

A SKETCH OF INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT. [1880.]

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

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

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

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

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

For now, towards the world around him—the world that is not his mother, and, actively at least, neither loves him nor ministers to him, reveal themselves certain relations, initiated by fancies, desires, preferences, that arise within himself—reasonable or not matters little:—founded in reason, they can in no case be *devoid* of reason. Every object concerned in these relations presents itself to the man as lovely, desirable, good, or ugly, hateful, bad; and through these relations, obscure and imperfect, and to a being weighted with a strong faculty for mistake, begins to be revealed the existence and force of Being other and higher than his own, recognized as *Will*, and first of all in its opposition to his desires. Thereupon begins the strife without which there never was, and, I presume, never can be, any growth, any progress; and the first result is what I may call the third birth of the human being.

The first opposing glance of the mother wakes in the child not only answering opposition, which is as the rudimentary sac of his own coming will, but a new something, to which for long he needs no name, so natural does it seem, so entirely a portion of his being, even when most he refuses to listen to and obey it. This new something—we call it *Conscience*—sides with his mother, and causes its presence and judgment to be felt not only before but

after the event, so that he soon comes to know that it is well with him or ill with him as he obeys or disobeys it. And now he not only knows, not only knows that he knows, but knows he knows that he knows—knows that he is self-conscious—that he has a conscience. With the first sense of resistance to it, the power above him has drawn nearer, and the deepest within him has declared itself on the side of the highest without him. At one and the same moment, the heaven of his childhood has, as it were, receded and come nigher. He has run from under it, but it claims him. It is farther, yet closer—immeasurably closer: he feels on his being the grasp and hold of his mother's. Through the higher individuality he becomes aware of his own. Through the assertion of his mother's will, his own begins to awake. He becomes conscious of himself as capable of action—of doing or of not doing; his responsibility has begun.

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

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

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

he, filled with the glory and not the duty of victory, could not but fail, and therefore ought to fail; but his dismay and chagrin are soothed by the forgetfulness the days and nights bring, gently wiping out the sins that are past, that the young life may have a fresh chance, as we say, and begin again unburdened by the weight of a too much present failure.

And now, probably at school, or in the first months of his college-life, a new phase of experience begins. He has wandered over the border of what is commonly called science, and the marvel of facts multitudinous, strung upon the golden threads of law, has laid hold upon him. His intellect is seized and possessed by a new spirit. For a time knowledge is pride; the mere consciousness of knowing is the reward of its labour; the ever recurring, ever passing contact of mind with a new fact is a joy full of excitement, and promises an endless delight. But ever the thing that is known sinks into insignificance, save as a step of the endless stair on which he is climbing—whither he knows not; the unknown draws him; the new fact touches his mind, flames up in the contact, and drops dark, a mere fact, on the heap below. Even the grandeur of law as law, so far from adding fresh consciousness to his life, causes it no small suffering and loss. For at the entrance of Science, nobly and gracefully as she bears herself, young Poetry shrinks back startled, dismayed. Poetry is true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry; but young Poetry is timid and Science is fearless, and bears with her a colder atmosphere than the other has yet learned to brave. It is not that Madam Science shows any antagonism to Lady Poetry; but the atmosphere and plane on which alone they can meet as friends who understand each other, is the mind and heart of the sage, not of the boy. The youth gazes on the face of Science, cold, clear, beautiful; then, turning, looks for his friend—but, alas! Poetry has fled. With a great pang at the heart he rushes abroad to find her, but descries only the rainbow glimmer of her skirt on the far horizon. At night, in his dreams, she returns, but never for a season may he look on her face of loveliness. What, alas! have evaporation, caloric, atmosphere, refraction, the prism, and the second planet of our system, to do with “sad Hesper o'er the buried sun?” From quantitative analysis how shall he turn again to “the rime of the ancient mariner,” and “the moving moon” that “went up the sky, and nowhere did abide”? From his window he gazes across the sands to the mightily troubled ocean: “What is the storm to me any more!” he cries; “it is but the clashing of countless water-drops!” He finds relief in the discovery that, the moment you place man in the midst of it, the clashing of water-drops becomes a storm, terrible to heart and brain: human thought and feeling, hope, fear, love, sacrifice, make the motions of nature alive with mystery and the shadows of destiny. The relief, however, is but partial, and may be but temporary; for what if this mingling of man and Nature in the mind of man be but the casting of a coloured shadow over her cold indifference? What if she means nothing—never was meant to mean anything! What if in truth “we receive but what we give, and in our life alone doth Nature live!” What if the language of metaphysics as well as of poetry be drawn, not from Nature at all, but from human fancy concerning her! At length, from the unknown, whence himself he came, appears an angel to deliver him from this horror—this stony look—ah, God! of soulless law. The woman is on her way whose part it is to meet him with a life other than his own, at once the complement of his, and the visible presentment of that in it which is beyond his own understanding. The enchantment of what we specially call *love* is upon him—a deceiving glamour, say some, showing what is not, an opening of the eyes, say others, revealing that of which a man had not been aware: men will still be divided into those who believe that the horses of fire and the chariots of fire are ever present at their need of them, and those who class the prophet and the drunkard in the same category as the fools of their own fancies. But what this love is, he who thinks he knows least understands. Let foolish maidens and vulgar youths simper and jest over it as they please, it is one of the most potent mysteries of the living God. The man who can love a woman and remain a lover of his wretched self, is fit only to be cast out with the broken potsherds of the city, as one in whom the very salt has lost its savour. With this love in his heart, a man puts on at least the vision robes of the seer, if not the singing robes of the poet. Be he the paltriest human animal that ever breathed, for the time, and in his degree, he rises above himself. His nature so far clarifies itself, that here and there a truth of the great world will penetrate, sorely dimmed, through the fog-laden, self-shadowed atmosphere of his microcosm. For the time, I repeat, he is not a lover only, but something of a friend, with a reflex touch of his own far-off childhood. To the youth of my history, in the light of his love—a light that passes outward from the eyes of the lover—the world grows alive again, yea radiant as an infinite face. He sees the flowers as he saw them in boyhood, recovering from an illness of all the winter, only they have a yet deeper glow, a yet fresher delight, a yet more unspeakable soul. He becomes pitiful over them, and not willingly breaks their stems, to hurt the life he more than half believes they share with him. He cannot think anything created only for him, any more than only for itself. Nature is no longer a mere contention of forces, whose heaven and whose hell in one is the dull peace of an equilibrium; but a struggle, through splendour of colour, graciousness of form, and evasive vitality of motion and sound, after an utterance hard to find, and never found but marred by the imperfection of the small and weak that would embody and set forth the great and mighty. The waving of the tree-tops is the billowy movement of a hidden delight. The sun lifts his head with intent to be glorious. No day lasts too long, no night comes too soon: the twilight is woven of

shadowy arms that draw the loving to the bosom of the Night. In the woman, the infinite after which he thirsts is given him for his own.

Man's occupation with himself turns his eyes from the great life beyond his threshold: when love awakes, he forgets himself for a time, and many a glimpse of strange truth finds its way through his windows, blocked no longer by the shadow of himself. He may now catch even a glimpse of the possibilities of his own being—may dimly perceive for a moment the image after which he was made. But alas! too soon, self, radiant of darkness, awakes; every window becomes opaque with shadow, and the man is again a prisoner. For it is not the highest word alone that the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in, choke, and render unfruitful. Waking from the divine vision, if that can be called waking which is indeed dying into the common day, the common man regards it straightway as a foolish dream; the wise man believes in it still, holds fast by the memory of the vanished glory, and looks to have it one day again a present portion of the light of his life. He knows that, because of the imperfection and dulness and weakness of his nature, after every vision follow the inclosing clouds, with the threat of an ever during dark; knows that, even if the vision could tarry, it were not well, for the sake of that which must yet be done with him, yet be made of him, that it should tarry. But the youth whose history I am following is not like the former, nor as yet like the latter.

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

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

hope of a central Will, which alone can justify one ecstatic throb at any seeming loveliness of the universe. For without the hope of such a centre, delight is unreason—a mockery not such as the skeleton at the Egyptian feast, but such rather as a crowned corpse at a feast of skeletons. Life without the higher glory of the unspeakable, the atmosphere of a God, is not life, is not worth living. He would rather cease to be, than walk the dull level of the commonplace—than live the unideal of men in whose company he can take no pleasure—men who are as of a lower race, whom he fain would lift, who will not rise, but for whom as for himself he would cherish the hope they do their best to kill. Those who seem to him great, recognize the unseen—believe the roots of science to be therein hid—regard the bringing forth into sight of the things that are invisible as the end of all Art and every art—judge the true leader of men to be him who leads them closer to the essential facts of their being. Alas for his love and his hope, alas for himself, if the visible should exist for its own sake only!—if the face of a flower means nothing—appeals to no region beyond the scope of the science that would unveil its growth. He cannot believe that its structure exists for the sake of its laws; that would be to build for the sake of its joints a scaffold where no house was to stand. Those who put their faith in Science are trying to live in the scaffold of the house invisible. He finds harbour and comfort at times in the written poetry of his fellows. He delights in analyzing and grasping the thought that informs the utterance. For a moment, the fine figure, the delicate phrase, make him jubilant and strong; but the jubilation and the strength soon pass, for it is not any of the *forms*, even of the thought-forms of truth that can give rest to his soul.

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

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

*Of sovran use
'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp.*

And now the shadows are beginning to lengthen towards the night, which, whether there be a following morn or no, is the night, and spreads out the wings of darkness. And still as it approaches the more aware grows the man of a want that differs from any feeling I have already sought to describe—a sense of insecurity, in no wise the same as the doubt of life beyond the grave—a need more profound even than that which cries for a living Nature. And now he plainly knows, that, all his life, like a conscious duty unfulfilled, this sense has haunted his path, ever and anon descending and clinging, a cold mist, about his heart. What if this lack was indeed the root of every other anxiety! Now freshly revived, this sense of not having, of something, he knows not what, for lack of which his being is in pain at its own incompleteness, never leaves him more. And with it the terror has returned and grows, lest there should be no Unseen Power, as his fathers believed, and his mother taught him, filling all things and *meaning* all things,—no Power with whom, in his last extremity, awaits him a final refuge. With the quickening doubt falls a tenfold blight on the world of poetry, both that in Nature and that in books. Far worse than that early chill which the assertions of science concerning what it knows, cast upon his inexperienced soul, is now the shivering death which its pretended denials concerning what it knows not, send through all his vital frame. The soul departs from the face of beauty, when the eye begins to doubt if there be any soul behind it; and now the man feels like one I knew, affected with a strange disease, who saw in the living face always the face of a corpse. What can the world be to him who lives for thought, if there be no supreme and perfect Thought,—none but such poor struggles after thought as he finds in himself? Take the eternal thought from the heart of things, no longer can any beauty be real, no more can shape, motion, aspect of nature have significance in itself, or sympathy with human soul. At best and most the beauty he thought he saw was but the projected perfection of his own being, and from himself as the crown and summit of things, the soul of the man shrinks with horror: it is the more imperfect being who knows the least his incompleteness, and for whom, seeing so little beyond himself, it is easiest to imagine himself the heart and apex of things, and rejoice in the fancy. The killing power of a godless science returns upon him with tenfold force. The ocean-tempest is once more a mere clashing of innumerable water-drops; the green and amber sadness of the evening sky is a mockery of sorrow; his own soul and its sadness is a mockery of himself. There is nothing in the sadness, nothing in the mockery. To tell him as comfort, that in his own thought lives the meaning if nowhere else, is mockery worst of all; for if there be no truth in them, if these things be no embodiment, to make them serve as such is to put a candle in a death's-head to light the dying through the place of tombs. To his former foolish fancy a primrose might preach a childlike trust; the untoiling lilies might from their field cast seeds of a higher growth into his troubled heart; now they are no better than the colour the painter leaves behind him on the doorpost of his

workshop, when, the day's labour over, he wipes his brush on it ere he depart for the night. The look in the eyes of his dog, happy in that he is short-lived, is one of infinite sadness. All graciousness must henceforth be a sorrow: it has to go with the sunsets. That a thing must cease takes from it the joy of even an aeonian endurance—for its *kind* is mortal; it belongs to the nature of things that cannot live. The sorrow is not so much that it shall perish as that it could not live—that it is not in its nature a real, that is, an eternal thing. His children are shadows—their life a dance, a sickness, a corruption. The very element of unselfishness, which, however feeble and beclouded it may be, yet exists in all love, in giving life its only dignity adds to its sorrow. Nowhere at the root of things is love—it is only a something that came after, some sort of fungous excrescence in the hearts of men grown helplessly superior to their origin. Law, nothing but cold, impassive, material law, is the root of things—lifeless happily, so not knowing itself, else were it a demon instead of a creative nothing. Endeavour is paralyzed in him. “Work for posterity,” says he of the skyless philosophy; answers the man, “How can I work without hope? Little heart have I to labour, where labour is so little help. What can I do for my children that would render their life less hopeless than my own! Give me all you would secure for them, and my life would be to me but the worse mockery. The true end of labour would be, to lessen the number doomed to breathe the breath of this despair.”

Straightway he develops another and a deeper mood. He turns and regards himself. Suspicion or sudden insight has directed the look. And there, in himself, he discovers such imperfection, such wrong, such shame, such weakness, as cause him to cry out, “It were well I should cease! Why should I mourn after life? Where were the good of prolonging it in a being like me? What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth!” Such insights, when they come, the seers do their best, in general, to obscure; suspicion of themselves they regard as a monster, and would stifle. They resent the waking of such doubt. Any attempt at the raising in them of their buried best they regard as an offence against intercourse. A man takes his social life in his hand who dares it. Few therefore understand the judgment of Hamlet upon himself; the common reader is so incapable of imagining he could mean it of his own general character as a man, that he attributes the utterance to shame for the postponement of a vengeance, which indeed he must have been such as his critic to be capable of performing upon no better proof than he had yet had. When the man whose unfolding I would now represent, regards even his dearest love, he finds it such a poor, selfish, low-lived thing, that in his heart he shames himself before his children and his friends. How little labour, how little watching, how little pain has he endured for their sakes! He reads of great things in this kind, but in himself he does not find them. How often has he not been wrongfully displeased—wrathful with the innocent! How often has he not hurt a heart more tender than his own! Has he ever once been faithful to the height of his ideal? Is his life on the whole a thing to regard with complacency, or to be troubled exceedingly concerning? Beyond him rise and spread infinite seeming possibilities—height beyond height, glory beyond glory, each rooted in and rising from his conscious being, but alas! where is any hope of ascending them? These hills of peace, “in a season of calm weather,” seem to surround and infold him, as a land in which he could dwell at ease and at home: surely among them lies the place of his birth!—while against their purity and grandeur the being of his consciousness shows miserable—dark, weak, and undefined—a shadow that would fain be substance—a dream that would gladly be born into the light of reality. But alas if the whole thing be only in himself—if the vision be a dream of nothing, a revelation of lies, the outcome of that which, helplessly existent, is yet not created, therefore cannot create—if not the whole thing only be a dream of the impotent, but the impotent be himself but a dream—a dream of his own—a self-dreamed dream—with no master of dreams to whom to cry! Where then the cherished hope of one day atoning for his wrongs to those who loved him!—they are nowhere—vanished for ever, upmingled and dissolved in the primeval darkness! If truth be but the hollow of a sphere, ah, never shall he cast himself before them, to tell them that now at last, after long years of revealing separation, he knows himself and them, and that now the love of them is a part of his very being—to implore their forgiveness on the ground that he hates, despises, contemns, and scorns the self that showed them less than absolute love and devotion! Never thus shall he lay his being bare to their eyes of love! They do not even rest, for they do not and will not know it. There is no voice nor hearing in them, and how can there be in him any heart to live! The one comfort left him is, that, unable to follow them, he shall yet die and cease, and fare as they—go also nowhither!

To a man under the dismay of existence dissociated from power, unrooted in, unshadowed by a creating Will, who is Love, the Father of Man—to him who knows not being and God together, the idea of death—a death that knows no reviving, must be, and ought to be the blessedest thought left him. “O land of shadows!” well may such a one cry! “land where the shadows love to ecstatic self-loss, yet forget, and love no more! land of sorrows and despairs, that sink the soul into a deeper Tophet than death has ever sounded! broken kaleidoscope! shaken camera! promiser, speaking truth to the ear, but lying to the sense! land where the heart of my friend is sorrowful as my heart—the more sorrowful that I have been but a poor and far-off friend! land where sin is strong and righteousness faint! where love dreams mightily and walks abroad so feeble! land where the face of my father is dust, and the

hand of my mother will never more caress! where my children will spend a few years of like trouble to mine, and then drop from the dream into the no-dream! gladly, O land of sickliest shadows—gladly, that is, with what power of gladness is in me, I take my leave of thee! Welcome the cold, pain-soothing embrace of immortal Death! Hideous are his looks, but I love him better than Life: he is true, and will not deceive us. Nay, he only is our saviour, setting us free from the tyranny of the false that ought to be true, and sets us longing in vain.”

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

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

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

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

So says the friend; the man hears, takes up the old story, and says to himself, “Let me see then what I can see!” I will not follow him through the many shadows and slow dawns by which at length he arrives at this much: A man claiming to be the Son of God says he has come to be the light of men; says, “Come to me, and I will give you rest;” says, “Follow me, and you shall find my Father; to know him is the one thing you cannot do without, for it is eternal life.” He has learned from the reported words of the man, and from the man himself as in the tale presented, that the bliss of his conscious being is his Father; that his one delight is to do the will of that Father—the only thing in his eyes worthy of being done, or worth having done; that he would make men blessed with his own blessedness; that the cry of creation, the cry of humanity shall be answered into the deepest soul of desire; that less than the divine mode of existence, the godlike way of being, can satisfy no man, that is, make him content with his consciousness; that not this world only, but the whole universe is the inheritance of those who consent to be the children of their Father in heaven, who put forth the power of their will to be of the same sort as he; that to as many as receive him he gives power to become the sons of God; that they shall be partakers of the divine nature, of the

divine joy, of the divine power—shall have whatever they desire, shall know no fear, shall love perfectly, and shall never die; that these things are beyond the grasp of the knowing ones of the world, and to them the message will be a scorn; but that the time will come when its truth shall be apparent, to some in confusion of face, to others in joy unspeakable; only that we must beware of judging, for many that are first shall be last, and there are last that shall be first.

To find himself in such conscious as well as vital relation with the source of his being, with a Will by which his own will exists, with a Consciousness by and through which he is conscious, would indeed be the end of all the man's ills! nor can he imagine any other, not to say better way, in which his sorrows could be met, understood and annihilated. For the ills that oppress him are both within him and without, and over each kind he is powerless. If the message were but a true one! If indeed this man knew what he talked of! But if there should be help for man from anywhere beyond him, some *one* might know it first, and may not this be the one? And if the message be so great, so perfect as this man asserts, then only a perfect, an eternal man, at home in the bosom of the Father, could know, or bring, or tell it. According to the tale, it had been from the first the intent of the Father to reveal himself to man as man, for without the knowledge of the Father after man's own modes of being, he could not grow to real manhood. The grander the whole idea, the more likely is it to be what it claims to be! and if not high as the heavens above the earth, beyond us yet within our reach, it is not for us, it cannot be true. Fact or not, the existence of a God such as Christ, a God who is a good man infinitely, is the only idea containing hope enough for man! If such a God has come to be known, marvel must surround the first news at least of the revelation of him. Because of its marvel, shall men find it in reason to turn from the gracious rumour of what, if it be true, must be the event of all events? And could marvel be lovelier than the marvel reported? But the humble men of heart alone can believe in the high—they alone can perceive, they alone can embrace grandeur. Humility is essential greatness, the inside of grandeur.

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

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

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

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

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

Having thus accompanied my type to the borders of liberty, my task for the present is over. The rest let him who reads prove for himself. Obedience alone can convince. To convince without obedience I would take no bootless labour; it would be but a gain for hell. If any man call these things foolishness, his judgement is to me insignificant. If any man say he is open to conviction, I answer him he can have none but on the condition, by the means of obedience. If a man say, “The thing is not interesting to me,” I ask him, “Are you following your conscience? By that, and not by the interest you take or do not take in a thing, shall you be judged. Nor will anything be said to you, or of you, in that day, whatever *that day* mean, of which your conscience will not echo every syllable.” Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity. Life parted from its causative life would be no life; it would at best be but a barrack of corruption, an outpost of annihilation. In proportion as the union is incomplete, the derived life is imperfect. And no man can be one with neighbour, child, dearest, except as he is one with his origin; and he fails of his perfection so long as there is one being in the universe he could not love.

Of all men he is bound to hold his face like a flint in witness of this truth who owes everything that makes for eternal good, to the belief that at the heart of things and causing them to be, at the centre of monad, of world, of protoplasmic mass, of loving dog, and of man most cruel, is an absolute, perfect love; and that in the man Christ Jesus this love is with us men to take us home. To nothing else do I for one owe any grasp upon life. In this I see the setting right of all things. To the man who believes in the Son of God, poetry returns in a mighty wave; history unrolls itself in harmony; science shows crowned with its own aureole of holiness. There is no enlivener of the imagination, no enabler of the judgment, no strengthener of the intellect, to compare with the belief in a live Ideal, at the heart of all personality, as of every law. If there be no such live Ideal, then a falsehood can do more for the race than the facts of its being; then an unreality is needful for the development of the man in all that is real, in all that is in the highest sense true; then falsehood is greater than fact, and an idol necessary for lack of a God. They who deny cannot, in the nature of things, know what they deny. When one sees a chaos begin to put on the shape of an ordered world, he will hardly be persuaded it is by the power of a foolish notion bred in a diseased fancy. Let the man then who would rise to the height of his being, be persuaded to test the Truth by the deed—the highest and only test that can be applied to the loftiest of all assertions. To every man I say, “Do the truth you know, and you shall learn the truth you need to know.”