of the summer hum of insects it could offer all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels." The streets of Coketown were all very much alike ; the houses were very much alike. It had eighteen chapels and one church. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town hall might have been either. It had schools, in the classroom of one of which the story opens. Thomas Gradgrind, Esquire, the leading retired merchant of Coketown, is on the Board of Managers of one of these schools, and he happens to be paying a visit to the school as the Inspector is conducting the examination. Gradgrind is a man absolutely devoid of imagination,

sentiment, poetry, or fancy. He believes in facts, and only facts. He has columns of statistics at his fingers' ends. He is an intensely practical man, and he regards the children's minds as so many pitchers or vessels to be filled to the brim with facts, without a single grain of sentiment, fancy, poetry, or imagination. This is how the examination is conducted :

"Girl number twenty, you know what a horse is ?"

Girl number twenty curtsies.

"Very well, now let me ask you girls and boys. Would you paper a room with representations of horses ?"

Some say yes; some say no. One boy says he wouldn't paper it at all, he would paint it. But the inspector insists that it must be papered—why wouldn't they paper it with pictures of horses ? "Because," he explains, "because you never see horses walking up and down the sides of a room in reality—in fact. Therefore you are not to

see anywhere what you don't see in fact. Now, I'll try you again," he continued. "Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?"

One little girl, Sissy Jupe, the circus-rider's daughter, ventures a feeble "Yes."

She is asked to stand up.

"So," says the inspector, "you would carpet your room—or your husband's room if you were a grown woman—with representations of flowers, would you? Why would you?"

"If you please, sir," replied the girl timidly, "I am very fond of flowers."

"And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?"

"It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither, if you please, sir. They would be pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy—"

"Ah, but you mustn't fancy," said the inspector. "You are to be regulated and governed by fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact, you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot therefore be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use, for all these purposes, combinations and modifications of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration."

Such was the educational atmosphere of Coketown; and truly, seventy years ago, the educational system of England was not much better than that.

But Thomas Gradgrind, though dominated by a voraciousness for facts, was not entirely without heart, as we shall see. He took into his home, as a sort of general

help and companion to his children, this girl Sissy Jupe, the child of the circus-rider who, about this time, had committed suicide. Mr. Gradgrind's home was very much like Mr. Gradgrind's business and Mr. Gradgrind's school—it was destitute of sentiment and imagination. Mrs. Gradgrind was a weak-minded, selfish woman, engrossed in her own ailments; Louisa, the eldest daughter, had the makings of a good woman in her, but her heart was starved for the want of something which neither father nor mother had given her—affection, sympathy, love; Tom, the son, was a selfish young "whelp," as Dickens calls him, on whom his sister Louisa lavishes all the affection in her nature. Into this household Sissy Jupe, the daughter of the dead circus-rider, is introduced. Sissy, poor and strange as the surroundings of her life have been, has been blessed with a wealth of affection from a loving father and mother, of whom she can hardly speak without tears of reverence and

gratitude. This is a new world to Louisa. Her poor, pining, half-starved heart rebels at the hard facts and dismal realities on which she has been fed all her life, and she longs for a life and a world similar to that which she sees mirrored in the circus-girl's heart.

But hard times are in store for Louisa Gradgrind. The chief friend of her father is Josiah Bounderby, the leading manufacturer of Coketown. Bounderby is a loud, vulgar, egotistic, boastful, unscrupulous man. Gradgrind has integrity and a heart somewhere within him. Bounderby has neither, but he has great wealth. To this man Gradgrind gives his daughter in marriage. Louisa, little more than a girl, tells her father that she has no love for the man, tells Bounderby himself that she has no love for him. But what is love? Mere sentiment. And sentiment is a trumpery, imaginative thing, of no value in the Gradgrind world. The marriage means money to money, and

money is a hard fact, a reality—so Louisa is sacrificed. With no love, no affection for the man she has married—nay, with a growing repulsion towards him—she enters upon her married life with a heart of stone. She does this partly out of affection for her worthless younger brother Tom, who has a situation in Bounderby's counting-house, and whom she can help the more effectually as Bounderby's wife.

Some time after her marriage there appears at Coketown a new candidate for Parliamentary honours in the person of Mr. James Harthouse. Harthouse is a clever, handsome, affable, but somewhat unscrupulous, political adventurer, a polished gentleman of society, the very antithesis in many ways of Josiah Bounderby. He stays with the Bounderbys while wooing the constituency, soon learns the real state of affairs between Bounderby and his wife, and very subtly begins to make love to Mrs. Bounderby. Mrs. Bounderby, still only

twenty, with no knowledge of the ways of the world, and only just beginning to learn the depths of the human heart and its imperative yearnings, longings and needs, is in danger of succumbing to Harthouse's subtle allurements, when something dreadful, and something sublime, happens.

Tom Gradgrind, Louisa's young brother, has developed into a fast young man, has piled up gambling debts, borrowed money in secret from his sister, and, not content with that, has misappropriated large sums from the counting-house. He knows that this misappropriation is sure to be found out in time, so he tries to arrange a sham robbery, throwing suspicion and blame on one of Bounderby's workmen, Stephen Blackpool. This deceitful and hideous plot is all the more shameful in that Stephen, honest as the day, has a load of troubles of his own. He has a wife who has given herself over to drink and made the home

a nightmare of misery for nineteen years. Soddened with drink and half-demented as she is, he has nursed and tended her in her drinking bouts until he begins to despair. He is in trouble, also, with his workmates because, for some reason or other, he will not join the Union ; and he gets into trouble with Bounderby because, although he will not join the Union, he stands by the men and will not peach upon them. Bounderby discharges him, and Stephen, knowing that he cannot now get work in Coketown, arranges to tramp to other towns in search of work. Louisa (Mrs. Bounderby) secretly gives him money to help him on his way. But her brother Tom, full of his plot to throw suspicion of the sham robbery on to some one, invites him to the counting-house on the pretence that he can help him to get work, keeps him dangling about the counting-house and its neighbourhood for two or three hours in the dusk of the evening, waiting for information

from Tom as to possibilities of work in other towns. That same night Tom leaves the safe door open and a false key on the floor of the counting-house, as though a burglary had been committed. Early the same morning Stephen sets out on his tramp in search of work. When the counting-house is opened for the day the open safe is discovered, and the whole town soon rings with the report of the robbery, suspicion being fixed on the absent Stephen, who was seen hanging about the counting-house the night before.

Meanwhile, the understanding between Louisa Bounderby and Harthouse has come to an end. At the last moment Louisa tears herself away from the temptation, and rushes, with heart filled with pent-up passion, fever, and despair, to her father's house. The scene between father and daughter is worth re-reading.

"O father," she says, "how could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable

things that raised it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of the soul? Where are the sentiments of the heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness in my bosom?"

She tells him of the danger through which she has passed, tells him that she hates her husband and can no longer live with him, and that the strife within her heart has almost crushed her better angel and turned it into a demon. "Oh, father, if you had known that there lingered in my breast sensibilities, affections, weaknesses, capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is, would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate? I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him. I knew, and you knew, and he knew that I never did."

Gradgrind bows his head before her. The scales are beginning to fall from his eyes. As his daughter falls unconscious at his feet he realises what a failure his "practical" system of education has been. Louisa is nursed back to life and health by the circus-rider's daughter, Sissy Jupe.

Meanwhile, Bounderby has raised the hue and cry for the person of Stephen Blackpool, the supposed burglar of the bank. A reward is offered for information which will lead to his discovery. His friends are confident of his innocence and say that he will come back to disprove the charge as soon as he hears of it. Day after day passes, but there is no sign of Stephen. Young Tom Gradgrind is in a fever of excitement. He knows that he is safe so long as Stephen is out of the way. But during the second week Stephen is discovered. He has heard of the charge against him; but on his way back to Coketown, and within a short distance of the town, he has tumbled down the shaft

of an old disused mine, the edges of which had been covered with overgrown vegetation. For days he remains there unconscious or only partially conscious, until he is discovered and help arrives. When he is hauled to the surface and laid upon the bank the bystanders see that the end is near. It is evening already and the stars are visible. Gradgrind is there. So is Bounderby and many of the mill workers. By Stephen's side is his friend Rachel, one of the factory-workers. His speech is broken, and his mind wanders.

"Aw things are a muddle," he says, "fro' first to last a muddle. I ha' fell into th' pit as have cost within the knowledge o' old folk now livin' hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives—fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an' thousands, an' keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. The men ha' pray'n and pray'n the law-makers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefolk loves theirs."

Then his mind wanders again, and comes back to his surroundings.

"When I fell in," he says, "I were in anger wi' them as were plotting against me. But in our judgments, like as in our doin's, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain and trouble, lookin' up yonder, wi' t' stars shinin' on me, I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom together more, an' get a better unnerstan'in' o' one another, than when I were in it my own weak seln."

Then he asks for Gradgrind.

"Sir," he says, "yo will clear me an' mak my name good wi' aw men. This I leave to yo. Yor son will tell yo how. Ask him. I mak no charges: I leave none ahint me: not a single word. I ha' seen an' spok'n wi' yor son, one night. I ask no more o' yo than that yo clear me—an' I trust to yo to do it."

Then, looking up at a particularly bright star: "Often, as I coom to myseln, and

found it shinin' on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!"

Shortly afterwards he passes away. Young Tom Gradgrind clears out of the country as quickly as he can. Bounderby is soon afterwards publicly exposed for the hypocritical bully he is. Louisa goes home to live with her father, and to bring a little happiness and love into his now shadowed life. Gradgrind himself, a sad and white-haired old man, goes back to his facts and statistics and scientific abstractions, determined to mingle with them a little more sentiment, a little more of Faith, Hope, and Love. The bright angel of the story, who stands for the poetry and imagination of the Heart against the stern facts and realities of a sordid industrialism, is Sissy Jupe, the strolling player's and circus-rider's daughter.

What is the lesson once more? It is surely the lesson taught so well by Lowell

in his poem—"The Vision of Sir Launfal." Sir Launfal goes forth proudly from his castle gate to search for the Holy Grail; and as he passes through, a leper crouches before him and begs an alms, and Sir Launfal, in scorn and loathing, tosses him a piece of gold. But what is gold to a leper with whom none will hold commerce? Sir Launfal goes on his way, travels through far-off lands, and is himself reduced to the extremes of suffering, privation, and misery. Coming back, worn out, aged, and purified by his own suffering, he meets again the leper at the castle gate who cries again: "For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms;" and Sir Launfal remembers in what haughtier way and guise before "He had flung an alms to leprosie," but now,

> "He parted in twain his single crust,
> He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
> And gave the leper to eat and drink.
> And lo! The leper no longer crouched at his side,
> But stood beside him glorified,

> Saying, "The Holy Supper is kept indeed
> In whatso we share with another's need;
> Not what we give but what we share,
> For the gift without the giver is bare."

That is the Law of Service, and it is the Law of all our life, religious, political, social, educational. In so far as our life is helpful at all it must be guided by this Christian Law of Service, the Law, that is, that whatever we give—if our gift is to be of a fruitful and serviceable nature—it must also carry with it part of ourself, our life, our spirit—that is, our patience, our endeavours to understand, our sympathy, our time, our energy, our thought, for it is by these things that we truly live and become more deeply "members one of another." Gradgrind's whole life and system was a failure because he neglected this great truth—all his gifts were material, mechanical, unaccompanied by life, spirit, sympathy, or affection. Sissy Jupe's life, poor and ignorant as she was, was a success, because, unconsciously, love and

tenderness, sympathy and affection, exhaled from her nature. Is not this the great drawback of much of our charitable and educational work—that it is too hard, institutional, and mechanical? We give our money, and then appoint our paid helpers to do our work for us. That will not do. It is difficult to suggest a remedy, save in those Guilds of Help which have been started in some German and English towns, where each street and district has its set of helpers, and every case of sickness, want, or suffering is immediately reported to the street or district committee and *personal* help and attention given. That, surely, is what we want if Christian service and brotherhood is to be anything more than a name. And—what is more—every nurse and every teacher of the young ought to pass an examination, not only of the head, but of the heart.

Another thing that is necessary to the effectiveness of this Law of Service, and

which Sissy Jupe possessed in a high degree, is this—the spiritual imagination which will enable us to put ourselves in others' places. If we have not that, then our service, like Gradgrind's, is likely to be blind and unhelpful. If we have it, it will make many things plain to us. It will give us a deeper sense of justice. It will give us, also, a tenderer patience and a deeper understanding of each others' needs. It will teach us to make allowance. As Stephen Blackpool said in broken words, when he was taken out of the old mine shaft: "In our judgments, like as in our doin's, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain and trouble I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom together more, an' get a better unnerstan'in' o' one another."

Hard Times was written expressly to mitigate the terrible effects of the factory system and to modify the mechanical stupidities of our educational system; but

really it contains a lesson for all time—the lesson that, as Ruskin says, "there is no Wealth but Life, Life with all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others." Yes, that is the Law of Service, and it is the deep and central fact in Christianity—nay, in any religion worth the name. For religion is not dogma, it is not ritual, it is not a selfish concern for the saving of one's own soul; it is rather the breaking down of the bonds of the lower self until the higher self, the diviner part of our nature, commands our thought and will, and slowly permeates our whole life. True social service is that also. And the truer and wider it is, the wider does our own life

become, until we feel that it would be a sin to monopolise or enjoy anything which cannot be enjoyed by each and all in so far as they have the capacity to enjoy it. Thus does personality deepen and widen until it includes, like the love of Christ, a love for all. This is the heart of religion, all else is husk and shard.

Let us, then, mingle with our hard dry-as-dust Commerce, Industry, Law and Politics, a little more Faith, Hope, and Love, a little more, everywhere, of the refining graces of Art and Music, of Poetry and Imagination, until each one of us, from the lowliest to the greatest, shall have the opportunity, as Ruskin urges, of perfecting the functions of his or her own life to the utmost and of being a widely helpful influence over the lives of others. That is the Law of Service. It teaches us to " bear one another's burdens." It makes us realise more deeply that " we are members one of another." It gives us " more abundant

life." It teaches us the meaning of the great saying: "Inasmuch as ye have done these things unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done them unto Me."

VI.—Oliver Wendell Holmes' *Elsie Venner* and the Law of Heredity.

Elsie Venner, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, has for its central theme one of those problems which, since the dawn of human existence, have perplexed and baffled the human mind—a problem which brings vividly before us the mystery of all life. It embraces nearly all other problems—disease, sin, temperament, undeserved suffering, genius, our relation to the Author of all life, and the degree of our personal responsibility for our thoughts and deeds. What are the mysterious spiritual influences which go to the making of the human soul? Where do those influences begin? To

what extent has the individual control over them? What are the laws of spiritual chemistry which regulate the mixing of souls? And do these laws control us? Or have we any control over them? These questions go to the very roots of religion and philosophy. On our answer to them will depend our religious outlook on the world, our moral strength and aspiration, our educational methods and activities, our judgments upon our fellow-men, and, if we agree with Omar Khayám, our judgment of God.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, both as a medical man and as a rambling philosopher, lived somewhat before his time. That is why his books are still fresh to-day, still well worth reading. As a medical man he had many opportunities for studying the facts and phenomena continually presented by the operation of the law of heredity, and some of these phenomena he gives in *Elsie Venner*. The study of biology and of heredity has made immense strides

since Holmes's day, but the fundamental problems arising out of these studies remain ever the same.

The story, or plot of the novel if it can be called a plot, is very slight. The story virtually opens at the Pigwacket Centre School where a young man, Bernard Langdon, fresh from college, has just been appointed schoolmaster. He finds himself confronting a rebellious boys' school, led by a brawny bully of a youth much heavier and apparently stronger than himself. The question has to be decided which shall be master—the bully, or Bernard. I commend to teachers the interesting chapter in which that question is settled—it may be of use to them in dealing with similar bullies.

From Pigwacket Bernard goes to a place called Rocklands, as English master of the "Apollinean Institute"—a high school for young ladies. At this school he meets Elsie Venner, a girl of singular but peculiar beauty, who seems to possess some strange power

over her teacher, Miss Darley, and some of her fellow pupils. Indeed, Elsie is an extraordinary creature altogether. Her mother is dead. Her father still lives, but seems oppressed by some great sorrow. He has little or no influence over Elsie. He gets governesses for her, but none of them stay long. The only persons who seem to be able to influence her are Sophy, her old slave-nurse, and Dr. Kittredge. She is a wild, restless, rambling creature, often out in the woods or on the mountains, climbing almost inaccessible peaks and gorges, one of which, called Rattlesnake Ledge, so-called from its being the haunt of snakes, she especially frequents. One afternoon Bernard Langdon climbed the mountain, succeeded in reaching Rattlesnake Ledge, and entered one of the caves there. Ere he got far in he was startled by "the glitter of two diamond eyes, sharp, small, cold, shining out of the darkness, but gliding with a smooth, steady motion towards him." It was a large

crotalus or rattlesnake, which paralyzes before it strikes. Bernard was half-paralyzed. He could hardly move. He waited, as in a trance, as for a blow to fall; then the eyes began to recede, and he felt close to his ear a gentle breathing. Half-turning, he saw the face of Elsie Venner beside his own, looking motionless into the reptile's eyes, which shrank away from the stronger power of her own.

Another recreation of which Elsie was passionately fond was the Spanish or Moorish fandango dance. She would catch up her castanets, and rattle them with a kind of passionate frenzy and cadence as she danced, "her lithe body undulating with flexuous grace, her diamond eyes glittering, her round arms wreathing and unwinding, alive and vibrant to the tips of the fingers. Some passion seemed to exhaust itself in this dancing paroxysm; for all at once she would reel from the middle of the floor, and fling herself, as it were in a careless coil, upon a

great tiger's skin in one corner of her apartment," and there fall gently to sleep.

The root cause of the peculiar and passionate temperament of this strange girl was this—While she was yet unborn, and but a short time before her birth, her mother was bitten by a *crotalus*, or rattlesnake, with terrible consequences to the mother. When the child, Elsie Venner, is born, she has not only the mark of the bite upon her body but, as she develops, she has something of the instincts and the nature of the snake in her habits, her passions, her very soul; and, as she matures, all the beauty, the affection, and the innate love and tenderness of womanhood mingles and struggles with the hateful poisonous nature of the reptile, which breaks out in strange, eerie ways, and vents itself in abnormal tastes and passions.

It is this girl Elsie Venner, grown to womanhood, who falls in love with the schoolmaster Bernard Langdon. Bernard, perhaps fortunately for himself, does not

return her love. The one person who does love her—partly for herself, partly for her prospective dowry—is her cousin Dick Venner, a wild, impetuous, self-willed, unscrupulous young fellow who has been out in the Far West, and who does not stick at trifles in trying to gain his ends. Dick soon finds out that Bernard Langdon, the schoolmaster, is in his way, though Bernard is all unconscious of the fact. But Elsie's thoughts are evidently full of Bernard, while Dick her cousin, who is a visitor in the house, finds himself neglected. He taunts her with her secret love for Bernard Langdon, and Elsie, driven to exasperation by his taunts, determines, in one of those fits of passion which sometimes overcome her, to poison her cousin. Dick, however, is on his guard, and he frustrates her purpose. He decides, however, that the schoolmaster must be removed if he is to gain his end, and he determines to remove him in such a way that it will seem as though the schoolmaster had

committed suicide. He decides to lasso him —one of the riding tricks practised by cowboys in the far West—then hang him up while unconscious on the branch of a tree. This cold-blooded attempt fails. Dick is unhorsed, his trick exposed, and he speedily clears out of the country.

Elsie however is no nearer her heart's desire. Torn by conflicting moods and feelings she decides to confess her love to Bernard himself. She does so. "I have no friend," she says to him, "people are afraid of me. I have no one to love me in the whole world. Love me!"

It was the tenderest, cruellest moment in Bernard's life. He has to wound.

"I do love you, Elsie," he says, "as a suffering sister with sorrows of her own, as one whom I would save at the risk of my happiness and life, as one who needs a true friend more than any of the young girls I have known. More than this you would not ask me to say. Give me your hand,

dear Elsie, and trust me that I will be as true a friend to you as if we were children of the same mother."

Elsie went home struck to the heart. She shut herself in her room. A strange illness settled upon her and she slowly pined away. Only once did she show signs of passion or delirium—it was when some of her school friends sent her a basket of flowers lined with a layer of the leaves of the white ash. She showed signs of agitation the moment the basket was placed on her bed. And when she took out the flowers and saw the leaves of the white ash, she dashed the basket to the ground and shrank away exhausted and half-paralysed, and ultimately became unconscious. It is a curious fact that the rattlesnake avoids the leaves of this tree as though they were poison to it.

Fortunately, as the body got weaker and death came nearer to her, the strange animal influence seemed to wane and die

away. Her eyes lost their hard glitter, her features assumed a softer and gentler expression, her heart lost its passion, and became more gently and lovably human. It was as though there had been two diverse principles—the animal and the human—warring within her soul; one making her a woman, with all a woman's affections and power of devotion—the other chilling the higher instincts and reversing the true currents of her being. But the higher triumphed; and as the shadow of Death slowly fell upon her, the loving spirit of her mother shone out of her eyes and countenance, and she died with her arms round her father's neck.

The whole story, so well worked out by the author, is an illustration of the mysterious Law of Heredity. And yet, only a partial illustration, for we must remember that the influence of that law is not confined to one generation as in this case; it goes back and back for scores and scores of generations. The blood of millions of ancestors—for we

soon get to millions when we multiply our ancestors, each of us having two parents, four grand-parents, eight great-grand-parents, sixteen great-great-grand-parents and so on—the blood of millions of ancestors, I say, surges through each one of us, and therefore brings its quota, not only physical, but psychical, spiritual, into our very life and soul. You may say that Oliver Wendell Holmes' illustration is an exaggerated and impossible one. Exaggerated, or unusual perhaps, but not impossible. Dr. Holmes tells us in his preface to the story that he had received " the most startling confirmation of the possibility of the existence of a character like that which he had drawn." Every doctor knows, every mother knows, every thoughtful observer knows, that the life of the child, the life of the soul, does not begin here—that it brings with it instincts, spiritual tendencies, qualities, faculties, dim and inchoate aspirations, which began their earthly existence in the lives of unknown

generations of ancestors in the dim morning of the world. It is probably this circumstance which accounts for the mysterious phenomenon of double or multiple personality. Not always

> "Trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home,"

but sometimes trailing clouds of darkness, passion, and misery, which, let us hope, are but a means of spiritual discipline and education by which, through error and suffering, the soul may be restored to its true aim, and so led on to its eternal welfare.

Now, this view of the moral influence of Heredity, which Holmes brings before us so forcibly in *Elsie Venner*, must modify not only our personal and social judgments, our systems of education, our legislation, our criminal code, and our penal institutions—it must modify also our religious opinions, our view of sin, and our outlook towards that future life whither we are all slowly but

surely tending. It must modify our social judgments because, as Oliver Wendell Holmes puts it: "I do not believe in the moral responsibility of born idiots, or that a new-born infant is morally responsible for other people's acts (the consequences of which may have been transmitted to the child). I do not think that a man with a crooked spine will ever be called to account for not walking erect. And if the crook was in his brain instead of his back he could not fairly be blamed for any consequence of this natural defect, whatever lawyers or divines might call it. . . Until we have thoroughly studied reflex nervous action in the bodily system I would not give much for men's judgments of each other's characters. Shut up the robber and defaulter we must, but what if your oldest boy had been stolen from his cradle and bred in a slum? . . . . Restrain the evil-minded from violence promptly, completely, and with the least possible injury; but when you have got rid

of them, or got them tied hand and foot so that they can do no mischief, sit down and contemplate them charitably, remembering that nine-tenths of their perversity comes from outside influences, drunken ancestors, abuse in childhood, bad company, vicious environment, for some of which you, as a member of society, may be fractionally responsible."

So, too, in our personal judgments. We *must* judge. We are bound to judge, in order to frame a proper educational and reformatory policy. But let us always take care that our judgments dip to the side of charity. "If," as Wendell Holmes puts it again, "if, while the will lies sealed in its fountain, it may be poisoned at its very source, so that it shall flow darkly and deadly through its whole course, who are we that we should judge our fellow-creatures by ourselves? If valour and justice and truth, the strength of man and the virtue of woman may be poisoned by the foul air

and darkness of the Christians cooped up in the tenement-houses, close by those who live in the palaces of the great cities"—shall not we, instead of judging harshly those who dwell therein, rather judge our own hearts and put to ourselves the terrible and searching question: What have we done with our brothers? On this point nothing finer can be said than those lines of Burns which I quoted in a previous chapter:

> "Wha made the heart, 'tis He alone
> Decidedly can try us,
> He knows each chord, its various tone,
> Each hue, its various bias,
> Then at the balance let's be mute,
> We never can adjust it,
> What's done we partly may compute,
> But know not what's resisted."

And so, too, in our religious outlook and our judgments of the future life. "Supposing," says Dr. Holmes, "supposing that the Creator allows a person to be born with some evil hereditary or ingrafted organic tendency,

and then puts this person into the hands of teachers incompetent or positively bad, is not what is called sin or transgression of the law necessarily involved in the premises? Is not the Creator bound to guard his children against the ruin which inherited ignorance might entail on them? Would it be fair for a parent to put into a child's hands the title-deeds to all its future possessions, and a bunch of matches? And are not men children—nay, babes—in the eye of Omniscience?" You may get a blow on the head which produces insanity. "How long will it be before we shall learn that for every wound which betrays itself to the sight by a scar, there are a thousand unseen mutilations that cripple, each of them, some one or more of our highest faculties?" How then, can we, as some of our theologians do, lay down our eternal judgments and say that this poor seventy years of life, with all its inherited weaknesses, shall decide our future happiness or misery

for ever? Such a view seems to me to be an insult to God himself. Let us rather say with Madame de Stael: "If we knew all, we should forgive all."

Shall we say, then, that the Law of Heredity takes away all moral freedom of initiative, and with moral freedom all moral responsibility? Not so. With each generation, with each individual life, there is a slight increment of moral force, of moral or spiritual truth, added to the great spiritual deposits of the past. By those accumulating deposits we live. Were it not so, there would be no moral progress whatever. Humanity would be at a standstill. It is we, then, who have to add these increments of moral life, of spiritual truth and power, to the growing life of the past. The apostle Paul was a great man and a very clever controversialist, but one of the weakest parts of his great epistle is where he exclaims in wrestling with this very question: "Hath not the potter a right

over the clay from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" And the answer, as applied to the eternal soul is—In the name of all that is holy and righteous, *NO;* for that would be to enthrone injustice in the heavens. But if, in shaping the pots or vases, the Eternal Potter gives us the power to paint a few delicate lines or flowers on the outer surface of the vase, or to place within the interior even a few withered leaves of hope and aspiration, of sympathy and love, which will send their fragrance into other lives, then we become fellow-workers with the Supreme Will, and slowly mould our life, by ever so little, into harmony with it.

> "O living Will that shall endure
> When all that seems shall suffer shock,
> Rise in the spiritual rock,
> Flow through our deeds and make them pure."

And so, with this view of the Law of

Heredity, the view that we are *conscious* vessels, carrying on and increasing the good of the world—for it is the good that endures—our lives, as Maeterlinck puts it, will become "as a beautiful river, streaming down from the heights and ashine with magnificent glaciers, but which has to pass also through plains and through cities where it receives only poisonous water. For an instant the river is troubled, and we fear lest it shall lose, and never recover again, the image of the pure blue sky that the crystal fountains had lent: the image that seemed its soul, and the deep and limpid expression of its great strength. But if we rejoin it, down yonder, beneath the trees and the woodlands, we shall find that it has already forgotten the foulness of the gutters. It has caught the azure again in its transparent waves, and flows on to the sea as clear as it was on the days when it first smilingly leapt from its source in the mountains." That is a parable indeed; for the source in the

mountains is the Spirit of God, and the river is our own life.

And so, with these ideas of this mysterious Law of Heredity, we can the more heartily and courageously strive to turn it to good account in our lives—for we must ever remember that if it brings to us pain and evil occasionally, it brings to us also all the good we know. Strengthened by this thought, we can daily prepare our souls to meet the strange burdens which Heredity brings; and so prepared, its shadows will become mingled with soft tones of light, and its calamities fall upon us with gentler hand. For ever, both in our individual life and in the life of humanity, goodness beckons to goodness, not only in this vale of Earth, but also over the wider and purer spaces of Eternity.

> "Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide;
> The Form remains, the Function never dies;
> While they, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
> And we, who, in our morn of youth defied

The elements, must vanish; be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent
dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

VII.—Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and the New Conception of Christ.

It must be now more than a quarter of a century since Mrs. Humphry Ward published her famous novel, *Robert Elsmere*. The book is so well known that it would hardly call for treatment in this series did it not bring vividly to our minds many of the questions which are associated with what is called the New Theology. Beliefs, especially religious beliefs, are changing rapidly, and thoughtful people everywhere are asking the searching questions—What *is* the truth? Does an erroneous religious belief affect one's chances of salvation? Or will the

Supreme not make allowance for differences of training, and up-bringing, and surroundings, and spiritual temperament? Why should one man be condemned because he happens to think differently from another on these grave and far-reaching questions on which we all know so little? What relation do we bear to the Supreme Spirit, and what relation does the Supreme bear to us?

These are the questions which are disturbing the minds of thousands of thoughtful people to-day, and it is probably because the book reflects the spiritual experience of a very large number of people that it has been so widely read.

One often hears the objection that novels ought not to deal with such topics, that the purpose interferes with the art, and so they become preachy and tedious rather than interesting. But surely a novel is supposed to give us a picture of Life—and what can be more absorbing, what can be a fitter subject, even for art, than a picture of lives brought

together by the strongest spiritual power that can bind men and women together—the power of Love—and then a picture of those same lives rent and torn asunder by another power almost as strong—the power of religious feeling working diversely in their hearts and minds.

It is difficult to avoid preachiness in such cases, and perhaps Mrs. Humphry Ward occasionally oversteps the line, especially in *Robert Elsmere*. But I think it is an altogether wrong view of art to say that it shall have no purpose except to please. Take our greatest novelists. Surely Dickens had a purpose, and Thackeray had a purpose, and George Eliot and George Meredith had a purpose! The purpose, of course, is, and must be, in a good novel, subordinated to the art. But if the novel or the drama can show us pictures of life that thrill us like great music, if it can make us feel the "depth" as well as "the tumult of the soul," and so give us quietness, inspiration,

strength, and steadfastness in our life, then its purpose is accomplished, whatever subject it may deal with.

The central figure in the book is, of course, Robert Elsmere. He is the son of an English clergyman, ardent, enthusiastic, warm-hearted. In due course he proceeds to Oxford with the object of following in his father's footsteps and taking orders in the English church. While at Oxford he comes under the influence of two very remarkable men, Edward Langham—at once a scholar, a critic, a dreamer, a cynic, a pessimist, and a thorough sceptic; and the other, Henry Grey, who is supposed to stand for Thomas Hill Green, many years ago Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, and who, in his time, was one of the strongest and most formative forces in English University life. Grey himself had been intended for the ministry, but had given up this intention because he could not conscientiously accept the creeds. Elsmere, however,

sees no difficulty. He throws himself with enthusiasm into his work, and looks forward to a useful career in the Church. His friend Langham, the sceptic, tells him he "may as well preach a respectable mythology as anything." Shortly after his college course is over, a breakdown in health leads him to spend a holiday in the Lake District of Cumberland and Westmoreland. There he meets the heroine of the story, Catherine Leyburn, the daughter of a scholarly but somewhat narrow recluse of the evangelical type. Catherine has inherited all her father's devout strictness and narrowness of religious view, but, at the same time, she is possessed of a heroic and devout spirit, of singular purity and moral force, capable of any depth of self-sacrifice to which her narrow ideal may call her. Upon Robert Elsmere, Catherine's beauty, purity, and moral fervour exercise a singular fascination, and ultimately these two, both deeply and intensely religious by

nature, both professing the same religion and looking upon it as the thing of supremest value in their life, bind themselves together for good or ill.

They then move to their new home in the parish of Murewell, Surrey, where Robert begins his ministerial work, throwing himself into the life of the village, and doing everything he can to brighten and uplift the dull intellectual and social life of the people. The squire of the village, however, the owner of Murewell Hall, happens to be one of the greatest scholars, as well as the greatest sceptic, of his time. He is also the author of one or two notable books which had sent a thrill, almost of horror, through the narrow and more exclusive circles of the religious world. With this man Robert is brought into almost daily contact. The Squire lends him books from his magnificent library—critical and historical treatises which are shaking the foundations of current thought. At the

same time Darwin's books are being published, and the theory of evolution comes almost as a new revelation to minds which have been slowly preparing, as it were, for the assimilation of new ideas. Elsmere finds that his theological course at Oxford has been a superficial training according to certain text books, not a course of deep thinking. His conversations with the Squire, a profound scholar and one of the ablest and most radical intellects in Europe, tend to undermine the very foundations of his previous beliefs. The two men thrash out the whole subject—the question of the authenticity of the Pentateuch and the Gospels; the growth of tradition and legend in the early church ; the myths of the miraculous Incarnation and Resurrection; the rise of the Catholic Church with its miracles; and the after movements of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. These discussions, backed up by a course of historic and scientific reading, sweep like a

dry and devastating wind over Elsmere's soul. His sermons are as eloquent and earnest as ever, as though he were trying to retain by passionate assertion his former faith. His religious antecedents, his love for his wife, all the old threads of character and association, tend to throw him back again and again into the old and loved beliefs. Slowly, however, through months of mental conflict and anguish, the bulwarks of his faith—the miraculous Incarnation, the Resurrection, miracles, the Bible as an infallible Revelation—all are swept away, and he compels himself to face the stern reality.

"Do I believe in God?" he asks himself. "Surely, surely, 'though he slay me yet will I trust in him.'" "Do I believe in Christ?" "Yes, in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol to us Westerns of all things heavenly and abiding, the image and pledge of the invisible life of the Spirit—I believe in this with all my soul and all my mind." . . . . "But in the man-God, the Word from Eternity, in a

wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus, in the living Intercessor and Mediator for the lives of his doomed brethren?" To that question his conscientious spirit, strong as ever within him, is obliged to answer "No;" and "in the stillness of his room there rose weirdly before him a whole new mental picture, effacing, pushing out, innumerable older images of thought. It was the image of a purely human Christ, a purely human, explicable, yet always wonderful, Christianity. He gazed upon it fascinated, the anguish underneath checked awhile by the strange beauty and order or the emerging spectacle. Only a little while. Then, with a groan, Elsmere looked up, his eyes worn with long night-study and anxiety, his lips white and set. 'I must face it. I must face it through. God help me!'" Then comes the thought of his wife. He hardly dare shock and pain her delicate and sensitive spiritual organisation

with what must seem to her the darkest catastrophe of her life. So he pays a hurried visit to Oxford to consult his old tutor, Henry Grey. Grey himself had been through a similar experience, and had come out of it with the same conclusions that Elsmere had now reached. He advises Robert to tell his wife everything, at once, and rely upon her love to sustain him in his mental conflict. " Take heart," he says, " it is the education of God. He is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is a pure and honest doubt. Reason is God's like the rest. Trust it, and trust Him. All things change, but God remains."

Elsmere goes back to Murewell, and then follows that scene with his wife, which is worth re-reading, in which they are both crushed by the conflict of religious feeling and by the fear that they will lose each other's love. For a time Catherine is prostrate, and he fears that the change may lead to a life-long

estrangement. He remembered Monica (the mother of St. Augustine) doubting whether she ought to live in the same house, or eat at the same table, with her son, because of his then heretical opinions; he called to mind Cardinal Newman's disowning all ties of kinship with his younger brother because of a difference in religious belief; and how in other lives husband and wife, or father and son, or sister and brother, have been divided in bitterness and sorrow by the narrowness of theologies and creeds.

And, indeed, Catherine is tempted to leave him—she cannot bear the thought of his heresy, his supposed infidelity, perhaps the wreck of his soul in the future life as well as in this. Before her marriage she had said to her sister Rose: "I could never marry a man that did not believe in Christ, to me it would not be marriage." Indeed she sets out to leave him. But love triumphs over even saintly fanaticism, and she confesses to him afterwards—

"I was afraid of losing my own faith, of denying Christ. It was a nightmare—I saw myself on a long road, escaping with our little one in my arms. Oh! Robert! it was not only for myself. I was agonised by the thought that I was not my own—I and my child were Christ's. And then, and then," she said sobbing, "I don't know how it was. One moment I was sitting up looking straight before me, without a tear, thinking of what was the least I must do, even—even—if you and I stayed together—of all the hard compacts and conditions I must make—judging you all the while from a long, long distance, and feeling as though I had buried the old self, sacrificed the old heart—for ever! And the next I was lying on the ground crying for you, Robert, crying for you! Your face had come back to me as you lay there in the early morning light. I thought how I had kissed you—how pale and grey and thin you looked. Oh, how I loathed myself! That I should think it

could be God's will that I should leave you, or torture you, my poor husband! I had not only been wicked towards you—I had offended Christ. I could think of nothing as I lay there—again and again—but *Little children, love one another; little children, love one another.* Oh, my beloved"—and she looked up with the solemnest, tenderest smile breaking upon the marred, tear-stained face,—"I will never give up hope, I will pray for you night and day. God will bring you back. You cannot lose yourself so. No, no! His grace is stronger than our wills. But I will not preach to you—I will not persecute you—I will only live beside you—in your heart—and love you always. Oh, how could I—how could I have such thoughts!'

"And again she broke off, weeping, as if to the tender torn heart the only crime that could not be forgiven was its own offence against love. As for him he was beyond

speech. If he had ever lost his vision of God, his wife's love would that moment have given it back to him.

"'Robert,' she said presently, urged on by the sacred yearning to heal, to atone, 'I will not complain—I will not ask you to wait. I take your word for it that it is best not, that it would do no good. The only hope is in time—and prayer. I must suffer, dear, I must be weak sometimes; but oh, I am so sorry for you! Kiss me, forgive me, Robert; I will be your faithful wife unto our lives' end.'"

And so they live on together—the husband a Liberal in religion, a virtual Unitarian, a supposed heretic; the wife, with her saintly devotion, wrung to the heart and trying daily to win him back to her narrower faith by prayer.

Elsmere resigns his living, cuts himself aloof from the church and all its old associations, starts a new religious movement in a crowded working-class district in East

London, and establishes a people's church, and library, and evening classes there.

Perhaps one of the best scenes in the book is a description of a meeting of working men, free-thinkers, and nothingarians—men who, though earnest enough in their way, had been taught to cast ridicule on Christ, and God, and the Bible, a meeting at which Elsmere tries to get them to realise the incomparable beauty and pathos of the life of the Galilean carpenter. He begins by telling them that he believes in God; in Conscience, as God's witness in the Soul; and in Experience, as God's method of education; "in an Eternal Goodness and an Eternal Mind—of which Nature and Man are the continuous and the only revelation." Then he shows them the place of great men in the revelation, and in the development of mankind; how, in their lives, the noblest thoughts of God, of duty, and of law are embodied for the education of, and imitation by, mankind. Then he comes to the place

of Jesus in this revelation of man, Jesus the supreme lover of men; to the simple life in Galilee; the preachings at Nazareth and Capernaum and by Lake Gennesaret; the permanence and expansiveness of the central conception of Jesus—the universalized kingdom of God, and God as spiritual father of all; his homely yet beautiful parables, his denunciation of the Pharisees, the formalists, and the worshippers of Mammon; his last journey to Jerusalem; his conflict with the priesthood; and then the Judgment Hall, the trial, the scourging, the place of the last torture, and the final and despairing cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

> "Far hence he lies,
> In the lorn Syrian town;
> And on his grave, with shining eyes,
> The Syrian stars look down."

Then he showed how, out of the very devotion of Christ's followers, mingled with the imagination and ignorance of the time, there

were begotten those exquisite fables of the bodily Resurrection and the Ascension, how those very fables have taken the place of the spiritual reality, how the Church has disfigured and misrepresented the *true* Jesus of Nazareth, and how mankind must return to that spiritual reality, how the Spirit of Jesus must be boin again, and rise anew in our hearts to transform and transmute them, and uplift our lives above a sluggish and complacent religiosity. It is the re-conception of Christ, so that, instead of being a dead idol, he may become a living Spirit in our hearts.

The rest is soon told. Elsmere obtains a marvellous influence over the men among whom he has now cast his life. But Catherine, though still devoted to him, is still half estranged. At first she will not attend his services in the new church. She prays for him daily, and her heart goes back to the time when her father had trained her young spirit to resist all tendencies towards Rationalism. Then Robert's health breaks

down. While away at the sea-side he risks his life to save that of an old bath-house keeper from drowning. The subsequent shock and chill develop a serious lung trouble. By this time Catherine herself is moved to a deeper tenderness and repentance before his noble self-sacrifice. Her eyes are opened, and she breaks down before her husband with piteous self-accusation:

"You were right—I would not understand, and, in a sense—I shall never understand. I cannot change. But I know now that my Lord is your Lord too. 'It is the spirit that quickeneth.' I have dared to think that God had but one language—the one I knew. I have dared to condemn your faith as no faith. But, oh! take me back into your life. I will learn to hear the two voices: the voice that speaks to me, and the voice that speaks to you!" So the two are united in spirit once more. The lung trouble however is too serious to be checked. Elsmere goes to Algiers, and there, slowly,

the end comes. As he lies waiting for death he gives utterance to words and thoughts which must surely have often passed through our own minds.

"I often lie here," he said to his friend Hugh Flaxman, "wondering at the way in which men become the slaves of some metaphysical word—*personality*, or *intelligence*, or what not! What meaning can they have as applied to *God?* Herbert Spencer is quite right. We no sooner attempt to define what we mean by a personal God than we lose ourselves in labyrinths of language and logic. But why attempt it at all? I like that French saying: 'When it is demanded of me—what is it that you call God?—I feel how ignorant I am of Him. But when no question is asked about Him, then, in the silence of the heart, I feel that I know Him very well.' No, we cannot realise Him in words—we can only live in Him, and die to Him."

Catherine returns to London after Robert's

death, almost broken-hearted. Every Sunday morning, with her child beside her, she worships in the old ways. Every Sunday afternoon saw her black-veiled figure sitting motionless in a corner of the Elgood Street Hall — Elsmere's new church. She had learnt that great lesson which, as Mrs. Humphry Ward says, is the epoch-making fact of our day—to dissociate the moral judgment from a special series of religious formulae or a special form of religious belief; that is, not to think any the worse of a man because of his theological or metaphysical creed. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "He that doeth the will shall know the doctrine;" and the book ends with the lines: "His effort was but a fraction of the effort of the race. In that effort, and in the Divine force behind it, is our trust, as was his.

'Others I doubt not, if not we,
The issue of our toils shall see;
And (they forgotten and unknown)
Young children gather as their own
The harvest that the dead had sown.'"

What, then, are the lessons of this most interesting book? First, there is the very obvious lesson, so obvious that I need not dwell upon it, that character is of more importance than creed, life of greater consequence than formal beliefs. Doubt, wherever it is sincere, is the education of the spirit. No one can read the story of Robert and Catherine Elsmere without feeling that on these large questions of religion —God, Christ, Miracles, Church Order and Ceremonial, Biblical Infallibility—men must be allowed the absolute right of personal conscientious judgment, without any bitterness, or ill-feeling, or social or religious condemnation. Life is robbed of its sweetness when men set up their own judgments, or the judgments of a church, as infallible, and then, if these are rejected, indulge in personal bitterness, hatred, or even grief at what they call the sin or heresy of others. The old cry "Unbelief is sin" must pass into oblivion. Indeed, unbelief sometimes may be a virtue

and a duty, for, as Mrs. Ward well says, "The Saint in the unbeliever belies the cry that unbelief is sin, and in the heretic of yesterday men see the rightful heir of to-morrow." Let us not fear to exercise our own judgment, reason, and conscience, for these are God-given faculties. But be careful indeed in the formation of your judgment. Try the conclusions of reason at every point. And take care that you do not narrow your conscience to the point at which it embitters your judgment. That done, fear nothing. Trust your best instincts, let come what will. And for the rest, go onward to your goal, whatever it be, with the consciousness that you have obeyed the highest within you.

This, then, is the second lesson that *Robert Elsmere* teaches,—the lesson that whatever faith or form of religion we hold we must make it our very own—we must pass it through the crucible of our own reason, moral sense, and understanding. That is, we have no right to

give ourselves over, body and soul, into the hands of a supposed infallible authority, whether it be the authority of a book, a creed, or a church. The only authority is the authority of the human soul, out of which come bibles, creeds, and churches, and which, educated, corrected, and purified by the experience of the race, gives us a guiding light for the future. Here is, indeed, a sphere in which authority has, and ought to have, influence over us. On a matter of science, for example, of which we may know nothing, the authority of the man of science rightfully has weight. Or on a matter of history, the historian who has made a special study of the facts has weight also. But this kind of authority is always recognised as provisional, never infallible. It is based upon knowledge and experience; and if new knowledge and wider experience disprove the conclusions of the scientist or the historian, they themselves would ask us to reject or revise those conclusions. But the authority claimed by the priest or the

Church is a different matter. It is an authority which claims to stand between man and God, between the soul and its Maker. "Believe this," it virtually says, "or you are lost." And so, Biblical marvels, childish philosophies of the universe, ecclesiastical rites and forms, puerile conceptions of God and heaven, and narrow ideals of human duty, take the place of the simple but strenuous religion of Jesus—the religion of the conscience and the heart, working out, in the process of education by experience, in new ideals of duty and new forms of love. But now, in the clear light of science, aided by a purified conscience, a wider knowledge, and an imagination chastened by the exercise of the critical reason, "the old order changeth giving place to new;" and men are beginning to recognise that not merely in churches and in priesthoods, not merely in rites and forms, but in "the unbroken sequences of nature, in the physical history of the world, in the long evolution and history of man, physical,

intellectual, moral . . . in that unvarying and rational order of the world which has been the appointed instrument of man's training since life and thought began—there lies the [*true*] revelation of God." *

But—and this is the third and greatest lesson of *Robert Elsmere*—we misread or misinterpret history and human nature altogether if we suppose that, because *forms* of religion decay and pass away, religion itself is of no account, or that, as so many are saying nowadays, churches and religious organisations are only fit for women and children, and that we can ignore the great underlying and over-arching forces which guide, and guard, and inspire our life—God, Nature, Spirit, Destiny. These forces and ideas remain; nay, they become more mysterious and more wonderful as they are stripped of the superstitions and the miracle-worship of the past. We recognise that *we are part of* those forces—fellow-workers

* *Robert Elsmere*, p. 494, 17th edition.

with God—nay, sons of God, like Jesus, by the truth which He made universal, marching towards a common destiny and thrilled by a common consciousness of fellowship and comradeship in service. And we recognise also that we can only become one with these diviner forces of the universe, in so far as we realise our divine sonship and take our part in this forward march of humanity, a march in which, as Matthew Arnold says, " God marshals the hosts and gives them their goal." On this view of nature and of religion Life becomes enriched with possibilities, the religious spirit becomes deeper, and our responsibilities become thereby enlarged. Did Robert Elsmere become less religious, less strenuous, less earnest, when he had given up the conception of a vengeful man-god, and salvation by miracle, and puerile conceptions of heavenly bliss ? On the contrary, he threw himself with greater ardour and devotion into the spread of his new ideas. He saw that a *true* Catholic Church is all the

more a necessity ; that the religious spirit in man will ever remain unshaken ; that mankind, if it is to become morally and spiritually perfect, must continue to live by "admiration, hope, and love."

In every change of faith there is, I know, pain and struggle. That is the penalty of progress. The Pagan women felt it when they gave up their dead gods for the invisible Spirit of Love which the early Christians preached to them. The early Protestants felt it as they thought of the beautiful services of the old Catholic Church—services which were bound up with the dearest memories of their childhood. Many to-day feel it, as they look back on the faith which teaches them to seek salvation through the sacrifice of Christ's blood, rather than, as Jesus Himself taught, by the strenuousness of their own endeavour and the purity of their own moral life. But that pain and struggle of change once passed, Life takes on a deeper meaning. Sacrifice is seen to be a spiritual thing.

God and the soul become words of more sacred import, and our very ideas and conceptions expand and enlarge, and are tinged with a wonderful and sacred beauty. The soul itself becomes more receptive to all finer influences round about us, and the cold, pulseless habit of formal religious worship is transformed into a breathing, earnest, purposeful life. Hence, I say, if through indifference, or faithlessness, or selfishness, or a shallow view of religion and the world, we cut ourselves aloof from the religious spirit or religious organisations, we tend to crush the very finest part of our nature and virtually commit spiritual suicide. We set ourselves apart as it were—though only for a time, for God will not forever allow the spirit to dwell in selfish isolation—we set ourselves apart from all that is noblest and best in human life. The great lesson of *Robert Elsmere* goes directly in the teeth of such a shallow philosophy. It teaches that we are instruments in the great

Workman's hands—at once the instruments and the helpers of a Goodness, a Will, an Influence, which is not our own, which is above us and around us, and for which we would die rather than be untrue to its behests. In that faith—too sublime to be put into words—a faith which we must *feel* before we can realise its power—we must live and work, changing our inner life from darkness into light, from unbelief and hatred into sympathy and love, until, embodying these master-forces of the world in a life of active righteousness, we break the bars and limitations of the lower self and rise to the purer and holier freedom of a more perfect spiritual life.

VIII.—James Lane Allen's *The Increasing Purpose* and the Law of Development.

Mr. James Lane Allen, the American novelist, is one of those writers who may be said to have brought a mountain air of freshness and purity into the somewhat turbid atmosphere of modern imaginative literature. There is nothing sensational in his work. So far from leaving, as so much of our modern literature does, a nasty taste in one's mouth, or a sense of morbid excitement, or of intellectual weariness, his books are wholly and thoroughly pure, healthy, and inspiring. His earlier book, *The Choir Invisible*, possessed these qualities in a very

high degree. No one could get up from the reading of that story without being lifted for the moment into a purer moral and spiritual atmosphere. And there is this further advantage in reading Mr. Lane Allen's books—he brings a freshness of method to the treatment and interpretation of the joys and sorrows of life. That freshness of method consists partly in the fine and sympathetic study of scenes and phases of the outer life of Nature. Dickens, and George Eliot, and George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy, and Mrs. Humphry Ward have also done that, but hardly with the fulness of detail and the deep sympathy of spirit which Mr. Lane Allen shows. His books may almost as well be called studies of Nature, as studies of life.

The Increasing Purpose for example, begins with sixteen pages of description of the sowing, the growth, the blossoming, the cutting, the rotting, the drying, and the

breaking of the hemp—all the seasons entering into its creation—the secret activities of spring time, the fierce heat of summer, the sobbing winds of autumn, the biting frosts of winter—before it is fit for service: "type, too, of our life," says the author, "which also is earthsown, earth-rooted, which must struggle upwards, be cut down, rotted and broken, ere the separation take place between our dross and our worth—poor perishable shard, and immortal fibre. Oh, the mystery, the mystery of that growth, from the casting of the soul, as a seed, into the dark earth, until the time when, led through all natural changes, and cleansed of weakness, it is borne from the fields of its nativity for the long service."

The story part of the book begins with a scene in which an old Kentucky pioneer, in a primitive church on the border of the backwoods of America, passionately and contemptuously defends himself from the

charge of heresy, shakes the dust of the church off his feet, and vows to build a church—not, as he says, to any man's opinions about God, but to God alone—a church which shall stand "free to all Christian believers, where any child may be free to learn and any man or woman free to worship."

Then the story moves on some sixty-five years, to the time immediately following the Civil War in America, and a great-grandson of this same sturdy old pioneer becomes the hero of the book. Times have changed. The lands of the original owner have been divided and sub-divided, and these particular descendants find themselves beset with all the sordidness and hopelessness of poverty. The father and mother have degenerated somewhat from the type of the old pioneer, but their son, David, seems to be the embodiment of one of those freaks of heredity with which Nature seems to mock our theories and systems—

now producing generation after generation and descendant after descendant of the ordinary type of manhood or womanhood, then harking back to secret and suspended activities for the perpetuation of an ancient and interrupted type; or throwing out for the sake of experiment, as it were, dim prototypes of the future—a Buddha, a Jesus, or a Mahomet, whom their own generation, in the foolishness of *its* wisdom, denounces and persecutes as fanatics and visionaries.

The parents, in this case, cannot understand their taciturn and peculiar son; the son, as he grows to maturity, feels himself out of sympathy with the parents. But they have this at least in common. They are all possessed by the deep religiousness of their Puritan neighbours and ancestors. So when it is announced that a new university is about to be opened at Lexington, to which a Bible College is attached, and when their son David, fired by a long felt secret ambition, expresses his determination

to enter the college and study as a minister, the hearts of both parents are filled with surprise and joy. At last, they think, David is about to justify their early hopes. Nay, more, his success, as a minister may help to lift them out of their sordid poverty, enable them to extend their holding, and so help them to regain that position amongst their neighbours once held by their more prosperous ancestors. And so the father and mother economise, and David does the work of two ordinary men, in order to scrape together sufficient funds to pay the bare expenses of his college career. To be a minister, an ordained servant of God—that, to their minds, is a calling than which there is none more sacred upon earth! From that hour David sets himself to the work of mental preparation. The Bible becomes his daily study, and the universe, as pictured by the Bible, the boundary line and determinant of all his thinking. That primitive universe of the early Hebrews—the earth the centre

of all things, with heaven above and hell beneath; sun, moon, and stars moving, as was supposed, in their respective paths around the earth; the seasons, the clouds, the ocean, the great laws of nature stopping their action or moving more quickly in obedience to man's prayers—this was the primitive thought-universe, all made for man, in which he lived, and moved, and had his being, and which conditioned all his thinking.

After two years of hard work and home study David entered the Bible College at Lexington, one of the poorest but also one of the most fervent, earnest, and single-minded of its students. He flung himself into the life and studies of the college with all the ardour of an apostle. When he had been there some weeks the Principal of the college announced that he intended to preach a series of sermons on the errors and heresies of the different Protestant sects, and the errors and heresies of the Catholics and the Jews, as he wished the students to get firm

hold of the one and only true form of faith and doctrine, which, of course, was that of his own particular sect.

The sermons were given each Sunday morning, and David made up his mind that each Sunday evening he would attend the service of the particular church or chapel the doctrines of which his professor had most unmercifully riddled and slain in the morning, in order to see and hear something of the other side. Sunday after Sunday this went on, David thereby increasing his knowledge of other forms of Christianity than his own, and actually finding that other preachers and professors were making much the same onslaughts on his form of faith as his professor was making on theirs, every word of the proof, in each case, being based on Scripture itself. No wonder the lad began to feel doubtful and distressed, not knowing what to believe. He was thrown back upon himself. His Biblical studies enlarged enormously his knowledge of the Bible. He

began to see that this vast literature, the outcome of many minds living in different ages, spoke with many and often different voices, and that each one must bring these differing voices to the judgment of his own reason. And yet each particular section of the Church claimed that *its* interpretation, and its interpretation alone, was the right one, the acceptance of any other being at the peril of one's eternal salvation. David sought an interview with his Principal. But this only made matters worse. The Principal was wroth at the idea that one of his own students should reject *his* particular interpretation of the Bible and *his* view of what constituted true Christianity. David left his pastor's presence more troubled in mind and heart than he was before. There lay before him two paths—the path of a rational and intelligible religion in which he must rely on his own powers of mind, thought, and research; and the path of blind faith. He must choose either the one or

the other. Meantime the conflict between the two must be fought out on the battle-field of his own soul—at present the field of Doubt.

A little incident which occurred at this time determined the bent of his thinking.

His pastor, prompted perhaps by his talk with David, had preached an earnest and passionate sermon against doubt and heresy, and, in the course of the sermon, mentioned certain books as specially to be avoided. David felt that he must get those books. He must go to the root of the matter, hear both sides, get the fullest evidence, and test things by his own reason. The books which his pastor had named were two books which had sent a great wave of thought surging to the very confines of the civilized world. They were Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man.* David procured them from a second-hand book

stall, and soon a vast new world of thought was opened out to him. The study of other books followed, for one great work leads to another. "Link by link," says Mr. Lane Allen, "link by link David's investigating hands were slipping along a mighty chain of truths, forged separately by the giants of his time, and now welded together in the glowing thought of the world. . . . In the light of evolution all departments of human knowledge had to be reviewed, reconsidered, reconceived, re-arranged, rewritten. Every foremost scholar of the world, kindling his own personal lamp at that central sun-like radiance, retired straightway into his laboratory of what-soever kind, and found it truly illuminated for the first time. His lamp seemed to be of two flames enwrapped as one. Whenever it shone upon anything that was true, it made this stand out the more clear, valuable, resplendent. But wherever it uncovered the false, it darted thereat a swift tongue of

flame, consuming without mercy the ancient rubbish of the mind."

David was unconsciously assisting in this "vast purification of the world by the fire of truth."

All this could not go on long. David found that he must give up all idea of entering the ministry. The letters he received from home at this time cut him to the heart—they were so full of confidence in his future. His father wrote that for years things had been going badly on the farm, but now all their hopes, their interests, their ambitions were centred on him, their son. To see him a minister, said his father, a religious leader among men—that would be sufficient happiness for him. One thing, he said, he was already looking forward to—he wanted David to preach his first sermon in the neighbouring church founded by the lad's great-grandfather—that would be the proudest hour in his life, and in that of David's mother. When they were not

talking of him at home they were thinking of him. And they thanked God that He had given them such a son.

David sat long and silently over that letter, and put it down with a sinking sense of the fatality of things.

In due course David was called up before the professors of the college and questioned. The conference lasted until late in the afternoon, and at last David was asked the question, "Do you not even believe in God?" They waited long for an answer: it was the great question he had so often asked himself; and at last he said—"I will read you a line which is the best answer I can give now to your last question." Then he read from the New Testament—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." "And if any man hear my words and believe them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." "He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have

spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." "I understand this declaration of Christ to mean," he said, "that, whether I believe in him or do not believe in him, I am not to be judged by man but by the Spirit of God." How long will it be before the various religious bodies teach and realise the charity of that sentence!

David was expelled from the college for heresy, and went back to his life at the farm.

The return home was particularly painful and bitter. He did not write. He reached home the day after Christmas day, and as soon as the door was opened both father and mother cry in surprise: "What! David, my son, my son?" and welcome him with pride and affection. But they soon see that something is wrong. David's face is overspread with ghastly pallor. They draw their chairs close to his.

"'What is the matter? What has happened?' asked his father.

'Ah, father, how can I ever tell you?'

'Oh! what is it?' cried his mother bursting into tears.

'What have you done?' said his father rising from his seat. There was a new note of sternness in his voice. David sat watching his father, dazed by the tragedy he was facing.

'It is my duty to tell you as soon as possible—I suppose I ought to tell you now.'

'Then speak; why do you sit there? What is it?'

'Father I have been put out of college and expelled from the church.'

How loud sounded the minute noises of the fire, the clock, and the blows of an axe at the woodpile, the lowing of a cow at the barn!

'For what?' The question was put at length in a voice flat and dead. It summed up a lifetime of failure and disappointment. 'For what?'

'I do not believe in the Bible any longer. I do not believe in Christianity.'

'Oh! don't do that!' The cry proceeded

from David's mother, who crossed the room quickly and sat beside her husband. This, then, was the end of their hope and pride; the reward of years of self-denial; the insult to all this poverty.

After a long silence the father asked feebly—'Why have you come back here?' Suddenly he rose, and striding across to his son struck him one blow with his mind: 'Oh! I always knew there was nothing in you!'"

It was as a kick with his foot. Their only son, in whom they had centred all their pride and affection, had brought back, as it seemed to them, shame and dishonour instead of glory to the home. David silently takes up his monotonous farm work, relieving its tedium now by the nightly study of science.

Then the story enters a new phase. The civil war, the overthrow of slavery, and the consequent impoverishment of the Southern aristocracy, had led to great social changes

in the Southern states. Young girls, brought up amid all the refinements of comparative wealth and luxury, suddenly find themselves almost destitute—thrust out into the world to make their own way as best they can—as teachers, governesses, artists, needlewomen, or whatever else may afford an opportunity of earning a living. One of these comes into the neighbourhood of David's home as a farm-school teacher. She knows David's story—she has heard of his young ambition, of his entry into the college, of his heresy, of his expulsion from college, of the poverty and the shame, the anger and the heart-burnings in the home. She, too, is a Christian—in spirit rather than in formal creed. The two meet, and David finds in the heart of the woman what neither father, nor mother, nor pastor, nor professor had given him—understanding and sympathy. He lays bare before her the story of his doubts, the development of his mind, the long mental struggle towards a deeper and

broader faith. But Gabriella has her faith, too, though she holds it in no narrow spirit—and in her faith she hopes to bring him back to the fundamentals of the Christian religion as she conceives it.

Despite their differences the two are brought gradually nearer to each other. Then David falls seriously ill through overwork and exposure on the farm, and Gabriella, knowing the poverty of the family, comes over to help to nurse him. In the companionship of sickness and convalescence they find the great truth which is beneath and above all creeds and dogmas, all rites and ceremonies—the truth that tolerance, charity, love is the fundamental condition of all true fellowship and religion. And when David, having decided to qualify himself to become a teacher of science, asks her to be his wife, and tells her that he can never be an orthodox believer again, and asks her whether she will judge him as his professors and his own kindred

have judged him, she answers that, so far from his unbelief separating them, he will need her all the more because of it, for it is love that makes man believe in a God of Love.

And so these two go hand in hand together —she to teach him by her love and sympathy, he to teach her and others the beneficent truths of science; "for the race henceforth," he says, "must get its ideas of God and build its religion to Him from its knowledge of the laws of His universe. The Creator of all life, in all life He must be studied! And in the study of science there is least wrangling, least tyranny, least bigotry, no persecution. It teaches charity, it leads a well-ordered life, it teaches the world to be more kind. It is the great new path of knowledge into the future. All things must follow whither it leads. Our religion will more and more be what our science is, and some day they will be the same."

That is one of the chief lessons of this

book—a lesson which all our best literature is now teaching—that each individual soul must frame its own religion and work out its own salvation, aided of course by the best thought that humanity can give; must fashion its own beliefs, and then live them out in conduct, and exemplify them in character, gaining wisdom and insight by experience. The world of thought is ever moving on. Knowledge grows from more to more. Creeds change and pass away. From the time when men began to communicate with each other by means of signs and letters, and ordered their simple pastoral or agricultural life by the movements of the heavenly bodies, down through the primitive uncivilised ages, through the great civilisations, through the wonderful developments of art, and science, and industry of our own age, through the still more wonderful developments of the moral sense, whereby men have been animated by wider and deeper sympathies and great peoples have

been welded into one—through all the unfolding ages, as Tennyson says:

> "One increasing purpose runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widened with the process
> of the suns."

But in this widening of thought and perpetually increasing purpose there has been great friction—nay, not only great friction, for friction we must naturally expect, but also great cruelty and great injustice. In the very name of the Prince of Peace religion has fought with religion, sect with sect, and they have tried to exterminate each other, because they have made the awful mistake of putting forward their creeds as the very voice of God Himself. Now, all that is passing away. The churches persecute no longer, but the same spirit still lives wherever one man is looked down upon by another for his religious belief. We are slowly learning the great truth which Jesus taught, that it is not always those who cry

"Lord, Lord," who are in the right, and that religion must be a thing of conduct, of fineness and worthiness of spirit, not of hard and rigid creeds. "If any man hear my words and believe them not, I judge him not. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the Word [the Spirit by which] I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

That, then, is one lesson of this semi-religious novel. But there is another lesson also. It is the lesson of the law of spiritual progress. That law may be stated in the words of Herbert Spencer—that progressive development is a continual movement from the simple to the complex. We find it in material things. We find it in spiritual things—from the seed to the fruit, from the acorn to the wide-spreading oak tree, from the simple single-cell life of the almost invisible infusoria to the million-celled complex brain and heart of man. So, too, in

religion—trace it back to its simplest known manifestations and we arrive at the totem-worship, the fetish-worship, the idol-worship, the ancestor-worship of the savage. Follow its long development down the ages and we come to the great world-religions of India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and to the eternal sentences of Jesus and John: "God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." "God is Love." "He that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him." It is the law of spiritual progress, the evolution of the spirit from the simple to the complex.

What is the lesson for us? It is surely this—that by the hard travail of thought, and the harder travail of experience, we must probe the deeper meaning of the great words—Truth, Love, Righteousness, Heaven, God. They represent a world of ideas, a Kingdom of Life, of which, as yet, we are only on the threshold, the

intimations and implications of which we only dimly discern or understand, but which are ever calling us towards a deeper and a fuller view of the responsibilities of our life.

> "New occasions teach new duties;
> Time makes ancient good uncouth;
> They must upward still, and onward,
> Who would keep abreast of Truth;
> Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires!
> We ourselves must pilgrims be,
> Launch our May-flower, and steer boldly
> Through the desperate winter sea,
> Nor attempt the Future's portal
> With the Past's blood-rusted key."

The full perception of this law of spiritual progress involves a deeper sense of what Religion, and Truth, and Righteousness, and Love really mean, and therefore a deeper sense of personal responsibility in putting these invisible things into character and practice—private and public.

If, as Tennyson says, "the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns," then surely that widening thought *must* bring deeper responsibilities. That is a common axiom of everyday life—the more a man knows, the more we require of him; the less he knows, the more ignorant he is, the more allowance we make for him. Apply that to your ideas and conceptions of religious life, and you must arrive at the same conclusion—the wider the knowledge, the deeper the responsibility. It is the law of progress, the movement from the simple to the complex, in the region of ideas.

What, then, is the situation with which this book deals? What is the lesson which it teaches? It is this—that during the past century, and especially during the past fifty years, science has immeasurably widened the range of human knowledge. Nearly everything has been thrown into the crucible of discussion. We have had to rearrange our religious beliefs. We stand

in a different relation to the Universe. We have found that hard and fast dogmas, formulas, and symbols are only the transient vehicles of ideas—that these formulas and symbols cannot express the growing truth of the world, and that they therefore tend to pass away. If we worship in Spirit and in Truth we shall care far more for truth than for dogma; we shall hold ourselves free to gather from all religions thoughts and conceptions which will extend the range of our minds, give us a larger and nobler view of life and of man, and make us feel more deeply our indebtedness to the Spirit of Life in which we live, and move, and have our being. This is "the increasing purpose" of the world. We cannot yet fathom or measure it. We have not yet realised its full meaning. We are, as Emerson says, only at the cock-crow of civilisation. Our civic development in morality is generations behind our individual development, and things are done in business and politics

which men would be ashamed to do in their individual and family lives. Hence, the burden is laid upon every thoughtful man and woman, to find out what that "increasing purpose" is, so that he may help its realisation and live by its spirit in his daily life and work. That, in the near future, will be the practical work of religion. As James Lane Allen says in his book: "I see all things as a growth, a sublime unfolding by the Laws of God. The race ever rises toward Him. The old things which were its best once die off from it as no longer good. Its charity grows. All the nobler, finer elements of its spirit come forth more and more, a continuous advance along the paths of Law. The development of man—this is itself the great Revelation of God."

"Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

"'Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I
linger on the shore,
And the individual withers, but the world is more
and more."

"The individual withers," or rather, as James Lane Allen says: "O Mystery Immortal—by which our poor brief lives are led upward out of the earth for a season, then cut down, rotted, and broken—for Thy long service," in Thy increasing spiritual purpose.

THE END

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